



# Personal Creativity Management

## 366

Daily Meditations to Leverage Intellectual  
Capital, Drive Innovation and Earn  
Greater Profits, Without Burning Out

**Scott Ginsberg,**  
Founder of *Prolific*

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## **FEBRUARY**

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- March 19** Being prolific means having an awareness plan.
- March 20** Which tools in your kit work in tandem to assure bigger and more sustainable success?
- March 21** If it's good enough for the flu, it's good enough for you.
- March 22** How do you feel about everything?
- March 23** What separates the productive from the prolific?
- March 24** Optimizing instrument in this symphony called life.
- March 25** How could you keep the door to irrationality open by a tiny crack?
- March 26** Timing isn't everything; it's the only thing.
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**April 4** It's not insanity; it's all relative.

**April 5** Are you using entirety of your inner life to serve your dreams?

**April 6** Defining success by how others fare because of our efforts.

**April 7** As we stand on this increasingly fragmented pixel.

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**April 11** Who's on first?

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## **MAY**

- May 1** Criticizing is a defense against joy.
- May 2** Cynicism has become our chief export.
- May 3** Why wearing heels is good for creativity.
- May 4** Dancers mustn't kick too high, and buildings shouldn't reach the sky.
- May 5** Dare to lose control and let the joy carry you.
- May 6** Declare the pennies on your eye.
- May 7** Demonstrate to yourself that you are determined to move forward.
- May 8** Speed in the micro, patient in the macro.
- May 9** Desperately trying to protect the narrative.
- May 10** Get on the scoreboard of creative survival.
- May 11** No drawing board needed, thank you very much.
- May 12** Do you have innovation regret?
- May 13** Does a lower fee make you more affordable, or less attractive?
- May 14** Don't assume it works well just because it feels right.
- May 15** Don't criticize something when it's all you have.
- May 16** Don't follow your passion, but bring it with you.
- May 17** Don't reinvent the wheel, but whatever you do should be round.
- May 18** Don't take things personally; people are only talking about themselves.
- May 19** Raising your ability to thrive in any work environment.
- May 20** Dude, what the hell is wrong with you?
- May 21** Electricity so cheap that only the rich will burn candles.
- May 22** Every conquered wave brings us closer to the land we long for.
- May 23** Everything is produced within an inch of its life.
- May 24** Everything you want to create is already inside of you.
- May 25** Feeling joyful and alive in the giving moment.
- May 26** Find an easy answer so we can wrap this thing up fast.
- May 27** Why aren't you guys more excited about this?
- May 28** Find some way to make it suit your purposes.
- May 29** Finding those small hidden islands of freedom.
- May 30** Freaking out at the first few signs of trouble.
- May 31** Free from the impediment of mood.

## **JUNE**

- June 1** Free the mind of detritus, and your calendar follows suit.
- June 2** How can this space become an area to assert my identity and needs?

- June 3** Get busy living, or get busy dying.
- June 4** Give them your best, not what they want.
- June 5** Give yourself two feet to stand on.
- June 6** Grateful for every chunk of progress as a rung on your ladder.
- June 7** Guarding the sanctity of the self.
- June 8** Hamster wheel of achievement and approval.
- June 9** He who builds the best experiment, wins.
- June 10** Here I am, largely unmolested by obligations.
- June 11** How can we channel the fear of not knowing?
- June 12** How can we create abundance where there appears to be scarcity?
- June 13** How can you give yourself more strength than you naturally have?
- June 14** How can you leverage the combination of absurdity, tedium and longevity?
- June 15** How can you optimize for joy?
- June 16** How can you reframe the story you're telling about your priorities?
- June 17** How can you reuse, resurrect or reposition something people threw away or quit on?
- June 18** How could forgetting make you lighter?
- June 19** How could the elapse of time reframe this failure?
- June 20** How could you build incremental power for yourself?
- June 21** How could you build tension by living in two places?
- June 22** How could you execute the anti or polar opposite of an existing idea?
- June 23** How could you go happen to things?
- June 24** How could you have no choice?
- June 25** How could you reverse temptation for your own positive gain?
- June 26** How could you scale your business sustainably by moving into a productized model?
- June 27** How could you selfishly take advantage of your circumstances?
- June 28** How could you view yourself through an infinite prism?
- June 29** How is this action an investment in my future self?
- June 30** How is this thing you're showing me going to improve my life?

## **JULY**

- July 1** How is this turbulence an opportunity to use my creativity?
- July 2** How is your inner life an emotional training ground?
- July 3** How quickly we return to the music.
- July 4** Humility is the greatest safeguard you have.
- July 5** I only got tired because I was trying to hide.



- July 6** Nobody is going to pat you on the back for delaying gratification.
- July 7** I quantify almost nothing in my life.
- July 8** I want to make trying look cool.
- July 9** If everybody did exactly what you said, what would the world look like?
- July 10** If everything you've done up until now is just the beginning, what's next?
- July 11** If it's going to be painful either way, then why delay?
- July 12** If we didn't do what we loved, we wouldn't exist.
- July 13** Instrumental activities of daily living.
- July 14** Is everything you know written down somewhere?
- July 15** Is this a real thing, or just your response to anxiety?
- July 16** Is this experience worth classifying, or simply enjoying?
- July 17** Is this worth a multiple of the energy put into it?
- July 18** It doesn't matter what we call it, only that we call on it.
- July 19** It is never too late for the seed to sprout and grow in infinite abundance.
- July 20** It only needs to happen once to be a disaster.
- July 21** It wouldn't have been given to you if you weren't supposed to use it.
- July 22** It wouldn't have the same motivational firepower.
- July 23** Dude, you need to do something completely different.
- July 24** What wants to be written?
- July 25** If you're deluded enough to bring your ideas to form.
- July 26** It's all just window dressing.
- July 27** It's merely inhaling and exhaling.
- July 28** It's all bullshit until the check clears.
- July 29** It's not a workout if there's no work.
- July 30** It's not fair whose dream gets attention.
- July 31** Learn to find satisfaction in small compensations.

## **AUGUST**

- August 1** Learn to work modular.
- August 2** Let there be light, and let it be free!
- August 3** Using encoding to convert information into motivational energy.
- August 4** Let yourself fall backward into your own arms.
- August 5** Like trying to explain how water tastes.
- August 6** What arena have you never played in before?
- August 7** Using moments strategically to gain force and power.

- August 8** Lock yourself in a room until something cracks open.
- August 9** Lost in the scramble of our own gratification.
- August 10** Love and fame can't live in the same place.
- August 11** Love letters to ourselves about things we ought to be doing.
- August 12** Making space for the natural order to emerge.
- August 13** Mediocrity will be rewarded, while excellence will be punished.
- August 14** My nervousness has started to find a place of rest.
- August 15** No longer in the urgent grip of lust.
- August 16** No one to say we're only dreaming.
- August 17** No other means of distraction from the essence of me.
- August 18** Nobody does it just to do it anymore; everything's just a vehicle.
- August 19** Creating an unreplicable inspiration pool.
- August 20** What talents and skills have you not tapped into yet to add value?
- August 21** Not everything has a finish line.
- August 22** Now somebody give this young man a box of nametags.
- August 23** Gaining an emotional anchor during difficult times.
- August 24** Now we are going to do something we have never done before.
- August 25** Identify what's already true for you.
- August 26** Oh crap, somebody might actually see my work.
- August 27** Okay, you're spending too much time on this.
- August 28** Once we've seen a ghost, we're always afraid of the dark.
- August 29** Once you know about something, it doesn't matter what the name is.
- August 30** Organisms that are better attuned to bad things.
- August 31** Originality demands a willingness to experiment.

## **SEPTEMBER**

- September 1** Other desires well up inside the human heart.
- September 2** Ownership is not a set of rights; it's a state of mind.
- September 3** Patience is the highest form of faith.
- September 4** Pay no attention to the craziness everywhere around you.
- September 5** Pick low, medium or high.
- September 6** Reduce your number of decisions and create a foundation of security.
- September 7** Change the convergence of light rays and correct the defect of your vision.
- September 8** Intentionally indicate limits that promote your values.
- September 9** Please, for the love of god, steal everything from me.

**September 10** Prolificacy is a dynamic process of increasing returns.

**September 11** Puke and shit your way to innovation.

**September 12** Pushing the whole world ahead in its march to the highest civilization.

**September 13** Put your process on a pedestal. Or not.

**September 14** Putting yourself into better position to execute.

**September 15** Quieting the monster inside your head.

**September 16** Renting my brain people.

**September 17** Say goodnight to the bad guy.

**September 18** Scraping the bottom of the franchise barrel.

**September 19** Sensitive to the clamorous pulls of inner energy.

**September 20** Setting out each day to set the world ablaze.

**September 21** Shovel some coal into that engine and start toot tooting.

**September 22** You may have created something, but you didn't innovate anything.

**September 23** Size and scale didn't matter, satisfaction did.

**September 24** So many things in life just go away.

**September 25** Sometimes you just have to do things to do them.

**September 26** Somewhere there are shoes into which we can step.

**September 27** Standing on a compost pile of bad ideas.

**September 28** Starting work that you're proud to finish.

**September 29** Stifling that precious commodity within us.

**September 30** Storytelling isn't everything; it's the only thing.

## **OCTOBER**

**October 1** Suffering stems from being mistaken about reality.

**October 2** Surrender to the heavenly pull.

**October 3** Take a step in the direction of your wholeness.

**October 4** Take it one whatever at a time.

**October 5** Take your secret special separateness and run into the corner.

**October 6** Reducing the perception of creative fear.

**October 7** Taking notes with your whole person.

**October 8** Tapping into your inspiration reserves.

**October 9** The best way to eliminate the competition is not to have any.

**October 10** The force that allowed us to encircle the world.

**October 11** The forcing function of reality builds momentum.

**October 12** The greatest path to grow is not going away.

**October 13** The heights toward which my ambition was driving me.

- October 14** The intention with which you play has an effect on the audience.
- October 15** The joy that accompanies the experience.
- October 16** Flying by the seat of your pants shouldn't be your primary ideation strategy.
- October 17** The kind of relationship we have with milestones.
- October 18** The marketplace demands it, and brands expect it.
- October 19** The most natural way for me to engage with the world.
- October 20** The new story we take our identity from.
- October 21** Don't blame me, the calendar made me do it.
- October 22** Giving people enough rope to find something better than what you came up with.
- October 23** The paradox of friction.
- October 24** How grandiosity can be channeled into positive outcomes.
- October 25** The rhapsody began as a purpose, not a plan.
- October 26** The right name is the one you pick.
- October 27** The score matters less than the streak.
- October 28** The ship carrying a cargo that will never reach any port.
- October 29** There's no money in being a hidden gem.
- October 30** The silence was like a weight in the room.
- October 31** The time fallacy of reinvention.

## **NOVEMBER**

- November 1** The urgency had burned out.
- November 2** They can't steal it because you're giving it to them.
- November 3** Time plus volume equals enrichment.
- November 4** Transferring the architecture behind our core talent.
- November 5** Trust your intuitive choices about what you're doing.
- November 6** Try to catch up on years of neglected goals in four days.
- November 7** Twisting the truth every which way to make us look like fools.
- November 8** Used as bargaining counters by the moneyed patrons.
- November 9** Using our awareness like a scalpel.
- November 10** What can do some of the heavy lifting for me?
- November 11** We apply a drop of oil to keep friction away.
- November 12** We thought we were smart, but we were just lucky.
- November 13** Weapons of mass procrastination.
- November 14** What are you so good at that you make look easy?
- November 15** What can you do to your physical environment to have it nurture and relax you?

- November 16** What could you build to help solve this problem faster?
- November 17** What idea will you be kicking yourself about in five years?
- November 18** What key could you create to unlock this door?
- November 19** What value are you not capturing from the work you create?
- November 20** A gross misappropriation of our finest natural resource.
- November 21** What will assist me in building trust with my true self?
- November 22** What would positivity do here?
- November 23** What you hear is the sound of a squealing dinosaur.
- November 24** When we dash away from ideas too fast.
- November 25** There will plenty of time to give up on yourself later.
- November 26** When you make things, reality is optional.
- November 27** When you're doing the work that matters, everything  
recedes.
- November 28** When your worst gets better.
- November 29** Where can you create the most asymmetry?
- November 30** Whew, we found the right guy.

## **DECEMBER**

- December 1** Which audience that you can't see yet is watching?
- December 2** Who cares what you got on the test if you have a superpower?
- December 3** Who has already tested and optimized this before me?
- December 4** Who is this guy?
- December 5** Who would crawl out from under the obscure?
- December 6** Every day you sit down to work on it, you've already won.
- December 7** Finely calibrate your creative filter for fresh powder.
- December 8** Whom does this person need to answer to and look good for?
- December 9** Why is right now the perfect opportunity for flourishing?
- December 10** How can you become successful before you're successful?
- December 11** Why should customers care that we exist?
- December 12** Wow, there might be something to this.
- December 13** A new creative drive from a sense of okayness.
- December 14** Kiss my ass, guys; you're on your own.
- December 15** You can't help but create real and lasting value.
- December 16** You don't carry lamb carcasses around town without building  
a few muscles.
- December 17** You're not the first person to try to make your company more  
innovative.
- December 18** You've got an ocean of oil under your feet.
- December 19** Using creativity to catapult yourself out of depression.

**December 20** You're here for me; I'm here for me, and nobody's here for you.

**December 21** Your idea is not any good unless it's on the verge of being bad.

**December 22** All you really have to do is finish.

**December 23** Trusting the process to lead and teach you.

**December 24** How sweet it is to be mugged by you.

**December 25** Zipping down the road at top speed.

**December 26** Treat your dreams as starting places, not destinations.

**December 27** An empty shell from defining ourselves by our outside life.

**December 28** The sweetness of meter and sound harmonize in the language of tragedy.

**December 29** Another graying prince of a shrinking kingdom.

**December 30** Get out of the inventory business and into the equity business.

**December 31** Hardness may be true, but it's ultimately irrelevant.

About the Author

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# Introduction

## A brief history of modern creativity

The first era of creativity was industrial, starting around the turn of the twentieth century.

Rapid scientific progress brought us an unprecedented invention boom. Everything from light bulbs to transportation to radio to telephones to physics were all inseparable from our modern world, amplified by the invention of public relations, all of which had a crucial role in the first two world wars. The creative process was now officially celebrated and commercialized like never before.

The second era of creativity was cultural, ushering in around postwar time.

Socioeconomic issues took center stage as baby boom and middle class developed, the women's movement blossomed, and counterculture blew up. Mass media gave people a platform to express their ideas and talents in innovative ways. That's why the fifties, sixties and seventies saw popular music, literature, cinema, art and culture flourishing like never before.

And that eventually shepherded in the third era of creativity, the digital information era.

Starting in the early eighties, people and organizations began making gargantuan strides in every area of modern life, underscored by these revolutionary technological advances, most notably, the internet. People now had the permission and the platforms to be creative, but also had something new that multiplied their reach. Connection. Creators related to other creators on this global scale, both before, during and after the creative process, free of charge, and free of barriers. That's why change has occurred at a blinding rate since then, multiplying technological progress to the power of eleven, generating another extraordinary period of creative flourishing.

But now the question is, what's next?

## We have officially entered the fourth era

It's already started. And it's the integration of all the eras that came before. Tomorrow's creatives seek the commercial utility from the industrial period, embrace the sociocultural firepower of the postwar time, while also leveraging the digital connection of the recent era.

All of which are fusing together in a new epoch of creativity, the entrepreneurial era.

In the modern age of automation, where the speed, volume and quality of data has reached unprecedented levels, creative problem solving has never been more critical

to professional success. Creatives are no longer defined by one skillset, role, medium or label. Everybody is everything; everybody does everything.

That's why we now have the biggest creative workforce in history. Over one third of our economy is freelancing. Nearly sixty million people for whom creativity is essential to their livelihood.

Digital natives have grown into legitimate artists, business owners and entrepreneurs, or have at least learned to think and act like them.

Modern professionals have multifaceted careers with several sources of income.

Large companies are being disrupted by entrepreneurs, and challenging employees to think that way so they can innovate to survive.

And this is a beautiful thing.

There's no telling what kind of impact this next era of creativity will have on our world.

## **And now everyone's job is creative**

Creativity will always be essential for all career success. Particularly as automation eats the world of work more and more, it is the innate, human capacity for creativity that will make professionals more employable.

Two pieces of research prove this hypothesis.

Mckinsey's study on automation and the future of the workforce reported that the demand for higher cognitive skills, including creativity, will rise close to ten percent in the next decade. Their data confirmed that there is a degree of innovative thinking that's essential in every position, regardless of its core professional focus. Creative problem solving and coming up with ideas is a highly interpersonal and emotional skill that transcends role, learning style, personality type and disposition.

What skills do you offer that can't be borrowed, replicated or programmed by a machine?

The second piece of research comes from the journal of organizational creativity. Their studies found that the creative skillset is needed in all types of organizations and industries today. And these jobs go far beyond the artistic endeavor or scientific discovery that has been traditionally labeled as creative work. Business as diverse as journalism, finance, manufacturing, health care, government and professional services today all require deep expertise and original ideas in order to be successful. As such, these organizations need to consider how their management processes support their ability to attract, motivate, and retain creative individuals. And those who work for them need to accept, embrace and capitalize on the unique brand of innovative thinking they bring to their job, regardless of what story they've been telling themselves about how creative they are.



Seems like the very human skill of creativity has proven to be at a premium, and is only growing in importance.

Creating is something we make part of our normal life, rather than something special and separate from it.

## **Meanwhile, creative professionals have a unique category of challenges to contend with**

There are a host of personal, social, and economic anxieties that come with this kind of work, whether you're an entrepreneur or an employee.

There's the fear of team members rejecting your work. The longing to be noticed for your innovative ideas. The dread of having to start projects from scratch. The pressure of finishing tasks on time. The exhaustion of having to prove yourself to customers and coworkers.

The disappointment of your career not following the path you imagined.

Not to mention:

The apathy of not wanting to do the work on certain days. The frustration of collaborating with unproductive people. The paranoia of sharing your ideas before they're ready. The difficulty of staying focused amidst distraction. The isolation of slaving away alone in your home all day.

If creative professionals are going to flourish, they need to change their relationship with this unique category of problems.

## **Sadly, most creatives don't have rules for what happens when this happens**

Making things is not always easy. Earning a living from your wits is not for the faint of heart. Innovating can be downright stressful and sometimes overwhelming. And if you're not equipped to handle the inevitable and resistance that accompanies creative work, then you can end up bitter, burned out and broke.

Meanwhile, every other element of modern business seems to have its own management system:

- Task management systems
- Project management systems
- Financial management systems
- Communication management systems
- Customer relationship management systems

Even office snack management systems.

But none of those tools are purpose built to directly support creative professionals in their work.

If it's the day before a big meeting, and you're struggling to generate, organize or execute your ideas, there isn't one trusted system for you to turn to. Or when you've just started a new job and want to add value to your team, there isn't a universal framework for how to do so.

## **And all the current tools are mostly distractions that don't change behavior**

More and more professionals need creativity for their job, but the available options to manage it efficiently are either nonexistent or insufficient.

Clearly, people have been trying to solve this problem for a few decades now. But their repertoire of solutions is outdated, clunky, inefficient, expensive and labor intensive.

Let's explore the categories of those solutions, including their respective upsides and downsides.

First, there are tools for creativity. This includes brainstorming games, social media, virtual flash cards, bookmarking programs and project management software.

Having used many of these myself, tools like these are quite strong in novelty and digital experience. They're also low priced or even free. But unfortunately, their number of features and notifications is overwhelming. The tools often consume more time than they save. They're all inspiration and organization, but no action.

Entrepreneur magazine did an article on these tools, quoting a creative professional who put it this way:

*Most of these tools designed to enhance your personal productivity seem to exacerbate the very anxieties they were meant to allay. The better you get at managing time, the less of it you feel that you have.*

The second category of current options to help people manage their creativity is called systems. These are software agnostic, since the systems are simply a set of guidelines that work together to help people get things done. It includes research methodologies, thought leadership empires, publishing concerns, artist communities, professional associations and freelancer platforms.

Having tried many of these systems myself, they're clearly high in structure and robust in their offering of resources. Plus the ability to connect with other creators is a benefit. But systems can be cumbersome, complicated and controlling. Some bordering on cult like. They're either too clinical or too artsy. And in many cases, just propaganda for selling other products, not helping you create more of your own.

Inc magazine's cover story on these productivity systems summarized it perfectly:

*An explosion in technology aimed at helping people manage their time and tasks may actually be making it harder. When you open up a browser window, there are twenty tabs staring at you with stuff you need to get done, fighting for your attention.*

Okay, now that we reviewed about tools and systems, the final category of available options for managing creativity is called services. This is the one to one offering, which can include creativity advisors, business consultants, productivity gurus, life coaches and paid mentors.

Having hired people like this myself, I will attest to their strong accountability and high efficacy in enabling habit change. But these services are expensive and labor intensive. They're often one size fits all solutions that come after the fact, rather than on a preventative basis. And such services can create an external dependency, robbing that client's capability to manage their creativity on their own.

FastCompany's article on the rise of this category of solutions says it all:

*My biggest issue with most coaching programs is they try to make you something you're not. And you spend a lot of your time trying to put into practice what the coach makes you aware of.*

In summary, the current solutions for managing creativity include tools, systems and services.

While each of them offer individual upsides, ultimately none of the options miss the mark.

We believe today's creative professionals need a new alternative to solve this widespread problem. Something different.

They need something that has the novelty and affordability of digital tool.

With the structure and robustness of system.

And the personalization of a one to one service.

But not a costly, cumbersome, exhausting chore.

Rather, a one stop shop that's there when you need it, and gone when you don't.

Something purpose built to directly support people in their creative work.

## **Ultimately, people are treating the symptom, not the source**

There are as many tools as there are people to use them.

But people seldom address their deeper issues with creativity, which are almost certainly more psychological than tactical. Their prop may offer them a quick fix,

but the individual's real problems never subside enough for them to take full action consistently. They just put a band aid on their inattention for an hour or two.

Imagine how much time people spend managing those idiotic notifications, updates and notes on their apps, calendars or project management software applications.

10 minutes a day = 1 hour a week = 1 week a year

Multiply that by the number of people on your team, and we're talking about a significant labor expense.

Just to preserve the illusion of productivity.

## **It's time for a repeatable and innovative experience in which creativity can thrive**

People are doing projects by the seat of their pants. They're constantly making things up as they go. Which has its merits, no doubt.

But the long-term danger of solely taking an extemporaneous path to creativity is, it makes it hard to replicate great work consistently.

If every day you and your team sit down to work, and you do so without preparation, making things offhand, fabricating work out of what is conveniently around you, then there will always be a ceiling on what you can accomplish.

It's foolhardy to assume people can sustain innovation without some kind of methodology to increase cognitive ease and free up their minds to do their finest work.

Eventually the time comes to stop improvising and start investing in system that is designed to provide a repeatable and innovative experience in which your creativity can thrive.

## **It's time for a way to raise the chances of effectively managing the process**

If we want to achieve breakthrough results in our creative work, then it will be helpful to learn and employ a robust vocabulary for that experience.

Because once we have a language that permits us to communicate with others and ourselves about our creativity, then we can start to make sense of this otherwise ambiguous process.

Once we start thinking and speaking the words that support our artistic intentions, then we can conceptualize and describe the experience of bringing our ideas to form. That's just as much of a superpower as the act of creating itself.

Language gives you leverage as a creative professional. It expands your repertoire of mindful awareness, allowing you to notice the opportunities to increase your return on experience everywhere you go.

By building an evolving glossary of what it means to be creative, you can significantly increase your chances of effectively managing the process.

## **It's time to teach the creative workforce how to troubleshoot the real issues**

Imagine if you could learn how to solve your creative problems efficiently, so you can get back to the real work of making things.

Imagine if you had a real time toolkit to help you think about your problems in a different way.

Imagine if you could understand the context behind the problem, see the experiences of others who have had the same problem, and visualize potential tools to prevent that problem from reoccurring in the future.

You would become unstoppable. You would free up your mental capacity to allocate attention to more meaningful tasks. Like actually doing your work.

This metacognitive skill, aka, thinking about thinking, aka, becoming aware of your awareness, changes everything.

## **Introducing Personal Creativity Management (PCM)**

Personal creativity management (PCM, is a unique approach to managing an individual's comprehensive creative process, including the phases of ideation, organization and execution.

Personal creativity management may refer to an individual working in a freelance or entrepreneurial capacity whose livelihood depends on bringing their ideas to form; or to an employee within a team or organization for whom innovation is a critical competitive advantage.

Advocates of this discipline note that effective personal creativity management typically results in greater output, faster execution, lower burnout, deeper focus and higher engagement for those who practice it.

The ultimate goal of personal creativity management is to help individuals and organizations build leverage from their intellectual capital that drives innovation and earns greater profits, while not burning people out during the process.

PCM is distinguished from other management disciplines by its cognizance of the mental, emotional and existential contexts of the people for whom it is created. The methodology centers around a robust arsenal of hundreds of solutions custom fit for each individual's unique personality, value system and life situation.

The solution taxonomy involves four classifications of tools. Mindsets, approaches, behaviors and assets.

Mindsets are the fixed dispositions that determine an individual's response to creative situations; approaches are the particular procedures for addressing or accomplishing creative work; behaviors are the specific ways in which the creative professionals act or conduct themselves conducive to prolificacy; and assets are the specific things that can be intentionally used to produce value along the creative process.

There you have it. You heard it here first.

Now you have a new cognitive reference point to navigate this new economic reality.

Welcome aboard.

## **The Personal Creativity Management Manifesto**

You are never starting from scratch.

Creativity can be systematic, not just sporadic.

Volume and speed trump accuracy and quality.

Mindset matters more than environment.

Giving yourself permission is half of the work.

If you don't write it down, it never happened.

All forms of emotional tension are usable.

Whatever is unsexy gives you leverage.

You have plenty of time to do everything you want to do.

If fulfillment isn't the answer, then rephrase the question.

Energy is the organizing principle that gives you the greatest momentum.

Nobody is paying attention anyway, so you may as well enjoy the process

**JANUARY**

January 1

## **We have officially entered the fourth era of creativity.**

The first era of creativity was industrial, starting around the turn of the twentieth century. Rapid scientific progress brought us an unprecedented invention boom. Everything from light bulbs to transportation to radio to telephones to physics were all inseparable from our modern world, amplified by the invention of public relations, all of which had a crucial role in the first two world wars. The creative process was now officially celebrated and commercialized like never before. The second era of creativity was cultural, ushering in around postwar time. Socioeconomic issues took center stage as baby boom and middle class developed, the women's movement blossomed, and counterculture blew up. Mass media gave people a platform to express their ideas and talents in innovative ways. That's why the fifties, sixties and seventies saw popular music, literature, cinema, art and culture flourishing like never before. And that eventually shepherded in the third era of creativity, the digital information era. Starting in the early eighties, people and organizations began making gargantuan strides in every area of modern life, underscored by these revolutionary technological advances, most notably, the internet. People now had the permission and the platforms to be creative, but also had something new that multiplied their reach. Connection. Creators related to other creators on this global scale, both before, during and after the creative process, free of charge, and free of barriers. That's why change has occurred at a blinding rate since then, multiplying technological progress to the power of eleven, generating another extraordinary period of creative flourishing. But now the question is, how do we evolve from here? Is there a fourth era of creativity? Absolutely. It's already started. And it's the integration of all the eras that came before. Tomorrow's creatives seek the commercial utility from the industrial period, embrace the sociocultural firepower of the postwar time, while also leveraging the digital connection of the recent era. All of which are fusing together in a new epoch of creativity, the entrepreneurial era. In the modern age of automation, where the speed, volume and quality of data has reached unprecedented levels, creative problem solving has never been more critical to professional success. Creatives are no longer defined by one skillset, role, medium or label. Everybody is everything, everybody does everything. That's why we now have the biggest creative workforce in history. Over one third of our economy is freelancing. Nearly sixty million people for whom creativity is essential to their livelihood. Digital natives have grown into legitimate artists, business owners and entrepreneurs, or have at least learned to think and act like them. Modern professionals have multifaceted careers with several sources of income. Large companies are being disrupted by entrepreneurs, and challenging employees to think that way so they can innovate to survive. And this is a beautiful thing. There's no telling what kind of impact this next era of creativity will have on our world. Personally, I feel privileged to be part of it.

***What did you create today?***



January 2

## **Learn the rules for what happens when this happens.**

As a creative professional, much of your life revolves around making things. Creativity is a daily requirement of your career. It's essential to your livelihood. It's not only what you do, but also it's who you are. Nothing beats the joy of making something out of nothing, right? But that process is not always easy. Earning a living from your wits is not for the faint of heart. Making things can be downright stressful and sometimes overwhelming. And if you're not equipped to handle the inevitable and resistance that accompanies creative work, then you can end up bitter, burned out and broke. The problem is, every other element of modern business seems to have its own management system. There's task management systems, project management systems, financial management systems, customer relationship management systems, hiring management, communication management systems, even office snack management systems. But none of those tools are purpose built to directly support creative professionals in their work. If it's the day before a big meeting, and you're struggling to generate, organize or execute your ideas, there isn't one trusted system for you to turn to. Or when you've just started a new job and want to add value to your team, there isn't a universal framework for how to do so. Sure, there are dozens of apps, games and tools that promise to train the creative brain and expand your imagination. But mostly, they're just distractions. They're reactive, not proactive. And people who make things for a living don't need to get better at handling creative emergencies; they need a system for preventing them. They need to customize their own set of rules for what happens when the resistance happens. You ever seen those disaster survival kits? You know, the ones that come complete with water pouches, emergency ponchos, survival whistles, fifty feet of nylon rope and three pairs of flame retardant safety goggles? People don't spend two hundred bucks on the kit because they actually think they'll use every tool inside of it. They buy it because, in a disaster situation, imagine how much calmer they would be, knowing they had a plan in place. That's what happens when you prepare for events in advance. Emergencies are less likely to knock you off course. You can take action calmly and efficiently to put yourself in the best possible position to thrive. Because you have a protocol. Listen, if your livelihood revolves around making things, and you're tired of scrambling for superficial, unsustainable, one off hacks to overcome the struggle, save yourself a bundle of stress and time. Get a personal creativity management system for your workflow. Every other element of modern business is solving its problems in all these new, technology based ways. It's time your brain finally caught up.

***What are your rules for what happens when the creative resistance happens?***

January 3

## **Lubricating the process of habit change.**

Here's the bill of goods we've been sold by the personal development industrial complex. There's a magical, one size fits all solution for habit change. Just buy this book, download this app and follow this program, and you'll be a new person in thirty days or less. It may sound absurd, but considering how our caveman brains are wired, it's no surprise that it's a fifteen billion dollar a year industry. The problem is, each new tool that come out becomes a social talisman, or sacred object. It's just another easy, cheap way to publicly pat ourselves on the back for having done something to improve our condition. Now that we've done the hard work of reading a book and taking copious notes, psychologically, it feels like we've processed the concept and can be done with it. But in reality, we haven't integrated anything new into our daily lives. It's in one ear and out the other. Take it from someone who has literally worn a social talisman on his shirt for half my life. Habit change is hard and nuanced, and if you don't lubricate the process, it won't stick. If a new idea is going to extend utility into your life, then there have to be enough hooks onto which it can hang. My psychologist friend talks about this all the time. She's always reminding me that each person has their own story, their own motivational system, both of which are embedded in complex social, psychological and cultural contexts. And so, the best interventions are the ones that are robust and individually tailored to help clients improve their lives. There are as many treatment plans as there are people to use them. There's no off the shelf solution, it's a lifelong process. If you've even visited a medical clinic and noticed literature about whole person care, this is what they're talking about. The best way to care for patients, the doctors say, is to consider their full spectrum of their complex needs, medical, behavioral, socioeconomic and beyond. No social talisman required. The beauty of this compassionate mantra for patient care is, it also works when caring for ourselves. If there is some condition of our life we'd like to improve, we lubricate the process of habit change. Starting with the core assumption that the potential solutions will come in many different formats. Some people will need mantras, some people will need routines, some people will need breathing exercises, and some people will need sticky notes. Fantastic, all useful solutions. But we accept that there's no superficial master key to unlock our potential. That's why we try lots of things. It's plug and chug, as my math teacher used to joke, and we stay with the process until something resonates and this new habit or idea starts to weaves itself into our personal fabric. Remember, there are as many solutions as there are problems and people to have them. As you extend care to yourself, look for ways to reduce friction and wear and tear. Change becomes so much easy to swallow.

*Are you open to whatever kind of tool will positively change your condition?*

January 4

## **You're too good to be this broke.**

There's a guy who used to run in my professional circle who launched a community for artists that were struggling between launch and bankruptcy. Their tagline was, you're too good to be this broke. It's a compelling and emotive mantra, but it's also misguided. First of all, there is no direct relationship between being good and financial success. It's certainly helpful to be good, but it's not a prerequisite. There are scores of professional creators with zero talent who ascend to great monetary heights, while there are just as many artists who are blessed with profound gifts that haven't earned a dime from their work in years. Vincent is arguably the most influential painter in the history of art, but he wasn't commercially successful. During his career, he sold one painting, several months before he committed suicide after years of mental illness and poverty. So much for talent. Another assumption behind my colleague's misguided mantra is, it smacks of artistic entitlement. He claims he's too good to be this broke, and yet he's the one who made the choice to burden his art with the responsibility of underwriting his life. That's his problem. The world does not owe him or anybody a career, certainly not a commercially successful one, simply because a person wants to be an artist. Just because you're highly creative and special and noble, doesn't mean you deserve to be remunerated for your idealism with a suitcase full of cash. My next issue with the mantra about being too good to be this broke is, it scripts people into scarcity mentality. When your default posture is bitterness about an industry of which you so deeply want to be a part, you're creating an unconscious attitude of limitation. And nobody wants to do business with an artist like that. Truth is, the world is an abundant place if you become a part of it in a healthy way. But that means you have to let go of the childish and petulant notion that complaining about your situation will somehow improve it. One final note: If you're broke, it's probably time to switch careers. If everyone in your peer group is broke, then it's probably time to find new friends. Artists aren't historically the most logical or economically minded of people, but if anyone should be able to read the writing on the wall, it's them. After more than a decade of running my publishing business, being brilliant and broke was no longer a twenty-something punchline; it was a thirty-something problem. Hence my retirement into full time employee and part time artists. Because that's what smart creators do. They read the writing on the wall and switch to a game with better odds for them. If you're experiencing a deep discrepancy between your level of talent and the world's willingness to pay for it, that's unfortunate, and my heart goes out to you, as that dilemma has happened to me in multiple phases of my career. But think carefully about the intention with which you put things out into the world. You may be too good to be this broke, but perhaps your mindset is the thing that's actually damaged.

***What if your art had more long term worth than money?***

January 5

## **Whether you get meaningful work done still depends on only you yourself.**

The default ways to increase productivity and creativity are through tools and techniques. You can use reminders, set timers, download apps, install plugins, launch applications that block websites, smoke a joint before you sit down to write, and so on. It seems there are as many tools as there are people to use them. The problem is, most of these so-called solutions treat the symptom, not the problem. People seldom address their deeper issues with creativity, which are almost certainly more psychological than tactical. Their prop may offer them a quick fix, but the individual's real problems never subside enough for them to take full action consistently. They just put a band-aid on their inattention for an hour or two. The other thing about tools is, they often become distractions in and of themselves. Imagine how much time people spend managing those idiotic notifications, updates and notes on their apps, calendars or project management software applications. Even if it's only ten minutes a day, that's an hour a week. That's an entire week a year. Multiply that by the number of people on your team, and we're talking about a significant labor expense, just to preserve the illusion of productivity. I'm reminded one study from a consciousness and cognition journal that studied the association between coffee and people with creative occupations. The scientists followed participants after they consumed either a placebo or a large coffee, and their research found that caffeine had zero significant impact on creative idea generation. Subjects reported they felt less sad and more alert, but not more creative. They're simply high on a legal drug. And there's nothing wrong with that. Drugs are wonderful things. But let's stop pretending that drinking brown water is the golden ticket to our artistic success. Speaking of drugs, there's also a study that recruited a group of regular cannabis samplers and divided them into groups. The researchers found that the smokers who had no marijuana were actually most creative when tested. Any improved creativity that they believe they experienced was an illusion. The findings suggested that cannabis with low potency doesn't have any impact on creativity, while highly potent cannabis actually impairs divergent thinking. Again, people should be encouraged to do all the drugs they want and enjoy themselves. But standing by for their creative output to skyrocket once the substance hits their bloodstream isn't the answer. Even if the drug does give you a temporary boost, is that really a sustainable long-term strategy for a creative practice? There's an old saying, a poor craftsman blames his tools. If a creator can't perform their job, they blame it on external factors like the quality of their equipment, rather than taking responsibility for their own failure. We have to be bigger than that. It's time to stop giving our tools more power than they deserve. Bottom line, if we have the wrong priorities, then we're just going to be efficiently executing the wrong work. And that doesn't help anybody. But if you are willing to be more creative, then you will be. If you believe that shipping your art depends on only you, yourself, then that's exactly what will happen. Expectation determines experience, and experience impacts

outcome. Now if you'll excuse me, my productivity timer just went off, and it's time for my next cup of coffee. Let me just check my phone right quick.

*Are you treating the symptom of your creative problem or the source of it?*

January 6

## **What if there was never a good time for this?**

At any given organization, certain projects always seem to get delayed. And the story we tell ourselves is, okay, let's put that on the back burner for now, and when it's not so crazy around here, then we'll get around to it. Once things finally slow down. But here's the thing. They never do. Just when we get there, there disappears. You see this a lot in retail. Stores seamlessly transition from spring launches to summer promotion to fall planning to holiday deals to end of the year bargains to new year's forecasting to inventory clearances, lather, rinse, repeat. And it goes beyond the world of retail. Every organization has its own version of this cycle. It's the nature of capitalism. When you're working at a place that's growing, things don't slow down. Even if team members have the best intentions, it simply doesn't happen. Reminds me of one of my ad agency jobs, where it took our team literally fifteen months to write one case study. The goddamn thing was only two pages long. That's thirty words a day. And yet, people just couldn't get it together. Everyone kept assuring me that once things slowed down, they would get around to it. Which was a lie. Nobody got around to anything. Something always popped up and took priority. Even if we did finally sit down for a half hour to regroup about this stupid project, new feedback would come in from our tech partners that changed all of our underlying assumptions, and that resulted in us having to start all over again. Talk about pushing the boulder up the hill. What work are you procrastinating until things finally slow down? Are your internal processes so wildly inefficient that you can't get products to market before they are obsolete? If so, perhaps a better question to ask your team is, what if slowing down is just an illusion? What if work doesn't get any easier? And what if there was never a good time to do anything? That may sound like extreme or black and white thinking, but it's also a helpful paradigm to knock out many of the excuses people make for why things couldn't get done. Because if you want to break the indecision cycle that's slowly eating away at the soul of the organization, you have to make a stand for execution. You have to tell people, look, there is never going to be a good time for this, so we might as well do it right now. Let's go.

*If you pretended time wasn't on your side, what projects might finally get done?*

January 7

## **Yeah, but I don't have a creative job.**

Glassdoor, a leading employee review and career search website, has nearly thirty thousand job openings under the search query, noncreative positions. Everything from website developers to operations managers to user researchers to logistics management specialists. As if to say, attention all left brained people, if you're someone who doesn't think of themselves as creative, then we've got a career opportunity for you. Inquire today! This bothers me on a cellular level. Because there's no such thing as a noncreative job. Creativity will always be essential for all career success. Particularly as automation eats the world of work more and more, it is the innate, human capacity for creativity that will make professionals more employable. Two pieces of research prove this hypothesis. McKinsey's study on automation and the future of the workforce reported that the demand for higher cognitive skills, including creativity, will rise close to ten percent in the next decade. Their data confirmed that there is a degree of innovative thinking that's essential in every position, regardless of its core professional focus. Creative problem solving and coming up with ideas is a highly interpersonal and emotional skill that transcends role, learning style, personality type and disposition. Ask yourself this. What skills do you offer that can't be borrowed, replicated or programmed by a machine? The second piece of research comes from the journal of organizational creativity. Their studies found that the creative skillset is needed in all types of organizations and industries today. And these jobs go far beyond the artistic endeavor or scientific discovery that has been traditionally labeled as creative work. Business as diverse as journalism, finance, manufacturing, health care, government and professional services today all require deep expertise and original ideas in order to be successful. As such, these organizations need to consider how their management processes support their ability to attract, motivate, and retain creative individuals. And those who work for them need to accept, embrace and capitalize on the unique brand of innovative thinking they bring to their job, regardless of what story they've been telling themselves about how creative they are. Seems like the very human skill of creativity has proven to be at a premium, and is only growing in importance. The question you have to ask yourself is, how does that capability express itself in your life in ways that are useful to yourself and others? That's the good news about this skill. There is no one way to be creative. Everybody innovates within whatever mental, emotional and existential contexts of their life own situation. That's precisely why this new discipline was named personal creativity management. Emphasis on the personal. In any given PCM system, there's a robust arsenal of tools and solutions custom fit for each individual's unique personality, value system and life situation. That way, there's no such thing as a noncreative job. Creating is something each of us makes part of our normal life, rather than something special and separate from it. Look, we're human. Humans make things. That's what we do. It's the core differentiator of our species. And the quicker we accept, embrace and exploit that innate skillset, as it manifests for our unique makeup, the more valuable and employable we ultimately become.

***What if there was no such thing as a noncreative job?***

January 8

## **What if changing one thing at a time was enough?**

Multitasking has been clinically proven to impair performance, block awareness, disrupt decision-making, produce more mistakes and reduce productivity. And yet, we do it anyway. Myself included, maybe out of boredom, impatience, anxiety, pride, who knows? But what's interesting about the bad habit of multitasking is, not only does it happen in the micro, like when we're texting while driving or listening to an audio book while cooking; but it also happens in the macro, like when we try to take on all of our life's problems at once. Have you ever done that before? Tried to make more than one major decision simultaneously? It's tempting. The opportunity to kill a few giant birds with one stone is hard to pass up. But leverage for leverage's sake rarely pays off. Quite the opposite. It often drastically increases the pressure we put on ourselves. The practice of speed thinking doesn't serve us; it just raises our blood pressure. And when we try to do everything at once, we're often as bad off as if we had panicked. Fried writes in his bestselling book about reworking that any company can turn a bunch of great ideas into a crappy product really fast by trying to do them all at once. It's hard enough to done one thing right, he writes, but trying to do ten things well at the same time? Forget about it. Jason is posing a critical question. What if, at least at first, changing one thing at a time was enough? There's a degree of restraint there that most of us don't have. After all, humans are primed for immediate gratification, and if we don't have to be patient, we won't. And yet, we forget that we don't have to do it all at once. That we don't have to wrestle with every problem. One thing at a time should do the trick. It's kind of like introducing solid food to babies. Pediatricians tell new parents to try one food at a time to see if the child has any allergic reactions. They're supposed to wait three to five days between each new food, but before they know it, that kid will be eating everything under the sun. Except broccoli. All kids hate broccoli. Point being, trying to do everything at once will only be a source of confusion and anxiety for you. If you want to give yourself leverage in the areas that need it most, stop pretending that multitasking is an effective strategy.

*What if you didn't wrestle with every problem today?*



January 9

## **Our creative blocks will simply subside.**

During my creativity workshops, participants tend to ask the same types of questions. They want to overcome hurdles in one of the three stages in the creative process. Inspiration, organization or execution. And as someone who's struggled with all three of them many times before, my heart goes out to them. Because these are very real problems that, if not addressed, can have a devastating effect on a person's ability to collect, create and communicate their ideas. But the answer is never as tactical as people hope it's going to be. Read these books, install this software programs, use these hacks, solutions like these may deliver cosmetic changes, but the reality of creativity is, it's such a deeply human process, that the only way to enable long term success is to repair the foundation. To make multiple behavior changes in which we train ourselves to stop thinking, feeling and acting counterproductive ways. If we can do that inner work, our creative blocks simply subside. Because existentially and ontologically, our being will be in such a state that inspiration, organization and execution flow naturally. Drucker talks about this process in one of his books. Medical educators say their greatest problem is the physician who has a good eye. He still has to learn not to depend on that along, but to go through the patient process of making a diagnosis, otherwise he will kill people. He must learn not to depend on solely insight and knowledge, but on a mundane, boring, and conscientious step-by-step process. Creativity works the same way. When we do the inner work first, the outer work gets done. Let's explore about several of the questions people ask most frequently. For each one, we'll dig deeper to find the problem behind the problem, the thing behind the thing. Can't stay focused? Well, spending thirty dollars on some website and app blocker might be a quick fix. But limiting your access to distractions isn't the issue. Surrendering is. Letting go is. Trusting that the present moment is enough is. Do some of that work first. Can't come up with any ideas? Sorry to say, but taking a different subway line home from work isn't going to help. You need to give yourself permission to be creative. You need to believe that you have something worth saying. You need to surround yourself with loving people who will say yes to your ideas no matter what. Can't stay motivated to create regularly? Signing up for a goal-setting seminar will create a temporary spark of power, but let's not shit ourselves here. People who aren't motivated aren't going to motivate themselves to attend a motivational program. What they need is to hit bottom, feel disgusted with themselves and admit that their life isn't working and needs radical change. Can't snap into creative flow state? Taking hallucinogens will certainly elevate your consciousness for a few hours, but it's not a sustainable strategy. A smarter approach would be building several small routines into your day that help your mind loosen its grip so the ideas can spring forth. Can't create anything original? Scouring social media for inspiration is a fun way to waste an afternoon, but you're not actually producing anything. The principal work is creating piles and piles of things until you've flushed all the cover songs out of your system and dropped down into your authentic self. Can't get started? You can write on sticky notes and brainstorm until your heart's desire. But the only way to

start moving the creative story forward is to reassess your relationship with fear. To honestly ask yourself what you're scared of, why you're scared of it, and what's worst thing that might realistically happen if you leaned into that fear? This is the true work of creativity. Making significant changes in the way we think, feel and act toward ourselves. If we can master that, our creative blocks will simply subside.

***What are you afraid to know about yourself?***

January 10

## **Humility is the greatest safeguard you have.**

Did you know it was physically impossible to tickle yourself? This is not an urban legend. Cognitive neuroscientists have researched the cerebellum, the part of the brain that's involved in monitoring movements. Turns out, this area can predict sensations when your own movements cause them, but not when someone else's movement does. And so, if you try to tickle yourself, your cerebellum will predict the sensation, and that prediction will cancel out the response of the other brain areas to the tickling. Isn't the human mind fascinating? It kind of makes you wonder if there are any other things you can't do to yourself. Like licking your elbow. Anyone who can do that really should be given their own reality show. Truly impressive. But all stupid human tricks aside, what about bigger, more meaningful activities? Like when you go on a mission to fix yourself? Perhaps you have fallen down this rabbit hole before. Circling all your imperfections like a plastic surgeon with a marker during a patient consultation. Okay so we'll get rid of this here, and cut out this piece, and remove this one section over here, change this part here, and so on. But unlike tickling, this behavior is highly addictive. And the worst part is, because your change isn't instantaneous, you get disgusted with your lack of progress, thinking you should be better by now, and that makes you feel even shittier, which starts the shame loop all over again. Good times. No wonder recovery programs center around humility. Step one is always surrendering to the fact that you can't control everything. You can't get sober unless you die to your ego and start accepting help from someone who is not you. There's power to that. Even if you're not an addict. Because regardless of what you're struggling with, if you were smart enough to fix yourself, wouldn't you have done it by now? If you were so aware of your problem, isn't there a good chance that problem would be solved already? Hurff, the renowned product designer and author, writes about this paradox from the perspective of tech startups, which is a helpful way to think about the process of personal growth. He says people have problems, and they want other people to make those problems go away. But nobody walks around looking for solutions to their problems. People walk around trying to tune out their problems, because they don't expect that they can solve them. And the purpose of the product designer is to tap them on the shoulder and say, excuse me, but you seem to struggle with this problem every day. Imagine if it was actually a positive interaction instead? Hurff's words remind us that if we plant right seed in the right spot, and it will grow without further coaxing. And that's the first step toward change. Accepting that we can't always lean on our own power. Instead of relying on ourselves to be reliable, we humble ourselves to this job that has to be done, and hire the best product or service or individual to help us do it. Could be a therapist, could be a software app, could be a group exercise program, could be a weekly support group meeting. Whatever it takes to stop us from trying to tickle ourselves. Humility is the greatest safeguard we have.

*If you were so aware of your problem, isn't there a good chance that problem would be solved already?*

January 11

## **The problem you didn't realize could be solved.**

Creative professionals, both the entrepreneur types and the employee types, have a unique category of problems to contend with on an hourly basis. There's the fear of team members rejecting your work. The longing to be noticed for your innovative ideas. The dread of having to start projects from scratch. The pressure of finishing tasks on time. The exhaustion of having to prove yourself to customers and coworkers. And the disappointment of your career not following the path you imagined. Not to mention, there's the apathy of not wanting to do the work on certain days. The frustration of collaborating with people who can't be productive unless they've had their coffee. The paranoia of sharing your ideas before they're ready. The difficulty of staying focused amidst all the noise inside of your head, on your devices and around your workplace. Or the isolation of slaving away alone in your apartment all day without anyone to talk to but the barista who thinks you're stalking him. Indeed, the life of the mind is not an easy one, nor is it always a desirable one. Arendt characterized it perfectly in her brilliant book on doing the hard work of thinking. Turn yourself upside down, stand on your head and on your thoughts, and build reality according to it. Wow, that's one hell of a job description. The challenge is, if we as creative professionals are committed to this life, we need to change our relationship with our unique category of problems. Motivation, organization, originality, community, we need to figure out a way to turn these daily struggles into a positive interaction instead. Otherwise we'll never make it out alive. Because what's working against us is the current repertoire of solutions to our creative problems. These offerings are outdated, clunky, inefficient, expensive and labor intensive. Most productivity and creativity solutions are just distractions in disguise. They're billed as time savors, but they actually cause more work than they complete. Most creative professionals don't need complicated, bloated project management systems to execute their work; they need a different framework for making clear, firm decisions. They don't need addictive smartphone games to engage their creativity; they need to work with leaders who remove the barriers that suppress the creative driver. They don't need to spend three days at a conference learning how to be more productive, they need a daily practice of taking risks with their original ideas so they can fail, bounce back and build resilience. The good news is, once creative people change their relationship with these problems, once they start to see that they can be solved in a new way, and then the daily struggle will end. Yes, the work will still be challenging, but it won't be such an uphill battle anymore.

***What problem are you not paying attention to because you never thought there was another way to solve it?***

January 12

## **You can't spell freelancer without free.**

Here's what that freedom will cost you. It's been dubbed the freelance marketplace, the creative workforce, the gig economy, the entrepreneur revolution, the startup generation and the remote culture. Call it whatever you want, but this type of work has become a significant part of our overall economy. The data shows a decreasing percentage of our working population relies on traditional full time employment, while an increasing percentage own their own practices or micro businesses as independent contractors, aka, people who find and perform temporary, flexible work for clients rather than employers. Upwork, the online marketplace for freelancers, conducts the most comprehensive study of the independent workforce on an annual basis. Their research showed that freelancers represent one in three workers in this country. There are close to sixty million of us, and our direct impact on the economy is nearly a trillion dollars. And it's not just one way of working, either. Gigging represents a wide range of activities, reported the study. While skilled services are the most popular type of independent contract work, this creative workforce ranges from highly skilled workers freelancing full time to those occasionally selling goods online. Now, the obvious upside of becoming a freelance professional who generates a multifaceted career and several sources of income is flexibility. You have the privilege of choosing what, when, where, how much, and with whom you work. What's not to love about that? Having done it for many years myself, it's tough to top that level of autonomy. But this freedom often overshadows the underemphasized downside of the gig economy, which is something very few people talk about. The fact that it's just you. There is no other person or company to absorb any of the responsibility and related stress. You're the single point of success or failure. And that's a lot of pressure. Interestingly, do you know where the term freelance originates? Back in the eighteen hundreds, it referred to a medieval mercenary warrior. Well, today's independent workers are just that. We're out there battling every single day. And considering our high degree of autonomy, unpredictable income, difficulty finding work and volatile schedules, there are a host of personal, social, and economic anxieties that come without the cover and support of a traditional employer. Cornell's business school did a fascinating study on the agony and the ecstasy of working in the gig economy. They found that freelance workers experience stark emotional tensions encompassing both the anxiety and fulfillment of working in precarious and personal conditions. Lacking the holding environment provided by an organization, said the research team, workers need to create that space for themselves. They do so by cultivating connections to personal routines, to physical places, to significant people, and to the purpose of their work. These elements help them stay productive and manage the emotions attendant in their work. How well do you create that kind of space for yourself? What kind of personal creativity management system do you use to keep your business, your work and your sanity intact? If you plan to take the creative plunge into the entrepreneurial world of freelance gigging, first of all, welcome to club. Great to have you. Secondly, accept the fact that you are mercenary warrior. And finally, make sure you build a robust arsenal

of solutions custom fit for your unique personality, value system and life situation. Because, as the song lyric goes, freedom isn't free, there's a hefty fucking fee.

***What creative tools will help you weather and harness the emotional storms that accompany working without the cover of an organizational roof?***

January 13

## What if you had no goals?

For most of my young adult life, goals motivated me to do things. The experience of setting, documenting, sharing, reviewing, achieving and reflecting upon them was a significant source of satisfaction for me. Until it wasn't. Until it occurred to me that the hedonic treadmill really has no end. Goals are for the person you are when you set them, not necessarily the person you're going to be when you reach them. That's the inherent paradox here. Fulfillment itself already contains the urge to move beyond what has been attained. The destination is forever unknown until we find ourselves there. And the moment we hit our goal, or don't hit it and abandon it, we just set another one and start the process all over again. Somebody please tell me that's not why we're here? To check boxes? Aren't there more important things in this life than competing, attaining results, being the best, crossing the finish line and hitting our numbers? In my experience, all that addictive, striving, goal driven behavior mostly just introduced unnecessary stress into my life for a marginal return. Certainty made my ego happy to have and hold and hit all of my fancy goals. But it robbed me of the joy of the process. Because when you're attached to outcomes, treating every task or person as another goddamn vehicle to get somewhere else other than this moment, it's a form of objectification. But we don't need another thing to take us away from the only thing we have, which is right now. What might be healthier is focusing on what is up to us, which is our effort and mindset. Letting go of how things will turn out and enjoying the journey. Linklater, the artist who sparked the indie film movement in the nineties and became a movie making legend, said it eloquently. The ride does not require a destination, only occupants. And so, if you've been feeling disenchanting around the concept of goals, here are several reframing questions to ask yourself. Fair warning: these questions are abstract, esoteric, existential and unconventional. Humor me for a moment. What if you had no goals? What if you just worked on whatever you were working on and ended up wherever you are? What if you just did whatever you felt like was the right thing to do in the given situation? What if you trusted that your discipline alone was enough to lead to creating value for yourself and others? What if milestones were merely stopovers where you learned what you needed to learn and set out to continue on your path? And what if however it ends up playing itself out over time is how it ends up playing itself out over time? Wow, there's a sense of acceptance there that's profoundly soothing. It feels sustainable. It feels respectful of the human experience. Rather than a goal that gives people one way to win, it's a system that can surface many winning paths, some of which we never could have imagined at the outset.

*What part of the process are you robbing yourself of enjoying?*

January 14

## **The quality of our preoccupations has plummeted.**

If we're too busy fetishizing the habits of others, we'll never develop any of our own. That's the problem with the modern media landscape. The quality of our preoccupations has plummeted into idol worship and vicarious living. We're watching television shows and listening to podcasts and reading books and subscribing to blogs that profile other people's habits, rituals, workspaces and daily routines. Which is fascinating, no question. But it's really just procrastination in disguise. It's an advanced avoidance technique. A spectator sport. By leading someone else's life for a short period of time and then obsessing endlessly over it, our mind is tricking us into believing that we're the ones doing something meaningful. And because we feel a certain satisfaction from that vicarious activity, we're less motivated to do any actual work ourselves. That's the problem with avoidance. Anything based on that motivation has a very limited ability to work. And when it becomes the major action in our lives, we cannot move to where we want to go. Consider these two statistics, both of which come from the bureau of labor. First, our country's current unemployment rate is just north of five percent, which nets out to over eight million people. Second, our country's current average number of hours of television watched per week is thirty-three. Apparently, we're so unemployed that we're watching other people work. Something doesn't compute. It's time for us to own up the fictional nature of our own story. It's time for us to stop living vicariously through others and start creating real value in the world.

*How many hours last week were you watching other people work?*



January 15

## **The productivity ladder is leaning against the wrong wall.**

One of my entrepreneur friends runs a successful business, and also has three young kids who are home schooled. He has a mantra about productivity that always makes me chuckle. I don't need more ideas, I need more time. Truer words have never been spoken. As a recovering entrepreneur myself, I can attest that he's not alone in his struggle. Not a single one of us would turn down an extra hour in our day if it were offered to us. Imagine what we could get done with that additional sixty minutes! But here's the irony that nobody is talking about. There's no shortage of tactical, useful ways to create more time in your day. Productivity science, research and case studies are free and ubiquitous. Want more time? Simply combine your tasks, delegate your work, get more sleep, wake up earlier, triage your email, make smarter lists, buy productivity apps, stop watching television, start snorting cocaine, declutter your schedule, silence your phone, and so on. And yet, with all these clinically proven recommendations, the majority of entrepreneurs still manage to feel overwhelmed. How can that be possible? Syverson, the renowned economics professor, conducted research on the decline of productivity in the last fifty years. He found that the mere one percent average annual productivity growth we've been experiencing since the turn of the century is less than half of what it was in the decade prior, and is slower even than the twenty year slowdown from the seventies to the nineties. Despite incredibly rapid changes in technology to help us become more productive, we still can't crack the code. My theory is, the productivity ladder is leaning against the wrong wall. We're solving the wrong problem. Because while all of the above tactics are effective to some degree, they still fail to address the big picture. Letting go. That might be the most powerful productivity strategy on the planet. Which is precisely why it's so difficult to execute. Casey's compassionate recovery manual for codependents nails this strategy. In the spirit of detachment, letting others think whatever they want to think, or do whatever they want to do, are marvelous gifts to us. Being unburdened by the need to interact over every little experience that comes our way gives us so much extra time. The key word in her advice is, unburden. Forget about project management software. Can you imagine how much more space you would have in your head, and therefore, how much more time you would have in your day, if you learned to let go of all the bullshit in the world that you have no control over, nor should even be meddling with in the first place? Here's a list from my own experience. See if any of these resonate with your struggle. Are you burdened by concerns about whether people will understand you or not? Let that go, and there's one hour. Are you burned by the stress generated by other people's expectations? Let that go, and there's another hour. Are you burdened by the baffling ways in which other people are living their lives? Let that go, and you've just found one more. Are you burdened by trying to solve, fix and otherwise control the business of anyone other than yourself? Let that go, and there's another. Right there, that's four hours of free time you didn't think you had. That's half of an entire workday. You didn't even have to use any sticky notes. All

you had to do was let it all go. You're welcome. No charge. Now, you might think my calculus here is inaccurate, facetious and absurd. Fine. But do you have a better idea? Does anyone have a better idea? Look, somebody has to think about these problems, and apparently I've been appointed. Hopefully I'll have enough time in my dad to find some solutions. Remember, once you learn to let go, time expands greatly, and the freedom that should be yours miraculously starts to show up.

***What are you still doing, out of guilt, that doesn't need to be done by you, or anybody?***

January 16

## **Find tech solutions that make it easy for them to do hard things.**

The world wants to distract you. In an economy where the scarcest resource you have is your attention, the business model of the universe has shifted from presenting information to manipulating brains. Brands used to exist so they could help consumers, and now they seem to exist to distract them. He who gets the most eyeballs, wins. But let's not blame capitalists for trying to make money. They're just doing their jobs. The challenge is learning how to focus our decision making energy, rather than going through the day distracted by trivia. Creative personalities struggle with this skill quite frequently. The nature of their right-brained personalities is, they want to do everything. Thriving on novelty and dreaming, they get bored with repetition and often become unfocused and disorganized. Which isn't a good or a bad thing, it's just who they are. Oftentimes it's a feature, not a bug, depending on the kind of work they do and the intention with which they approach it. But the danger of this personality is, you're ripe for the picking in this distraction economy. Like when the graphic designer spends her entire afternoon trapped in the seductive vortex of gathering inspiration on a digital clipping website, rather than executing her principal creative work. Sorry to say, but that digital experience was expertly engineered to make her feel useful, satisfied and connected, but at the end of the day, it's not a productive or healthy use of her time. Only doing the actual work is. The good news is, for every piece of technology out there that's tailor made to distract our attention, there's another solution that can help focus it. That's the beauty of modern automation. Artificial intelligence, meaning any software that learns, has done for our generation what electricity did in the late eighteen hundreds. It's a total paradigm shift that's not incrementally better, but exponentially different. Creative professionals can actually find tech solutions that make it easy for them to do hard things, rather than just feel less bored. As long as they choose more intentionally. If you're someone who finds themselves wasting hours of time on unproductive tasks that merely preserve the illusion of productivity, try this. Before opening up a new tab on your browser, take a moment to ask a few questions. Will this technology save me time by doing something so that I don't have to? Does using this platform reduce my level of complexity, friction or cognitive burden? And can I quickly get what I need without exerting considerable skill or effort to pull all of the pieces together? If the answer is yes, then knock yourself out. If your problem can be solved right now, in a new technology based way, deploy your attention accordingly, get what you need, and then get back to work. But if you get the feeling that a particular tool might consume more time than it saves, try something else.

*How are you using technology to paint yourself into simple, life giving, stress avoiding, streamlined corners?*

January 17

## **Shift your frame of reference from the sporadic to the systematic.**

Lightning has historically been a prominent symbol of creativity. And yet, few innovators hang their hats on the almighty thunderbolt. They're more likely to reject the notion of the elusive eureka moment and promote a more systematic approach to their creative process. Edison didn't file for a thousand patents in his career because lightning just happen to strike a thousand times. He and his team pulled the plow daily and cultivated fertile ground so that the spark of conception kept firing every time they went to work. This is the number one misconception about creating. People assume good ideas only arrive sporadically and magically. Now, sometimes they do. And that's a wonderful thing. But this enchanted approach to getting ideas is not the norm, despite its romantic portrayal film and television. Like when all of the character's complex problems are solved by sudden epiphany. The artist or detective or lawyer gets hit with some external inspiration, apparently completely unrelated to everything, which becomes the key to their salvation. Fade to black, roll credits. Sure, this eureka moment certainly makes for a memorable scene, but sadly, it's not as common as people would like it to be. A high percentage of the time, innovation is the result of systematic and mechanical labor. It's less of a mysterious art and more of a disciplined science. Fewer lightning bolts, more hours at the workbench. Not exactly the glamorous picture of creativity that we were told about as kids. But that doesn't mean there's no magic or beauty or joy in the process. Quite the opposite, in fact. Because once you're willing to shift your frame of reference from the sporadic to the systematic, creativity becomes magical in a different kind of way. When you emphasize the unspectacular reality of the process, you're reminded that bringing new ideas into the world is, at its fundamental core, labor. You punch the clock and do your job. And that reminds you that you're a real person living in the real world making real things. That's a priceless experience no thunderbolt can provide. If you want to become prolific, you need to abandon your dependence on lightning and build a trusted, disciplined system instead.

***What outdated narrative about creating is holding you back?***

January 18

## **Someone who's exhaustingly trying to start from zero.**

The painful reality of managing up is, your boss's time is more valuable than yours. Period. It's simple organizational economics. Because of their level of experience, degree of judgment, access to power, and ability to effect change on the broader team, they have more leverage than you. Their opinion weighs more than yours. And that's okay. Knowing this makes you more effective at your job and thus, more valuable as an employee. Now you can hyper focus on making things easier for that person. You can establish a better working arrangement by formatting and filtering tasks against the filter of, okay, does this give my boss more of what she needs to succeed? What's unfortunate is, creative professionals forget to apply this same thinking to their own internal processes. Because the principle of prioritization works for managing within, as well as managing up. Again, it's economics. On any given workday, not all of people's minutes are created equally. Time spent on creative execution is disproportionately more valuable than time spent on administrative work. You might have plenty of tasks on your plate, but your daily discipline of physically generating new ideas will always be the single highest leverage activity that facilitates all the others. It's the catchall. Which means, if you only have two hours each morning and two hours each afternoon do that work, then you better be efficient. You better know how to get your brain up to operating temperature quickly, without a lot of ramp up time. One tool that's profoundly helpful in solving this problem is called well digging. It's a creative professional's ongoing reference file. Almost like a forced savings account for your ideas that always has a high enough balance to make withdrawals on a moment's notice. That way, when you sit down to create in those crucial two hours of high leverage time, the blank page is no longer ground zero; your life is. Your intellectual reservoir has been constantly replenished. Hemingway had his own version of this. He famously advised writers to always stop their work when things are going well, and when they know what will happen next. If they can do that every day when they are working on a novel, they will never be stuck. That's well digging. And you always do it before you're thirsty. When we have parts of something, we always want to create a whole. How much of your high leverage creative time are you wasting trying to start from scratch? Make things easier on yourself. Accept the painful reality that not all of your time is created equally, and prioritize and execute accordingly. Contribute to your ongoing creative reference file on an hourly basis. And each time you sit down to do your work, you'll have a creative advantage over someone who's exhaustingly trying to start from zero. It's not managing up, it's managing within.

*Have you developed an exquisite understanding of your own timing?*

January 19

## **This is either complete bullshit or the next big thing.**

People have so many great ideas, and they're simply not valued by society as real things. But what if money wasn't the only way to contribute to the commons? That's why somebody needs to create credit union that accepts intellectual property as economic trade for monetary currency. Ideafund will be the name of this service. Members submit ideas; the governing body assigns them value based on a conceptual algorithm, credits their account with money, and then sells those ideas to their investors and donors, who use those ideas to improve the world. Think of it as intellectual venture capitalism. Matter of fact, this idea fund can work on an organizational level as well. Because way too many companies out there are just paying lip service innovation. They don't actually want their team members coming up with any new ideas. They just want customers, board members and stockholders to perceive their company as being innovative. And so, if these businesses wanted to put their money where their corporate mouths were, they could start accepting ideas as legal tender. This goes way beyond a suggestion box; this is an operationalized system. Need a fancy letter desk chair? No problem. Submit ten new ideas. Want to work from home once a week this summer? Go right ahead. Submit fifty new ideas. Want an annual raise? Submit five hundred new ideas. As long as employee submissions make their business case for improving teamwork, growing revenues, or cost savings for the organization, then they're valid. Now that's what you call a culture of innovation. What's most exciting about this idea fund is, through the sheer volume of idea production, employees will submit hundreds if not thousands of terrible ideas. And that's the whole point. Innovators never uncover the next big thing unless they're willing to put themselves out there. As my cartoonist pal once told me, an idea is not any good unless it's on the verge of being stupid. In this new culture of innovation, few will call the employees geniuses, most will say they're just crazy, but every once in a while, an amazing idea will drop out the bottom. And it will all be worth it. Schopenhauer famously said that all truth passes through three stages. First, it is ridiculed. Second, it is violently opposed. Third, it is accepted as being obvious. If people are willing to grow thicker skin, then payment in the form of intellectual capital just might work.

*What does it take for you to be optimally creative?*

January 20

## **What is the smallest step you can take, right now, with little or no effort?**

Early on in your project, long-term vision is not your friend. It's a momentum killer. Imagining everything you need to do to make your idea a reality is a huge mental obstacle that can make success feel miles away. A smarter use of your attention is to zoom in. Going from a telescope to a microscope. Here's one simple question you can ask. What is the smallest step you can take, right now, with little or no effort? Once you identify the very next physical action required to move your project forward, and then do it, you will start to gain a greater sense of agency over your work. It won't even matter how small your steps are. In isolation, they may not feel significant. But in the aggregate, you'll be amazed at how much leverage you can create for yourself. Remember, the creative process is nothing but an endless series of small and conscious choices. The goal here is momentum. Getting things moving in the right direction. Trusting that even the small actions you think aren't that important add up. My old startup founder comes to mind. He practiced promised based leadership. Coming from a military background, he deliberately cultivated and coordinated commitments. To him, this was the only way to inspire teams to finish projects consistently. He trained us to always end meetings with each participant stating consciously and publicly what their positive commitments were. Then one person sent out a written summary list of each of those commitments. This process felt excessive at times, but then again, it also made us feel like we had honor. Which motivated us to move projects forward swiftly and consistently. How committed are you? If you're starting something new right now, this process of zooming is invaluable. Because when you're at the beginning of your journey, excited as you may be, it's also easy to feel intimidated by the long road ahead. My recommendation is, not to focus on that. Objects in the mirror may be farther away than they appear. For now, let microexecution cure your impulse for inaction. You'll quickly see that small steps work just as well as big ones at taking your work where it wants to go.

***If successful creative projects are nothing but are a series of daily commitments strung together, what's the next action you can take?***

January 21

## **Complaining about the things they willfully chose to consume in entirety.**

The most common complaint in most one-star reviews of books, movies and other media goes a little something like this. That's time I will never get back. Have you ever noticed that? Or have you ever made that comment yourself? Customers are annoyed that they just spent their hard earned money on a crappy product. But importantly, they're really enraged about the fact that they invested their precious time consuming it. They feel regretful, foolish and mad. Now, this response is perfectly human understandable. Those words have come out of my mouth plenty of times. However, as a person who consumes and creates a vast amount of media, allow me to share my perspective on the matter. First of all, there is no unit of time we will ever get back. That's not how the currency of time works. Once it's gone, it's gone. It's amazingly ephemeral and all we have is the next moment and the moment after that. Any lingering traces will be gone with the wind. Secondly, even if we could get time back, complaining about it isn't worth the effort. Because if we want to live prosperous, abundant and fulfilled lives, then we have to take ourselves out of the victim position in regard to all forms of energy. Whether that's time, money, love, creativity, we must practice complete abstinence from complaining about any of those things. Instead we learn to remind ourselves that we have plenty of everything we need to do everything want in life. Finally, when people complain that they will never get their time back, part of me wonders whose fault that really is. Look, nobody held a pistol to your head and made you read the whole book, listen to the whole album, eat the whole pizza or sit through the entire musical. You're an adult who can make your own decisions and stop any time you want. Just stop. Or walk out of the theater. Get on with your life. I'm deeply perplexed when I hear people complain about the things they willfully chose to consume in entirety. They act as if these pieces of media forced themselves into their brains, and that they were helplessly trapped with them. When the fact is, content they allowed into their orbit is exactly what they choose to consume. My theory is, some folks hate to read or hate to watch things to completion, so they can justify their bitching once the suffering is over. It's this twisted version of self-mutilation. It's like they like not liking things, because they're addicted to the act of spitting vitriol after the fact. Writing that scathing, resentful one star review about how they are miserable makes them happy. It's the pellet that makes the rat like itself. Anyway, hopefully reading this wasn't so much a waste of your time that you wish you could get it back.

***What is your relationship to the currency of time?***



January 22

## What if you labeled yourself as everything?

Shakespeare had a lot to say about the topic of identity. You may recognize several of his most quotable aphorisms. To thine own self be true, and thou canst not then be false to any man. There is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so. A rose by any other name would smell as sweet. It's proof that his characters were reminding us that labels are fables. They're for jars, not humans. Yes, labels can definitely start us down the path of understanding. But when we get attached to them, they remove us from reality. And yes, labels can certainly frame our experience with intention and attention. But they can't possibly capture the emotions and circumstance surrounding that event. Particularly when it comes to the words we use to describe ourselves. My friend was asking me the other day how long you have to live in a certain city to call yourself a citizen of it. He claimed that unless you've lived here for at least a year, tasted a bagel at the right bakery, cried on the subway, and been hit by a taxi, then you couldn't reasonably call yourself a local. This reasoning is utter nonsense. We are adults. Grown ups who can make our own decisions about who we are. And yet, millions of people refuse to label themselves as a certain thing unless their life conforms to some imagined cultural barometer of worthiness. Unless they check the requisite boxes and get their life experience passport stamped by the powers that be. Fuck that noise. First of all, people have the right to call themselves whatever they want, whenever they want. If you read the declaration of universal human rights, article nineteen, everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers. Secondly, regardless of what we decide to call ourselves, that label isn't still who we are. It may identify us, but it doesn't define us. It's a part of us, but it isn't the heart of us. Because if we remember that we are everything, it doesn't matter how we label ourselves. If we accept that we are infinite, then there's no need to box in our identity with something as superfluous as a word. Prince, the late great musical genius, epitomized this better than anyone. He would sniff at simplistic questions about his identity during interviews and even in his lyrics. Are you black, white, straight, gay, man, woman, religious, godlike, or sinner? Are you a producer, writer, vocalist, bassist, drummer, cymbalist, artist or slave? Are you called by your given name, your stage name, or just that weird symbol? All of the above. Prince was a person who was everything. Through his courageous display of freedom from and irreverence for archaic labels, he made millions of people feel more comfortable in their own skin. Even if that skin didn't have a clean, clear name attached to it. That's why he had such a profound impact on the world. No labels, no limits. Shakespeare would have been a huge fan. To reiterate from before, labels are labels. If you're making a case for your own limitations, if you're living within a prescribed boundary that you have assigned to yourself, just know that you're the only one telling that story. Freedom is available to you. You can resolve to call yourself an anything you want, or nothing at all. It doesn't matter what you nametag you wear,

or don't wear. It only matters that you're operating from a place of possibility rather than prescribed limits.

*What if you labeled yourself as everything?*

January 23

## **The wisdom to know that there is no hurry.**

We live in a results oriented culture. We've been trained not to waste our time with anything that can't prove itself quickly of its own efficacy. And as a result, we now have zero patience. We no longer have the faith required to wait things out. It's tragic. Just imagine how many world-changing products never make it out the door because some restless entrepreneur distorts her work by not allowing its proper timing. Just imagine how many profitable projects are sharply abandoned in the first few months because some middle manager is in a rush to prove something to somebody. If only they had known, time is the component that is not in play yet. And if they had stayed the course for another six months, they would have seen results. But that's not the way we're wired. Few people have the wisdom to know that there is no hurry. Hawking, the theoretical physicist and cosmologist, once said that if we wait long enough, the improbable is inevitable. Now, that's not the kind of insight you can take your board of directors or investors, but that doesn't make it any less true. Look, it takes time to build valuable things, and that means delayed revenue. But it doesn't mean delayed action. Smart companies hedge their bets. They don't put all their creative eggs in one basket. They start more and more new project initiatives to offset the problems with the ones that are bogged down. Bandura's research on the cognitive functioning of creative thinkers proved this very approach. His studies found that our creative efforts are more productively deployed when we pursue multiple projects simultaneously, at varying stages of completion, shifting among them as circumstances dictate. In doing so, he says, we're less likely to succumb to the impediments, false starts, inevitable delays and distractions of the creative process, and more likely to experience greater productivity and goal attainment. Believe it or not, that's a form of patience too. Hustle while you wait.

*What if you learned to balance relaxation and exertion?*

January 24

## **The vision was the hard part; let the idiots work on the details.**

There's a clever saying from the construction world that should be plastered on the walls of every startup. We got a dollar waiting on a dime. Meaning, let's not allow the trivial to overwhelm the vital. Let's not let some chickenshit issue with minimal operational impact divert attention away from what really matters. Have you ever worked with someone like this? The person who personifies the dime holding up the dollar? It's frustrating, demotivating and frankly, a waste of time. Reminds me of a woman from my old ad agency. Her only apparent expertise was the ability to take the smallest things way too seriously, read between the lines when there was nothing written on the page, and divert the group energy into another trivial rabbit hole that retarded our momentum. She was the dime, we were the dollar, none of it made cents. Particularly in a highly creative environment, this type of behavior can be detrimental to an organization. And clearly, creativity is inherently unpredictable and risky, and most managers are under pressure to minimize risks and deliver predictable results. But if we're obsessing over the font when we really should be deciding where to hang the poster, then we did something wrong. It's not our job to figure out every detail of our work, it's our job to differentiate major issues from small ones and execute accordingly. If you've spent the last twenty minutes of your staff meeting debating the most optimized sentence structure of a tweet, something is wrong. We got a dollar waiting on a dime, and the cost to the group is growing more expensive with every passing moment.

*Are you the dime holding up a dollar, or are you prioritizing tasks that make sense?*

January 25

## **They just hop from phenomenon to phenomenon, all day long.**

Debussy said that music is the space between the notes. The rests are what allows them to resonate, reverberate, and reach their full measure of expression. But what if the great composer was talking about more than just classical instruments? It seems to me that human beings could benefit from learning this principle of composition. Because for many people, work has become so overwhelming that they just hop from phenomenon to phenomenon, all day and all week long. There's no space between the notes. Is it any wonder the department of health and human services reported in their annual stress survey that one fourth of the workforce has felt like screaming or shouting because of job stress? Would you include yourself in that number? Unfortunately, the digital revolution has completely eradicated any sense of task boundaries for business professionals. As a recovering workaholic, I can assure you that this is no joke. The harder it becomes to tell where we end and the work begins, the more likely we are to burn out. One solution that's been helpful in my own creating of this nonmusical space is the victory log. Each day, instead of writing a list of things I hope to do, I make a list of things I've already done. The moment my task is complete, it goes on the list. From something small like submitting an application to something big like shipping a new project to something simple like asking for help editing a piece of code on our website. This victory log is a real time record of my executions. And it not only boosts my confidence and builds my momentum during the day, but taking ten seconds to fill out that list gives me a beautiful sense of reward. And that prevents me from feeling like I'm always in the middle of something. The victory log gives me permission to notice when one task ends and another begins. It's the space between the notes that allows my work to resonate, if only with myself, so it might reach the full measure of its expression. Now that sounds like a song worth singing to me.

*How will you create space between the world's green lights and your own stop signs?*

January 26

## **The lights are low, come see these gifts that I've brought for you.**

Seinfeld has done a few documentaries, one cartoon, a decade of network television, tons of commercials, a popular web show and forty years of standup. And yet, reporters are always asking him why he doesn't do more movies. But during one interview, he famously gave an answer: The world doesn't need that from me right now. Let's unpack that statement, as it contains a wealth of insight around the process of creation. First, the world needs. We live in an oversaturated and hypercompetitive marketplace. Anybody can do anything anywhere for nothing. Which means, they will. Which means, whatever it is that we are trying to make, the world probably doesn't need another one. Which means, before we add something else to the slagheap, we ought to consider whether or not it's worthwhile to entrench ourselves in over farmed land. Second, from me. This piece is about identity. Because in the event that world does need another one of something, it doesn't necessarily mean that we are the ones who should provide it. Opportunity plus ability does not an innovation make. There has to be a deep hunger. A need to do it, not merely a want to do it, and not a want to want to do it. Finally, right now. This last piece implies an openness to evolution. Of the self, of the work, and of the marketplace in which the two intersect. Trusting, that although the present moment does not call for this particular thing, who knows what the future might hold? Jerry might start directing movies in his eighties as a retirement gig. The lesson is, if you give everything, they're just going to ask for more. And so, before the world starts pestering you with their idiotic brainwaves, create your own unique filter for evaluating opportunities. Otherwise you might find yourself standing on the bottom of that slagheap, wondering if you really wanted it all along, or if it was simply a response to pressure.

***Is this something the world needs from you right now?***

January 27

## **Undermining your creative potential without even realizing it.**

In the last several decades, we thought we knew the correct path for managing creativity and innovation. But compelling evidence from multiple sources shows that a decline in creativity has been happening for some time now. Kyung, a renowned educational scholar and creativity researcher, discovered that children's performance on the most reliable measure of creativity has declined more than a full standard deviation in the last generation. According to her study of hundreds of thousands of creativity tests, nearly ninety percent of today's children are less creative than their counterparts from back in the eighties. Since then, children have become less able to produce unique and unusual ideas. They are also less humorous, less imaginative and less able to elaborate on ideas. Now, multiple theories have been attributed to this decline. One is our government's initiative to raise annual standardized test scores, which of course don't include any questions on creativity. Just math and reading. Teachers haven't exactly been stressing the value of divergent thinking during literature class. Another hypothesis is the rise of television watching, which is a passive activity that doesn't require human interaction. No need to form original thoughts while bingeing thirteen episodes of reality shows? Then there's the cultural shift around over scheduling young people's activities, which has been clinically proven to increase anxiety and leave less time for pretend play. That's how people's creative muscles atrophy. And don't forget about the unintended consequences of economic prosperity. Particularly in first-world nations like ours that offer unlimited resources, tools and opportunities for young people. And the more stuff we have, the less imaginative we need to be. Mehta's study from a consumer research journal shows that a general sense of resource availability influences how creativity consumers use their products. The researchers demonstrated that the salience of resource scarcity versus abundance enhances the novelty of product use solutions in independent consumption environments. Why? Because there are no constraints. No need to innovate when everything is going great. Okay, here's one last hypothesis for the decline in creativity. It's yet another cultural trend. We have multiple generations of people who were born into an instant gratification culture of digital infinitude. Anything is instantly available to everybody, everywhere, for nothing. Good lord, who in the hell needs to invent their own backyard games or make forts when there's a bottomless trough of prefabricated media following their every digital footprint? The point is, it's a jungle out there. Powerful cultural forces are stacked against the human brain, and it is possible that our creative potential is being undermined without us even realizing it. Man, it kind of makes me grateful for all those lonely, boring nights and weekends during high school and college, sitting in my room, playing guitar, putting my feelings and experiences into songs. It may have been sad and isolating at the time, but it also built a creativity foundation that has served me in almost every area of life.

***When was the last time you were bored?***

January 28

## **The basis for a new response.**

Miyagi says that the best way to block a punch is to not be there. This principle of martial arts perfectly relates to the creative process. Because if you feed your subconscious such a rich diet, you will never run out of ideas. If your eyes, ears and hearts are open to the accidental insight and inspiration that surrounds us everywhere, you will never run out of ideas. If you perpetually dig your well before you're thirsty, rather than counting on and waiting for direct inspirations, you will never run out of ideas. Punches won't need to be blocked because you will not be there. That's why the definitive question about how many hours a day someone should be creating makes no sense to me. Because creating is something we make part of normal, everyday life, rather than something special and apart from it. There's never nothing happening. In the creative brain, something is going on all the time, not just the moment a person sits down and decides to start working. Creating is breathing. You either inhale, pause, or exhale. Those are the only three choices. If you struggle to come up with ideas, then you're simply not paying attention. The name for this process is called unconscious rumination. It's when we allow our inner mind to get to work mulling over, sorting out, organizing and categorizing material that has been previously absorbed, ultimately generating an idea at a time when the mental spotlight isn't on it. That's what the brain does. It forms neural networks. And if you train it correctly, areas of your brain will start to communicate between networks as they notice ideas that belong together. McNiff writes in his book about imagination in action. The vitality of the new response is proportionate to the energy invested in what is discarded or transformed. Letting go, as in breathing, is the basis for a new response. Our inhaling, pausing and exhaling is precisely what makes space for our next idea. Take a breath, tell yourself that you're okay, and trust the moment to provide.

***What if creating was something you made part of normal life, rather than something special and apart from it?***



January 29

## **That's what a guy who loves himself does.**

It's hard to be distracted when you love yourself. If you're someone who accepts and forgives and cherishes who you are, then you will believe that you are more significant than whatever bullshit noise is being supplied to you at every moment. Show me someone who has done the difficult inner work of learning how to cherish themselves, and I will show you someone who doesn't have trouble focusing. Georgetown once conducted a study that explores the impact of smartphone notifications on productivity. It was gripping, no pun intended. Researchers explained that every day, billions of us receive these notifications. Designed to distract, these interruptions capture and monetize our time and attention. But while these smartphones are helpful, their current notification systems impose underappreciated, yet considerable, mental costs. Each one of these micro distractions jolts our nervous system and stimulates our fear of missing out, provoking anxiety and lowering our productivity. According to the scientists, to mitigate this problem, app and smartphone developers should build in features and tools that are designed for wellbeing. Perhaps batching notifications once an hour on the hour, to help reduce inattention. It's not a bad idea. Doing so would certainly help people stay focused. The issue with this solution, it's focused on the symptom, not the source. Because our phones are not the problem. Our hearts are what need an upgrade. Back to my original point. It's hard to be distracted when you love yourself. Maybe that's what we should be teaching people. How to trust that whatever idiotic notification is coming through our phones isn't going to free us, complete us or make us whole. It's not going to phase us, amaze us or save our souls. We have everything we need, right now. There's nothing missing. Almost everything is noise. The hard part about this philosophy is, we live in a world that wants to distract us. In the economy of the past, companies made money by actually being useful to people, now companies make their money by distracting us with bullshit. It is literally their business model. And we don't have to buy into it. We can love ourselves instead, and use that energy to stay focused on what matters most. Changing the notification settings on our phone is a good start, but only by upgrading the operating system of the heart will we truly be able to become fully present.

*What if you believed that you were more significant than the noise?*

January 30

## Help me help you help me.

Depression is like an over eager party guest. It doesn't need an invitation. Sometimes it just shows up. Even if we've done tons of inner work to keep meaninglessness at bay, it can never be entirely ruled out. Because the pilot light inside the human brain needs only the smallest spark to ignite. If those two metaphors weren't enough for you, here's another one from my favorite comedian. Carlin once said, just because you got the monkey off your back doesn't mean the circus has left town. However we describe it, this existential pickle invites us to uphold several responsibilities to ourselves. First, to plan for failure in advance. Knowing that the noontime demon can strike unannounced, we carve out time when we're in a calm state to create our own emergency recovery plan. Even if it's a short playlist of our favorite songs or a list of affirmations that will soothe our troubled mind. Having a plan equips us to execute when the pressure is on. That actually gives me an idea for a new app. Have you ever suffered from depression in silence because you were too paralyzed to ask for help from the people who matter most? Now you can use my private text messaging service that sends a bat signal to a small group of trusted confidants, alerting them of your need for someone to talk to in a time of need. Securebase is an app that will help you regulate your emotions with other people instead of addictions. Help me help you help me. Not a bad emergency plan. The next responsibility in regards to our existential pickle is forgiveness. This is way harder, as it requires us to meet our bleak mental state with love and acceptance. And so, if we suddenly feel the need to sleep for thirteen hours one night, then lay in bed for another five hours the next day, then we give that gift to ourselves. We allow our brain and body to get their needs met, we forgive them both for being what they are, and we express gratitude for the opportunity to soothe ourselves in a healthy, effective way. Another responsibility is letting go of our compulsive need to fix, overcome, explain or understand every pain, every time. Because that information isn't always available to us. Even if it was, it's not going to be the thing that sets us free. What's more, our attempts to lessen every mental struggle can become a source of anguish in and of itself. And so, rather than making an island of every psychological confusion and trying to solve its pain, we trust the flow of our life. We have faith that we'll get there when whenever we get there. And we remind ourselves that all feelings are weather patterns that have a beginning, middle and an end. These are our responsibilities to ourselves. Next time our eager party guest shows up unannounced, we'll be ready.

***When your brain starts telling you that you're no good, your world is bleak and your future is hopeless, how will you respond?***

January 31

## **There's more to life than being the best in the world.**

Our culture officially has a mastery fetish. We've become completely addicted to the pursuit of greatness and creative genius and becoming world class at anything in six months and reaching the upper echelons of power in all that we do. Which does wonders for the ego and looks attractive on a resume, but the only problem with mastery is, there's no room left for mystery. Or humility. Or curiosity. Because you have it all figured out. You've put in your precious ten thousand hours. You've mastered this thing. I'm reminded of the apocryphal story of the patent office commissioner. At the turn of the twentieth century, he famously observed that everything that could be invented had already been invented. That's where mastery gets you. Unable to disrupt your own point of view. Trapped in your own way of thinking. And only accepting the answers you anticipate. It sounds dreadfully boring and short lived. Listen, there's more to life than being the best in the world. What ever happened to searching? What ever happened to not knowing? What ever happened to playing to keep the game going, not just playing because you wanted to win? Those things sound far more interesting and challenging and satisfying than simply ascending to the top of the mountain, grabbing the first place trophy and moving onto the next dick-measuring contest. Mastery is overrated. Shoot for mystery instead.

*Are you treating life as a problem to solve or a mystery to be lived?*

**FEBRUARY**

February 1

## **The simple and finite world of black and white.**

When asked why they couldn't execute something on time, people often attribute their failures to forces outside of their control. In contract law, attorneys will often use the legal term act of god, which is an implied defense under the rule of impossibility or impracticality. Events for which nobody can be held responsible. Chalking nonperformance up to divine intervention, fate or destiny. But here's the thing. Most of life is forces outside of our control. With the exception of water pressure in dams releasing a geological fault or geothermal injections of water provoking earthquakes or illegal drilling causing a mud volcano, odds are, forces outside of our control is yet another way of not taking responsibility when things don't work out. Hiding in the cozy grey areas of life to justify poor choices and mediocre results. And not to be insensitive to people's experience. I understand that life is a subjective experience, and there's no need to burden ourselves with too many absolutes. But the simple and finite world of black and white has its merits. It knocks out excuses, reduces our experience of anxiety, prevents the rationalization of failure and enables daily decision making to be significantly easier and faster. And so, for the sake of our sanities, and the sanities of the people we work with, just own it. Let's just assume that all forces are outside of our control. Either we did enough, or we didn't. Either we had an idea, or we had an I did. Life has no preheat setting.

*Are you evading responsibility by believing you can control outcomes that you demonstrably have no influence over?*

February 2

## What spectrality could work in my favor?

Eisenman, one of the legendary deconstructionist architects behind the modern creation of the world's greatest city, was interviewed for a study in a social science trade journal. The researchers explored the significant interaction between architecture and the human sciences, such as philosophy, psychology, and sociology. One passage that resonated with me was about something he called the trace. Eisenman explained that it is the architect's job to find traces and residues of a certain presence from which the process of designing commences. Builders need to pay close attention to the development process of physical traces that remain at a site. And then, they use those traces as the starting point in designing projects. The site where anything is to be built is never a *tabula rasa*. Every site is haunted by an invisible past, which is known as the *spectrality* of the site. The true deconstructionist architects search for inevitable traces on which they will base their work. Despite my inability to draw a straight line, this little window into one builder's mind is profoundly inspiring to me. It's a reminder that nothing can be wholly absent at any given time. There's always a trace of presence in everything. Try this leverage question on for size. What spectrality could work in my favor? Because if it's true that we never start with nothing, finding the trace is simply a matter of intention and attention. Digging around to see what's already in your possession that can be used to your advantage. The challenge with this approach is, it requires optimism and vulnerability. First, we have to believe we are never unpartnered in the pursuit of our dreams. And second, we have to trust that the cooperation of unseen forces will help us achieve them. That's hard for some people. Particularly those who hold a scarcity mindset. The mere idea that they're not starting from scratch, that the world is an abundant place where dreams are had a followed and it wants to support them, that's a bitter pill to swallow. But as much as people disagree with my optimistic opinion about possibility, this mindset works for me. Not because it increases my success, but because increases my field of vision, and that allows me to better notice the opportunities that lead to success. Reminds me of a fascinating interview between a surgeon and a cancer survivor. Recounting his diagnosis experience, the patient said this. If you have a bad attitude about your disease, odds are, you won't get better, because you won't do the necessary research on the resources that will make you better. You'll never find the solution that leads to the solution. That's the physical and procedural manifestation of a bad attitude. Mindset may not affect the outcome, but it does affect the experience. My recommendation is, force yourself to believe that you never start with nothing. Trust the trace that is already there, and let its spectrality work in your favor. The canvas is not as white as it looks.

***Which of your dreams did you abandon because you thought they were blank pages?***

February 3

## **What took a lot of work that most people wouldn't even notice if it were gone?**

One of my friends is an event planner. His staff runs post mortems the day after each celebration, capturing things that went right and wrong, recognizing team wins and refining best practices for future events. There's a question they ask each other that's quite powerful, and it goes like this. What took a lot of work that most people wouldn't even notice if it were gone? It's perfect for an event company, but it's also useful for any business that wants to steer clear of high effort low reward mirages. That's one way we can uncover sources or inhibitors of leverage. Because unnecessary labor intensity is the easiest way to drain limited resources. It's one thing if putting in a ton of work pays dividends to reconcile your effort, but if none of your customers or coworkers would even miss that if it were gone, then it's probably not the smartest use of energy. It's just weighing the team down, which distracts us all from attending to where we really can have an impact. The force we have to contend with is ego. It's the part of our brain that convinces us certain things have more importance and influence than they actually do. Reminds me of my early years public speaking. I would spend hours and hours of time writing, printing and distributing handouts to audience members. Because in my mind, that was the valued add. People wouldn't like and trust me if there wasn't a beautifully crafted worksheet waiting on their chair. And yet, after every one of my presentations was over, most people not only didn't take a single note on their handout but also left their papers on chairs after they exited the room. They didn't want my crappy handouts about the content of my speech; they wanted an authentic connection during the speech. Turns out, my leverage came in the form of interaction, not information. Never printed another handout again. And as you might guess, nobody put up a fuss. Hell, nobody even noticed. We were all secretly relieved, myself include. It was just another high effort low reward mirage. My challenge to you, set your ego aside. Figure out what takes a lot of work that most people wouldn't even notice if it were gone. Free yourself from involvements that seem necessary. It feels like losing fifty pounds of psychic weight.

***What if, instead of walking faster, your carried less in your pack on the trail, and then run?***

February 4

## What meaning would trump this mood?

My mentor once told me that all people have mental disturbances, because the human condition is a mentally disturbing experience. He's not wrong. That's the harsh reality of the existential nightmare we call life. But his insight still doesn't solve the emotional problem. When those disturbing or even destructive thoughts come crashing in on our minds, we can feel scared and shameful for having them, and powerless stop or control them. And so, we have to figure out how to talk ourselves down from that ledge and get things moving in the right direction. One of the psychologists whose work has had a profound impact of my growth suggests that people rethink their relationship to moods. Maisel writes in a psychology publication that we accomplish this by learning how to lead with our life purposes and by making the decision that our life purposes are going to trump our moods. How we intend to live our life is more important to us than some transitory mood, he says, even a deeply entrenched one like chronic sadness. Taking a page from the doctor's playbook, my strategic question when a particular mood arises is asking myself, what meaning would trump this mood? What existentially nourishing activity or task, that is guaranteed to provide me with the psychological experience of meaning, would enhance my wellbeing right now? This pivoting strategy doesn't give me permission to deny, avoid, repress or my feelings. That's important too. But the key is not what we feel, but how long we feel what we feel. Our goal is learning to not get swayed by the emotion of the moment. Not letting mood dictate our experience. Adams, in his bestselling book about training your brain, comments that his childhood was horrific. And although the past doesn't exist anywhere except in hid memories, that was still enough to ruin his present happiness. And so, he learned, that he could control those destructive thoughts by crowding them out with work, intellectual pursuits, and other distractions. Over time, the memories faded from lack of attention, and now he doesn't consider them to have any impact on his current happiness. How do you crowd out unhelpful thoughts? What positive action could you take rather than creating unnecessary psychological fuel around your bad mood? My answer is almost always meaning. Instead of waiting to feel good to do what brings me joy and satisfaction, I just start doing those things. And good feelings almost always follow. There's no guarantee it will work, but it's certainly better than wallowing in my own shit, and then beating myself up about the smell. Look, mood is a construct. It's a story we elected to tell ourselves. When we're in a mood, say, grumpy, morbid, upset or stressed, our default instinct is to assume that this mood has been determined outside of our conscious awareness. It came from some cosmic force beyond our control organized the world in a this fashion and colored our emotions in a certain way. But there is no one or no thing to blame. It's us. It's where we place our attention and intention. It's creation, in the sense that we're bringing this mood into existence. Let us not impoverish ourselves further. Meaning trumps mood, every time.

*Have you gotten into the habit of taking the temperature of your mood too often?*



February 5

## **The sound you hear is the sound of a squealing dinosaur.**

Most of us don't respect our minds enough to know that almost everything is noise. Everything. And as a result, we convince ourselves that every meaningless distraction is a red presidential phone in one of those cheesy disaster films. We pressure ourselves to handle these seemingly emergency messaging coming from some unknown situation, as if the planet was on the brink of ruin and only we could save everybody. But it's just noise. All of it. Every bloody magnet for our attention does not deserve equal response. Or any response, for that matter. Think of this way. Sprint recently conducted a survey finding that old fashion talking now accounts for less than half of the traffic on mobile networks. Less than half. Makes sense. Nobody uses their phone to talk on the phone anymore. It's mostly about texting, apps and web browsing. This isn't the nineties. Who still answers the phone? That cheery ringtone you hear is the sound of a squealing dinosaur. This is precisely how we should approach life's many distractions. They're just wrong numbers. Prank phone calls. Spammy solicitors. Random callers we don't know, like or trust. And nose that we have zero obligation to response to. Not out of some grandiose sense of importance, and not out of some codependent need for approval from everybody. There is no emergency here. Everyone will be fine. Not everything needs our personal stamp on it. The world will not fall apart. Let that cursed phone ring, or better yet, turn the damn thing off, and get on with your life.

*What will be possible for you once you shed another layer of worldly distractions?*

February 6

## What will add energy to the system?

Fulfillment means having a horizon to point to. Something in your life that makes you excited to wake up. Or as my mentor used to joke, find a job that makes you want to jump out of bed, and find a partner that makes you want to do the opposite. The challenge is, what if getting out of bed isn't so simple and straightforward for you? What if you're the kind of person who struggles to drag your tired bones out from under the covers each day? You're not alone. Motivation is hard for a lot of people. One solution that's been a game changer for me is learning how to locate natural energy and using it for positive change. Because among all the resources we have in this world, energy is the one thing that helps make all choices easier. When it becomes the organizing principle of how we manage our life, suddenly tasks that used to feel overwhelming don't seem so awful anymore. Adams, in his bestselling memoir about failing his way to becoming the world's most successful cartoonist, spend several chapters addressing this issue. Here's the excerpt that resonated most with me. When we make choices that maximize our personal energy, it's easier to manage all of our other priorities. If something charges you up, gets you going and gives you a positive lift, then that's enough. You don't need another reason to do it. As a result, energy can become the force multiplier to move you forward and lower the threat level of all the other things you have to deal with. And so, the question each of us has to answer for ourselves is, what will add energy to my system? To be more specific, what will add clean, renewable, natural, sustainable energy to my system? Because drinking sugared water out of a can doesn't count. Even if your energy drink contains antioxidants, amino acids, essential oils, healing properties, all natural ingredients, electrolytes, vitamins and minerals, that's probably not the best long term solution to motivating yourself to find fulfillment. Allow me to share a few of my own energy sources. First, ideas. They excite the hell out of me. Moments of conception get my adrenaline pumping. They give me what botanists would call *germinational* energy. And if you are curious, there is never a shortage of good ones out there. Second, meaning. Framing my daily actions through the lens of my personal meaning-making mission is a unique source of energy for me. It's simultaneously a muscle relaxer and a stimulant. The meaning making process both sweetens and sustains all of my endeavors. Even the mundane ones. It gives me what philosophers would call *existential* energy. My final source of energy is other people. Not from the cannibalistic standpoint, although human flesh is quite delicious. But more as an extrovert. Interacting with people of all kinds fires me up. The electricity that surges between us is magical, even if it's brief, even if it's not the most positive encounter. Matter of fact, sometimes engaging with others triggers my anger, but in useful ways that can be productively channeled. People give me what psychologists would call *interactional* energy. What adds energy to your system? What triggers the motivational subroutine in your head and gets you into the appropriate state of mind to create fulfillment for yourself? If you're not sure, or you have lost touch with the energy that once fueled you, it's not too late. Just keep trying different things. Keep mining your life sources. Previously inaccessible energy and

psychic fuel often shows up when we least expect it. We just have to stay attuned to our senses.

*How could you arrange your work to coincide with your energy style?*

February 7

## **What we really want to create for ourselves.**

A commonality among unhappy people is, they don't pursue their values with sufficient intensity. They continuously fail to live up to their own ideals. And without that foundation of true nature, it becomes very difficult to build a fulfilling life. Everything feels like an uphill battle. Turns out, though, that when our ambitions are married to our highest values, that becomes the positive driving force that enables us to believe in ourselves, take initiative, overcome obstacles, bounce back quickly, and keep moving the story forward. I'm reminded of an inspiring passage on values from my favorite recovery devotional. In the chaos of addictive substance use, our ambition may have gone completely underground, lost in the haze of trying to find the next high, leaving us with little energy to invest in creating any future ideal. Perhaps it is time to rekindle this essential vital force. We might begin by holding the important questions of how we define success, asking ourselves what we really want to create for ourselves in this lifetime. That's powerful stuff. Are you paying close attention to what your values are telling you about the next important steps in your life? They are one of your greatest sources of internal leverage available. Here are several scenarios in which your values can play out. Want to feel fully alive? Honor your values by writing them down and keeping them with you at all time. Want to make yourself proud? Manifest your values through your behavior as often as you can. Want to have freedom? Make choices based on your values, rather than fear and guilt. Want to build mental toughness and take back your power? Find ways to practice your values rather than simply professing them. Wish you could deal with pressure better? Ask yourself what someone with your values would do in this situation. Want greater confidence in yourself and your decision making process? Note down every time you honor your values during the day. Point is, like any path to happiness and fulfillment, values are a daily practice. It's not the kind of reflective work you do at retreat one weekend and never think about again. You bring yourself with you everywhere you go.

***How are you pursuing the values that both survival and flourishing demands?***

February 8

## How could creativity become a regularly occurring possibility?

During my first day as head of content at a startup, my boss said something that always stuck with me. Scott, you have the most creative job in the entire company. Naturally, the artist in me was flattered and excited, as this new role would give me a platform to engage all of my right brained skills in an otherwise left brained environment. Plus it made me feel special, which my ego loved. But from an organizational standpoint, this comment should have been a red flag. Because anytime you start separating employees into camps of creative and non-creatives, you're setting a dangerous precedent. You're putting up permissive walls that make innovation harder. The advertising industry has always been notorious for this bipolar culture. Creatives are the designers, copywriters and creative directors. Their job is to ideate and execute against the client brief, and nothing else. Non-creatives are the sales executives, account managers and operations people. Their job is to land the accounts, romance the clients and keep the project on time and on budget, and nothing else. If you've ever worked at an agency before, these two factions act like an old married couple you see bickering on the street corner. Creative and account have a relationship that's fraught with friction and discord. And it all goes back to permission. Because the owners of the agency are essentially saying, okay, you people over here get to be creative, and you other people over here don't. Whoa now, what do you mean you people? Sorry, but that's not how human beings work. Creativity is the fundamental attribute of our species. It's our leading evolutionarily advantageous trait. The process of bringing ideas to form, making something out of nothing, solving problems big and small, that's everyone's job. It's not a department or a position; it's a universal skill. And in fact, it's become the price of admission for participating in the modern workforce. Multiple studies from the department of education have shown that tomorrow's jobs will not only demand creative problem skills from all employees, but those who have those skills will be more prepared to thrive in the age of automation. This means organizations will soon have to abandon their outdated, siloed approach to innovation and embrace a new way. Not a better way, but a different way. One in which creativity is pursued systematically, not just sporadically. Where coming up with new ideas is less of a mysterious art and more of a methodical science. It's a deep discipline that's subjected to the same rights as any other aspect of business. Does that describe your company? Do you work in a culture where creativity isn't an extraordinary event, but a regularly occurring possibility? Few people do. Because our current understanding of creativity is, sorry guys, it's not recognizable as a balance sheet asset, and therefore, never managed like one. It's just something that happens when it needs to. Oh, and only by the folks who are creative. Ultimately, there should not be one person at your company who has the most creative job. Everyone should be empowered to be as creative as they want. And they should be given the tools they need to do so. Look, they already have systems for project management, billing management, communication

management and the like. The time has come to support your people with personal creativity management systems as well.

*Would you rather make creativity an extraordinary event, or a regularly occurring possibility?*

February 9

## **The broken centerpiece of our personal motivation strategy.**

There's a novelty coffee mug with three phrases printed on it, each corresponding to the level of liquid in the cup. From top to bottom it reads as follows. Unable to communicate in full sentences. Slightly more coherent but still unable to hold a conversation. You may speak now. It's funny, it's accurate, and it's the perfect gift for people who can't function until they've had their morning joe. But if we dig beneath the surface, this gift also sends a deeply flawed message. Because the mug is basically enabling a person's addiction. And in a world where people will use almost any excuse to justify their bad manners, isn't it time we stopped letting each other off the hook just because we didn't have our precious before coming into the office? Besides, have you ever met some of these people? When did a lack of morning coffee become an acceptable excuse for being an asshole? We need to stop accepting chemical dependence as a legitimate reason for poor work and disrespectful behavior. The rest of the office shouldn't have to suffer through other people's addiction withdrawal symptoms before being able to do our work. And not to deny the deliciousness and usefulness and importance of the ritual around coffee. There's a study from a molecular psychiatry journal that identified several genetic variants associated with highly habitual coffee drinkers, clinically proving that a given amount of coffee has different effects on different people. And so, no argument there. But the bigger issue here is isn't really about coffee; it's about motivation and regulation, two behaviors that are at their best when they come from within. Whereas, if our energy level and ability to communicate feels inert and at the mercy of coffee as an external force, then there will always be something to complain about, something to blame other than ourselves. Victor writes about this transformation in his inspiring recovery devotional, saying that discipline is not a response to some external should, it is part of an inner strength. Point being, just because something is delicious and helpful and habitual, doesn't mean it should be the centerpiece of our personal motivation strategy. The goal is to cultivate internal sources of power so that our energy isn't dependent on an external stimulus.

*What if your refuge was not outside yourself?*

February 10

## **Fortune is scary when she looks upon us.**

Time, money, love and creativity are the same thing. They are all forms of energy. They are all currencies that flow to us, flow through us and flow from us, every single day. But only if we allow them to. Only when our relationship with those energies comes from a place of abundance, generosity, prosperity and gratitude does our cup runneth over. It reminds me of a colleague of mine who struggles with procrastination, aka, the energy of time. And while she never asks these questions outright, you can feel it her eyes and body all day. How do we cope with this ceaseless inflow of annoying interruptions? How are we supposed to manage all these distresses that bid for our limited time? And does anybody know how to resist getting emotionally involved with so much useless distraction? These questions are totally understandable, but unfortunately, they're not very useful. They come from a contracted posture of scarcity and fear. Which is the wrong vibration to manifest any sense of abundance. Look, receiving is hard. Fortune is scary when she looks upon us. But there is a beautiful world waiting for us to return to it. And so, starting today, whether it's time, money, love, creativity, or whatever other currency we seek, remember this. The only path to taking ourselves out of the victim position in regard to anything is complete abstinence from complaining about it. The flow of is constant. We are the fickle ones.

***How will you eliminate the behaviors that stop the flow of positive energy into your life?***



February 11

## What business could you be in?

Why don't people pay attention to certain problems? Because they never thought there was another way. They don't have the frame of reference. They're living within a legacy system that operates on an outdated consciousness. And unless they are actively conditioned to abandon the old and embrace the new, they will not only continue to ignore their problems, but take zero action to solve them. Reminds me of my biggest mistake as an entrepreneur, which was being religious about how I made my money. For many years, unless my income derived from speaking engagements or book sales, it simply didn't show up on my radar. And that was dumb. Worse than dumb, it was unprofitable. Doing so locked me into a lane that I had a hard time getting out of. That's how human motivation works. When you don't realize there's another way to operate, and not just a better way but a different way, then you don't make positive changes. Because you can't solve a problem that you don't realize you have. It wasn't until my mentor asked a key question that shifted my frame of reference. He said, forget about what business you're in, what business could you be in? Meaning, instead of locking yourself into limited models of how you earn money, actively engage with the growing list of financial avenues that might be available to you. Hell, every scenario could become another chance to get paid to do the things you love that create real value for others. It all depends on your frame of reference. Imagine the struggling musician who has accepted the marketplace reality that she can't earn a living from selling albums alone. She probably assumes the only viable business model is leaving her friends and family behind and going on tour three hundred days a year. But that's all just legacy system thinking. She could still create economic value and earn equitable compensation in the music industry in numerous other ways. What about giving music lessons? Performing at church services? Playing background for local theater? Selling songs to other artists? Managing other bands? Earning online streaming royalties? Building digital products and subscription programs? Writing commissioned pieces? Arranging charts? Writing sheet music? Selling royalty-free music to online libraries? Licensing songs for commercials? That's diversification. It's not about what business you're in, but what business you could be in. Look, the highway patrol won't pull you over just because you decide to change lanes. Don't get so invested in your current strategy that you stop thinking about new paths for growth. Don't limit yourself because you can't accept the fact that you might be able to do something else. Stay open to the fact that there might be a different way forward, and you might solve important problems that you didn't realize you had.

***Do you get so worked up thinking your strategy is going to work that you're not able to imagine it won't?***

February 12

## What's my counterbalance?

Human beings are built for activity. Our bodies are designed to move. And in fact, that's exactly what we did for thousands of years. But now that rapid technological advances have been chipping away at our ability to be active, we have become more sedentary. My yoga teacher often jokes that the worst invention in the history of mankind was the chair, and she makes an interesting point. Because it's not just our bodies that need to move, it's our minds and hearts, too. If you think your lumbar spine stiffens up when you don't exercise enough, imagine what happens to your brain when left to its devices. Imagine what happens to your heart when you don't have a horizon to point to. Without things to generate some kind of inner demand, life gets really boring really fast. Which isn't always a bad thing. Idleness has its merits. But in general, if we have too many pockets of our lives when we aren't moving, be it physically, mentally and emotionally, then we are liable to be that much more irritable and unfulfilled. One of the lessons working from home for so many years taught me was that freedom is great, unless you're the only one who has it. If you work a job, are searching for a job, or have just retired from working completely, then that means you likely have nowhere to be and all of the time to get there. That scenario can be devastating to the mind, body and spirit. Each person needs to create a menu of various activities and endeavors guaranteed to provide them with the experience of meaning. Otherwise they'll spend too much time to reflecting and obsessing and disappear down the rabbit hole of our own irrelevant bullshit. It's the theory of relativity in a modern context. Einstein proved that time expands or contracts according to our perception of it, and so, if we have not a single obligation to attend to on our calendar until dinner, then we'll start inventing things to worry about. In the absence of counterbalances, small problems suddenly morph in major life emergencies. Like that air conditioning unit that should have been replaced six months ago. Rather than simply ordering a new one and moving on with our lives, we'll spent countless hours trying to fix the old one, reading reviews for a new one, and making ourselves crazy along the way. After all, we have all the time in the world. Why not turn this twenty-minute task into our all-consuming life purpose project? Look, it's not that having a functioning air conditioning unit isn't important, but it needn't be our whole world. If it is, that might mean we have lost all sense of proportion and perspective. There's a classic mantra in the productivity cannon that says, if you want something done, give it to a busy person. Because that person doesn't have all the time in the world. They have counterbalances. They have gravity. Whereas people who don't intentionally move their bodies, hearts and minds, they have too much freedom and not enough constraints.

*How are you generating an inner demand for yourself?*

February 13

## What forcing function would prevent waste?

Japan has historically run the best railway grid in the world. But recently, they began investing in a two-year project that will save, get ready for this, exactly one minute on a single train route. Thanks to that few extra kilometers per hour, passengers now have a commute that is a whole sixty seconds shorter than before. The best part about this story is, their transit authority has been planning this move for nearly a decade. Which means the concept must have been thought about and worked over and debated for years. Talk about marginal utility. Think how precious it would have been to be in the boardroom for that executive decision: You me to tell me that our commuters will now have one extra minute in their days? You sir, have just earned a promotion. All jokes aside, though, too many of us make this same mistake. It's the fallacy of agonizing convenience. We spend too much time, money and energy trying to optimize our tasks, only to marginally the improve results. We burn precious resources that could be more meaningfully deployed elsewhere. My old startup boss used to tell our marketing team to always set a specific time frame on certain tasks. Give yourself a deadline, even if it's something arbitrary. It's smart advice for anybody. Because it applies to a number of situations that could potentially drive any of us crazy. If we don't find the umbrella in the next five minutes, let's just spend five bucks on a new one and get on with our day. Let's work on this project until dinner, and then we'll call it a night. Whatever new code we have written by the end of the week, let's push what we have so far. What's the commonality? We objectify tasks in a concrete, externalized way, creating a forcing function that prevents waste. And our work no longer falls victim to the law of diminishing marginal utility. At that point, that extra minute of our commute won't even matter anymore.

*Do you really need the entire fire department, or just a guy on a bicycle with a bucket of water?*

February 14

## **Will this course of action simplify or complicate my life?**

da Vinci supposedly said that simplicity is the ultimate sophistication. Apple computers adopted a variation of his mantra in the seventies as a slogan for their revolutionary personal computer. So who should we give the credit to? Doesn't matter. The spirit of the statement is what matters. The problem is, too many people are attracted to complexity because it feels like progress. It gives them a sense of power and importance. No wonder the allure of complexity is undeniable. But lest we forget, the more complex something is, the more uncertainty there is, and the greater the probability of unexpected problems happening. My constitution has always been a simplified one. Good enough is good enough for me. The question my brain almost doesn't even have to ask anymore is, will this course of action simplify or complicate my life? It allows me to figure out the easiest way to accomplish tasks with the fewest possible variables. It's a question that became second nature to me when running a business. Because when you're an entrepreneur, your most valuable source of leverage is your own energy. It's the single best tool for taking your enterprise to new places you couldn't go before. And if you are plagued by decision fatigue all the time, then there's a level of energy that's impossible to sustain in the long run. That's the trouble with optimization. Unlike simplification, it just makes my heart beat faster, my stomach churn and my blood pressure spike. Not only at work, too. Whether it's riding public transportation, going out for lunch, doing yoga, or spending time with friends, chasing the best possible outcome at every moment doesn't appeal to me. It's exhausting, stress inducing, and frankly, not worth the additional twenty percent of better results that come from it. Optimizing does have its place with many of the larger projects and endeavors of life, but on an hour-to-hour basis, the goal should be giving ourselves permission to be satisfied simply, easily and quickly. That's what leverage is all about. Influencing the system without outlaying a ton of effort. Minimizing the number of tasks and maximizing personal energy, so you can concentrate it where you need it most.

*What question might help you let go of some complexity?*

February 15

## What can you do in five minutes that will change someone's life?

Employee engagement, as a management concept, first originated in the twenties. Williams, the renowned social investigator, gathered information by going undercover to live as a laborer in steel mills, oil refineries and coal mines. He wrote a series of popular articles and books about labor relations, and this work blossomed into his career as a management consultant, public speaker and founder of several labor organizations. Of course, back then the experts called it employee attitude. And the field has evolved significantly since then. The history of employee attitude testing in our nation's industrial development is fascinating. Behavioral science has been used for nearly a century to help managers improve employee relations and loyalty. Back in the nineties, this concept evolved into mainstream as what we now call employee engagement. And by the turn of the century, it had become a widespread management practice. It's a critical metric for understanding the relationship between an organization and its employees. Because companies know it's a powerful source of leverage. Not surprisingly, the concept has its detractors. Many academics, consultants and cultural figures have critiqued its usefulness. Dilbert's boss comes to mind. He once announced to his team that company needed more of what the management experts called employee engagement. When his engineers asked about the details of this program, he responded with, I think has something to do with you idiots working harder for the same pay, and I'm supposed to be happier. Later, the evil director of human resources reinforced that decision with the following memo. We're going to brainwash you people to believe company profits are more important than your health. You will work twelve hour days while thinking you enjoy every minute of it! All cynicism aside, though, the concept of employee engagement still matters, whatever people choose to call it. Hell, we spend a third of our lives at work, so it's probably a smart idea to figure out how to create an environment worth coming to every day. The hard part is, the onus is mostly on us, not the organization. Here's a case study from my own work experience. My startup once conducted an employee engagement survey. And overall, I found the experience to be meaningful. Except for one part. Under the category of performance drive, there was a question that bothered me. Are you motivated to work harder here than you have at past companies? Sorry, but that's the wrong word. There's no leverage with working harder. As people progress in their careers, they shouldn't be figuring out how to work harder, but how to work smarter. It's a cliché, but it's also a life-changing distinction. Because once employees learn how to do as much as necessary and as little as possible, their engagement skyrockets. After all, you only have so much energy in a given workday. And if your goal is to keep ratcheting up labor intensity with every new role, position or career in which you work, then you'll burn out faster than a cheap firecracker. That's what highly engaged employees do. They learn how to pace themselves. They learn how to deploy their brilliance in short, powerful bursts. They learn how to see new opportunities, make key decisions and enable powerful connections that create massive value and

minimal time. Godin, in the best employee engagement book of all time, calls this the law of linchpin leverage. He says the more value you create in your job, the fewer clock minutes of labor you actually spend creating that value. The art is created in one moment, not tiny increments. My recommendation is to start asking yourself a smarter question. What can you do in five minutes that will change someone's life? Forget about working harder. Figure out how to create maximum leverage with minimal effort, and your company won't need a survey to determine if you're engaged.

***Do you independently and proactively try to improve your work situation, or do you expect someone else to do it for you?***

February 16

## **When did we decide that knowing everything meant anything?**

Reading comprehension tests never made sense to me. The exercises always felt pointless and counterproductive. The teacher would give us a sheet of paper with several paragraphs about a diversity of topics. We had five or ten minutes to digest the material, and then we had to answer a series of questions about what could be inferred from it. The results of this exam created our reading comprehension score of either low, minimal, adequate or sufficient. Which determined if we got into the cool reading group or not. Reflecting back, my issue with this system is that the ladder is leaning against the wrong wall. Teachers may have been measuring right, but they weren't measuring the right things. Skills like obeying instructions, accepting the information that was given to us, and learning to work well within an antiquated industrial system, that's what institutions want, but it's not what young minds need. Carlin once joked that only real goal of the modern education system was to turn students into populations incapable of critical thinking and into obedient, soul dead workers in the conformist consumer culture, being people just smart enough to run the machines and just dumb enough to passively accept their situation. He was onto something. Because there are so many better questions that could have been asked on those tests. Let's compare several of them. Do you know the meaning of the words? Perhaps a better question is, what other words would have communicated that message better? Can you draw inferences from this content? Perhaps a better question is, are you inspired to create any new ideas as a result of reading it? Did you identify the main thought of a passage? Perhaps a better question is, did you have any of your own thoughts about the topic? Are you able to recognize the literary devices used? Perhaps a better question is, which textbook rules were broken that engaged your curiosity and sparked joy? What was the writer's purpose and point of view? Perhaps a better question is, where might the author's points be wrong? Can you draw inferences about the writer's personality? Perhaps a better question is, what aspects of your own personality did you learn about while reading? I've read thousands and thousands of books in my life, some of which were completely incomprehensible to me. But that didn't stop me from exacting value from them. Every page was worth the experience because of mindset in which they were read, reflected on and responded to. Besides, when did we decide that knowing everything means anything? There are more important skills in life than understanding.

*Are you understanding what you read, or questioning why you need to read it?*

February 17

## **What would your intuition say before you had time to think?**

According to various personality inventories, my psychological orientation is intuition. That means my artistic, abstract brain is wired to pay the most attention to impressions or the meaning and patterns of the information presented to me. I tend to remember events more as the impression of what it was like, rather than actual facts or details of what happened. Compare that to the opposing orientation, which is sensing. If your brain is wired in that way, you probably pay more attention to physical reality. Things that are actual, present, current, and real. Both of these approaches are important and useful in this life. Admittedly, my abstract brain could improve its ability to sense things, not just intuit them. But allow me to make an argument for the increasing value of intuitive functioning. We live in a complicated, confusing, cracked and chaotic world. Despite our addiction to data, we've arrived at a time in history where facts are no longer considered absolute, the truth has become a rule that people can bend, and context is no longer king. And so, considering our culture's dearth of objectivity, perhaps it's a forcing function to push us to focus more on the threading of intuition's voice. To open the door to more native forms of intelligence. Think back to the last time you had one of those gnawing gut feelings that something didn't seem right. Maybe it was the first few minutes of a job interview. Or sitting down for a drink with someone for whom you swiped right. Or an impromptu conversation with a friend of a friend who wanted to pick your brain. Or perhaps you were evaluating the website of a potential vendor that raised several red flags. Point being, our intuition, the statistical aggregate of past experience that provides insights into our current situation, can be a valuable compass. There's no reason it can be as valid as anything known by our material experience. It's just that we've been taught to worry about the validity of our thoughts rather than to trust our intuitive promptings. We've been told that if there's no logical explanation to support our actions, then it can't be reliable equipment. But the thing is, it's not just us. Estes, the internationally acclaimed psychoanalyst and culture storyteller, writes about something called aesthetic knowing, where we attune to things unnoticeable by the casual observer. When we assert this intuition, we are therefore like the stargazer. We gaze at the world through a thousand eyes. Imagine if more of your decisions had the benefit of that exponential storehouse of visionary power. Imagine if you trusted your inner promptings to keep leading you where you were meant to go. Yes, it takes immense courage to have faith in our own experience. But it's amazing what we can find on the other side. My recommendation is, make paying attention to your intuition a priority. Take your intuitive sense of things seriously. If not, you are potentially missing out on a formidable source of leverage.

*How are you allowing your mind to bypass its normal process of reason?*



February 18

## **Becoming more aware of our existential horizon.**

There's no such thing as finding your dream job. But there is such a thing as creating a fulfilling life, of which our job is a key part. That job doesn't have to be the biggest or most important container of meaning in our life, but it still can contribute to our overall level of satisfaction with it. If there's one thing you learn in recovery for workaholism, it's that work is merely one spoke on a larger wheel of existence. It's just one of many folders in our diverse portfolio of happiness. When we assume that baseline posture of abundance and enoughness, we become more aware of our entire existential horizon, we're less likely to feel that our dream has degraded into a nightmare. Koontz's beautiful poem springs to mind. On the road that I have taken, one day, walking, I awaken, amazed to see where I have come, where I'm going, where I'm from. This is not the path I thought, this is not the place I sought, this is not the dream I bought, just a fever of fate I've caught. I will change highways in a while, at the crossroads, one more mile. My path is lit by my own fire, going only where I desire. Not a dream job, but a fulfilled life. This distinction is critical. We have to intentionally frame our work in a manner that makes us feel true to our value system, even if we don't love every minute of it. Reflecting on my own career, several of my jobs were boring and underpaid, but because my whole identity wasn't wrapped up in them, the whole my life still managed to feel fulfilling. Maisel's research on the act of making means suggests asking ourselves a question about our dreams before pursuing them. Is this container capable of holding my beliefs and dreams? If so, even at a lower level than we might prefer, then that container is worth adding as a new spoke on our wheel of fulfillment. That mindset assures that the work we do assumes greater significance in our own minds, as it's poured into our meaning container, capturing and gathering weight, rather than allowing it to drain away. And you might think to yourself, now wait a minute, you're not really happier at work, you're just tremendously good at deluding yourself. But why should those two ideas be mutually exclusive? In this vortex of unrelenting despair called life, deluding ourselves is the one of the most important survival tools we have. If fulfillment is the goal, then we owe it ourselves to do whatever it takes to make it a reality.

*Are you focused on finding your dream job, or creating your fulfilling life?*

## **Wow, you think about things in a really strange way.**

Creativity can be profoundly isolating. It's one of those superpowers that can also be its own kryptonite. Looking back over the course of my life, people have always seemed to think my behavior and thinking was weird. Not necessarily in a deviant way, just different. This led to loneliness on numerous occasions. Many times my own fault, sometimes other people's fault. But all in all, the anxiety that comes with the territory of being a highly creative person is undeniable. No wonder I started wearing a nametag everyday. Hey, that idea was weird, but at least people knew my name. Which is more than I can say about many of my other failed identity experiments. Point being, imagination comes at a social and emotional cost. But if you've ever felt isolated because of the way your brain works, know that you're not alone, and know that the upside outweighs the downside. My cousin is a primary school art teacher, and she often tells me about these infamous creativity scales. There are nearly three hundred assessments currently in use by teachers, parents, therapists and other educators, any of which are fascinating to read. There's one scale in particular that caught my eye recently. Reading it actually went a long way in making me feel less alone in the world. After all, this is a clinically researched scale about an adjective that people have used to describe me for the past forty years. There must be some merit to it. Here are some of those questions. Maybe you'll see your own reflection mirrored back to yourself too. Do your thoughts often go off in odd or unusual directions? Will people often look at you as if you'd said something really weird? Do people tell you that you think about things in a really strange way? Do people tell you that you think about things in a really strange way? Do people tell you that you're one of the most unusual people they know? Are you nonconformist and willing to do things your own way? Are you opinionated and willing to talk openly and freely? Do you have an uninhibited and freewheeling style? Do your strange ideas seem to make sense to you, but often viewed as too unusual to explain to anyone? Sounds like the story of my life. Now, that list of questions indexes more on the negative side. Which is probably why the list brought up old feelings of shame, loneliness and fear. Made me think back to my childhood and even adulthood when people made fun of me for being what they called, too creative. But digging deeper into these assessments, there were also many questions that gave me a sense of pride and empowerment. See if you relate to any of these. Do you take risks, do things differently or try difficult things? Do you have an extraordinary sense of humor in everyday situations? Are you flexible and always able to accommodate unexpected changes in situation? Can you motivate and direct yourself? Are you curious about many things? Do you engage in a deliberate systematic investigation and develop a plan of action? Are you imaginative and do you enjoy fantasy? Will you come up with many solutions to a problem? Also the story of my life. Sounds to me like the kind of leader everybody wants on their team. And that's the real beauty about creativity. Once we are willing to own the fact that our imagination makes others confused or uncomfortable at the onset, if we can push

past that initial shame, we can blast through to the other side where real impact takes place.

***Who was the last person who shamed you for being too creative?***

February 20

## How could you think bigger than any opportunity of the past?

Fashionable footwear may look stylish, but it has potentially harmful consequences. Podiatrists warn patients that wearing tight shoes can lead to a variety of foot conditions, including ingrown toenails, calluses, bunions, skin irritation and even long-term nerve damage. Meanwhile, leading research from the journal of foot and ankle studies shows that a surprisingly high percentage of the population still report footwear related foot pain. Their labs reported that a shocking two thirds of people wear shoes that are too narrow for their feet. Now, if you're one of those people, don't worry. There are no shortages of hacks and home remedies for solving this problem. If your shoes are too tight, but you still want to keep them in your wardrobe rotation, you can try one of the following techniques. Stretch them with a blowdryer, put the shoes in the freezer for a few hours, buy a wooden shoe stretcher, spray your shoes with leather shaping solution, tape two of your toes together while wearing them, insert a peeled potato and stuff it inside your shoes overnight, elevate your toes in the evening, put on thick socks and blow dry the tight areas on medium heat for thirty seconds, or my own personal favorite, smear the entire surface of your foot with dry stick underarm deodorant. Problem solved, right? Not exactly. This scenario is a classic example of treating the symptom, not the problem. Because there is a simpler, more sustainable, less expensive, and less labor-intensive solution. Get a bigger shoe size. Matter of fact, that's good advice not only for the good of fashion, but also for the goal of career fulfillment. Imagine how many people are figuratively walking in shoes that are too small for them. Think how many creative professionals in their careers are making one lateral move after another, acquiescing to the tight squeeze of the middle market, without really growing their work, strengthening their brand or deepening their value. It's probably more than two thirds. Personally, this stuck point has happened to me on multiple occasions in my professional life. I walked in shoes too small for me for years. Not only during my time as an entrepreneur, but also an employee. And what's insidious about this path of scarcity is, you don't realize you're walking it. Playing small is a covert operation. It's invisible. Until one day you wake up and look down to see your two swollen feet. And you exhale what's called a disgust of wind. It's that little moment of positive tension that has the power to change everything. Disgust does that to people. It's one of the few human emotions in life that actually makes you say, okay, I'm ready; it's time to change. If you're guilty of wearing shoes too small for your feet, consider this an invitation to play bigger than you otherwise might. Listen, you have reached a point in your career where you must find a new form of power. It's the fallacy of playing small and evaluating your creative work too narrowly isn't helping you anymore. It may even be hurting you. And not just your feet, neither. Godin said it best in his book about the storytelling of marketing. If your story is too small, then it's not a story; it's just an annoying interruption. You have to keep making the story bigger until it's important enough to believe, remember and share. Listen, one of the reasons we as artists fail to achieve

our dreams is because they're too small. We haven't woken up to a bigger context about our future, and so, we leave a lot of happiness on the table. Don't let it happen to you. Fashion isn't that important. Don't become so focused on your small plan that you forget there might be a bigger one you don't know about. Throw out those old clunkers and step into the next size up. Hell, go a few sizes up. Why not take the risk? You're already feeling disgusted with yourself. You have so little to lose.

***Once you recognize your chosen way of surviving has become a trap with diminishing rewards, what's next?***

February 21

## **A failure of emotional regulation.**

I recently read a study about the impact of procrastination's on the workplace. Ferrari's research assessed over twenty thousand people and found that procrastination was statistically associated with lower salaries, lower well-being, shorter durations of employment and a greater likelihood of being unemployed. But what's truly revelatory about the study is, researchers found that procrastination wasn't merely a failure of professional execution, but a failure of emotional regulation. Turns out, the real reason people procrastinate is in attempt to avoid the anxiety or worry aroused by a difficult task. Instead of doing the work, we engage in activities aimed at repairing our mood, like taking a nap or eating a snack or checking our inbox or calculating our social media likes. Whatever it takes to get our shot of dopamine. But this pattern, which psychologists call giving in to feel good, actually makes procrastinators feel worse later, when they face the consequences of missing a deadline or making a hasty, last minute effort. And so, in those moments when we experience the urge to procrastinate, we might ask ourselves what feelings we're trying not to feel. What emotions we're trying to suppress. Because once we name them, we can claim them. And once we claim them, we can set them aside and activate a real and healthy mood boost, namely, one that comes from doing something we intend to do. From the pride of having lived up to our expectations for ourselves. From making meaning in accordance with our values.

*How do you emotionally regulate when procrastination isn't an option?*

February 22

## **You don't need any synthetic forms of aliveness.**

The best part about watching competitive swimmers is, they never make any tense, contorted facial expressions. No matter how exhausted and cramped and aggressive they are on the inside, their face just flaps in the water like dog jowls hanging out of a car window. Because when a person is under water, they have to relax everything they can relax. That way, all of the oxygen in their body can go to the places that are doing all the work. It's a smart approach to swimming. A smart approach to life in general. Mastering the economy of effort. Walk into the workspace of any professional, and you'll notice how they've arranged their work to coincide with their energy style. They spend as little energy as possible to get things done. They surrender their actions to systems superior to their minds, leaving them free to strategically focus their available energy on the work that matters most. They're swimmers. Walk into the workspace of an amateur, and you'll notice them investing all their valuable creative energy waging personal battles of useless speculation, trapped in the vortex of comparing and chasing and airing grievances. They're drowning. Proving, that in the economy of effort, oxygen is everything. It's freely available and highly efficacious. But only when it travels to the right part of your system. Next time you see a commercial for a new energy drink that contains nutrients, antioxidants, amino acids, essential oils, healing properties, all natural ingredients, electrolytes and vitamins and minerals that will help flush out free radicals, toxins and impurities from your system, run in the other direction. You don't need any synthetic forms of aliveness. Focus on expanding your capacity for positive energy. And while the rest of the world is nodding out in front of the television, you'll be left with undirected kilowatts to redirect into something creative and enriching.

*Have you taken responsibility for the energy you bring to the world?*

February 23

## **You're not going to change anything by not going to this audition.**

Two actors were chatting on the subway seat next me, so I decided to eavesdrop on their conversation. The older man told the younger one a story about his early career. He talked about how he used to work nights at some shitty restaurant, and spend his days trying to get acting gigs for film and television. Pretty standard plot for a young actor. But what stood out the most was what the man said he told himself anytime he felt resistance to leaving the house. You're not going to change anything by not going to this audition. Don't you love how simple but powerful his message is? Here's an artist who knew that the secret to gaining traction in his creative career was volume. Saying yes to every opportunity to practice his craft in front of a real audience, albeit a small one, trusting that it would only be a matter of time before something somewhere clicked. How many creative opportunities did you say no to last month? How many times did you convince yourself to stay home and watch twelve episodes of some beautifully crafted television show about nothing, rather than plying your creative trade in public? Look, in the life of any artist, there's almost zero upside to not betting on yourself. It's true that you might show up and not get the gig, but your chances of getting it are disproportionately higher than if you had just stayed home, complained about the stupid industry, compared yourself to the competition, and brooded about how what you wanted wasn't available. That's not betting on yourself, that's beating up yourself. Not helpful. To quote that actor once again, you're not going to change anything by not going to this audition. We all have our own version of that. We all have some kind of venue where we're given permission to display our wares. Why not say yes? Why not decide that by simply showing up and doing what we do, there is nobody who can spin that moment into us losing? Forget about fairness. We can decide before we even walk in the door that no matter what happens, we are not going to be unfairly treated. What's more, there are tons tools out there to help make the whole process less threatening and more efficient. Callback comes to mind, which is an amazing digital content management system that helps artists keep track of their auditions in a simple, organized, strategic way. After all, most creative people are not the most organized people. But they can't afford to avoid missing critical career opportunities. Callback finally launched a system that works. It helps artists document all of that priceless feedback from talentless hiring managers who wouldn't know human emotion if it sat on their faces. Now it's available at your fingertips. Callback manages the art, and you get the part. Okay, full disclosure, that tool doesn't really exist. It's another one of my fake inventions. But that only proves my point more. Instead of waiting for some faceless corporation to hire me to come up with innovative ideas, I just hired myself and started publishing them for my innovation podcast and card game. As my personal mantra state, keep doing things worth writing about, and keep writing things worth talking about. Next time you feel resistance to leaving the



house, let those immortal words chime like church bells. You're not going to change anything by not going to this audition.

*How many hours of television did you watch last week?*

February 24

## **We inherit nothing, and we stand at the end of no tradition.**

We inherit nothing, and we stand at the end of no tradition. Some productivity systems create more work than they save. Some software platforms cause more problems than they solve. Some processes create more headaches than they alleviate. You get the point. The classic law of diminishing returns is a very real and looming prospect. And not only in business, but across all areas of life. We allow our minds, hearts and hands to go to places that are so unnecessary. So cumbersome and insanely counterproductive. Makes me want to scream. Small companies are experts at mitigating this kind of redundancy. The tech startup that I worked for was maniacal about reducing friction and eliminating redundancy. From day one, our founders preached the sermon of being scrappy and lean and agile. Buzzword happy as they might have been, it still worked. The practice of testing concepts without the hassle and risk of a big capital outlay, that pays dividends. One question we learned to ask ourselves was, can we execute this in a manner that's not going to be more trouble than it's worth? After all, if something wasn't important or useful enough to even make an effort doing it, then we should simply move on to the next thing. As opposed to upholding some unquestioned and antiquated corporate decree in the name of preserving legacy. Roark said it best. We inherit nothing, and we stand at the end of no tradition. If you want to avoid creating yet another cumbersome elephant in the room, always consider the impact of the law of diminishing returns. Create fewer unnecessary pressures and stressors for yourself. And then focus on doing good work, not doing work that's really good at tricking you into thinking it's important.

*Which seemingly efficient system actually makes things harder on you?*

February 25

## **We beat ourselves up instead of gently return our attention.**

During a recent five-hour bus ride, the woman across the aisle from me had ants in her pants. Do you remember hearing that phrase as a child? Parents and teachers would use it to describe kids who are unable to sit still, due to anxiety, excess energy, or impatience. Anyway, the woman next to me spent the entire bus trip executing the same series of tasks. Check the notifications on her phone, switch-sitting positions, rifle through her purse, eat a snack, pull out her notebook without actually writing anything, repeat. It was fascinating to observe this routine out of my peripheral vision. And while there is no way for me to know if this woman was enjoying herself or not, it made me wonder about adults who have ants in their pants. Do you know someone like this? The person whose attention gets hijacked by everything? They notice and respond to every sight and sound around them? It's a complex personality feature, because to a certain degree, it's biological. This is brain chemistry. Some people are natively wired to be more distractible than others. But there's a nurture piece as well. Because we can learn to filter out unwanted information. We can choose not to accept the slavery to our idiotic notification culture. Psychiatry researchers have found evidence suggesting that certain meditative practices ameliorate distractibility by activating brain regions implicated in both sustaining and directing attention. This shouldn't be news to most, as the mindfulness industrial complex has been going strong since the seventies. But as a person who has been accused of having ants in his pants more than a few times, I'm no stranger to training my brain to become less distractible. One of the terms psychologists use is called open monitoring, or choiceness awareness. It's where you pay attention to what's happening around you without becoming attached to it. Instead of processing it, thinking about, judging it or trying to change it, you simply notice it, moment by moment, and when it's gone, it's gone. This is harder than it sounds. It requires patience and forgiveness and acceptance. Not only with the world, but also with yourself. That's why most people can only do it for a few seconds or a few minutes at a time. When the mind wanders, we beat ourselves up instead of gently return our attention. Ultimately, though, mindfulness pays off in the moment and down the road. Multiple studies have shown that people who engaged in a regular open monitoring practice, be it meditation, yoga, breathing exercises and so on, have demonstrated a greater ability to detect arising distractions or mind wanderings. Note the language there. These people didn't reduce the amount of irrelevant stimuli; they learned how to reduce the effects of it. These people noticed the world trying to hijack their attentional resources away from the task at hand, and brushed it off their shoulder like a piece of lint. Or maybe more like an ant in their pants.

***Will you definitely use this piece of information for something immediate and important?***

February 26

## **Make things versus making gods out of your tools.**

I was eavesdropping on a conversation between two friends having coffee. One of them bragged how she obsessively uses every scheduling app, inspiration board, productivity system, project management portal, note taking software, mind mapping tool and collaboration application known to man. To which her friend argued, yeah but girl, you literally haven't written anything in three years. Boom, roasted. Do you know somebody like this? It's becoming more common. Creating people are making gods out of their tools and losing the thread on what matters most, which is the act of creative expression. My frustration with this problem finally reached its breaking point a few years ago. Because time and attention are the most precious resources we have as human beings. And it's heartbreaking to me that so many talented people, whose creative ideas really could create joy and increase fulfillment and reduce friction in the world, are burning both of them like fossil fuels. When they should really be out there making things. This trend was one of my original motivations for pioneering the discipline of personal creativity management. Prolific actually has a commercial based on that conversation I once overheard. Here's the original script. There are hundreds of apps, games and tools for creative professionals. They promise to get you organized and spark inspiration so you can achieve more. But mostly, they're distractions. They consume more time than they save. And people who use these apps often get sucked into an endless cycle of unproductive work that goes nowhere. When in reality, they should be out there executing their ideas. Prolific wants you to know it's different. Our goal is to get you off our damn app and back to work. We've built the world's first personal creativity management system that's designed to help you troubleshoot your own issues in a fast, personalized way. Our knowledge base teaches you how to identify and solve your specific problems in the creative process. And our premium library of battle tested tools is custom fit for your unique personality, value system and life situation. That way you can be innovative in your work, without burning out in the process. Look, in a world of digital distraction and technology addiction, creative professionals are so busy scrolling, they're not actually innovating anymore. Prolific's mission is to reverse that. Our software isn't another beautifully designed website where you to pretend to do your work. It's the place you come for answers about why you can't. Next time you get stuck in the creative process, get prolific. Come to our knowledge base, name your problem, learn why you might be having it, and pick the best tool to overcome it. Then please, for the love of god, get off our app and get back to work. You can try us for free up to five times. And then, if you want unlimited access to our private library of more than three hundred personal creativity management tools, it's only eight bucks a month to subscribe. That's less than three cups of coffee. Which you won't even need to drink anymore, because you'll be so freaking energized. Hey, we understand. Earning a living from your wits is tough. Making things can be downright stressful and sometimes overwhelming. But whatever problem you have, with whatever step of the creative process you're at, we promise we've been there too. Because our app was built by creators, for creators.

Whether you're an entrepreneur, employee, or some mashup between the two, it's time to get prolific. Start cultivating your intellectual capital and growing greater profits from your art today. Anyway, that's our humble attempt to help people actually make things, rather than making gods out of their tools. In a world where time and attention are the most precious resource we have as human beings, we hope it works.

*What systemic problem does your brand solve?*

February 27

## **Establishing a new cognitive reference point for our creative workforce.**

What kind of personal creativity management system do you use? Okay, full transparency, that was a trick question. Most people don't even know what PCM is, much less have one that they prefer. The reason for that is, there's never been a broad level of public awareness around the field of personal creativity management in our culture. Until now. We've finally reached a key inflection point in our country's economic history where the official definition of this category is needed. Consider the recent numbers from our department of commerce. One, creative professionals add over fifty billion dollars to our national economy each year. Two, freelancers account for more than thirty percent of the country's workforce. Three, fifty percent of the new opportunities in the job market cite creativity as a necessary skill. Four, seventy five percent of educators say that the risk of job automation is lower in professions that require creative problem solving skills. And five, creativity, originality and initiative are the most in demand professional skill predicted for the next three years. Because of this new economic reality, the time has come to establish a new cognitive reference point for our country's workforce to support it. We need to make the historic decision to think about the creative process in a different way. Not a better way, but a different way. Which brings us back to the original question. What kind of personal creativity management system do you use? Since most people don't have an answer, now would be a good time to official define this term. Personal creativity management, PCM, is a unique approach to managing an individual's comprehensive creative process, including the phases of ideation, organization and execution. Personal creativity management may refer to an individual working in a freelance or entrepreneurial capacity whose livelihood depends on bringing their ideas to form; or to an employee within a team or organization for whom innovation is a critical competitive advantage. Advocates of this discipline note that effective personal creativity management typically results in greater output, faster execution, lower burnout, deeper focus and higher engagement for those who practice it. The ultimate goal of personal creativity management is to help individuals and organizations build leverage from their intellectual capital that drives innovation and earns greater profits, while not burning people out during the process. PCM is distinguished from other management disciplines by its cognizance of the mental, emotional and existential contexts of the people for whom it is created. The methodology centers around a robust arsenal of hundreds of solutions custom fit for each individual's unique personality, value system and life situation. The solution taxonomy involves four classifications of tools. Mindsets, approaches, behaviors and assets. Mindsets are the fixed dispositions that determine an individual's response to creative situations; approaches are the particular procedures for addressing or accomplishing creative work; behaviors are the specific ways in which the creative professionals act or conduct themselves conducive to prolificacy; and assets are the specific things that can be intentionally used to produce value along the creative

process. There you have it. You heard it here first. Now you have a new cognitive reference point to navigate this new economic reality. Welcome aboard.

***What kind of personal creativity management system do you use?***

February 28

## The PCM manifesto.

What separates the productive from the prolific? The creative process, because it's a distinctly and fundamentally human activity, can be ridiculously difficult to figure out. Mostly because people are complicated. And not just that, they're uniquely complicated. Each individual rests at the nexus of a vast number of interwoven causes and conditions that influence their behavior. There are no two people whose mental, emotional and existential contexts are the same. And so, each creative professional, in addition to making art, and in addition to making the opportunity to make art, must also learn how to troubleshoot their issues around art. It's totally a pain in the ass, but apparently tracing and correcting your own faults along the creative process is part of the job description. The challenge is making sure it's not your entire job description. Learning how to solve your creative problems efficiently so you can get back to the real work of making things. My friend, a talented graphic artist, struggles with this balance. Bless her heart, but the woman is so bloody neurotic, unfocused and ambivalent about her work, that she burns most of her calories trying to solve her creative problems, rather than actually creating product. She hasn't figured out how to free up her mental capacity to allocate attention to more meaningful tasks. This was precisely the individual I had in mind when developing my software platform. The whole purpose in launching the first personal creativity management system was to give people a technology based way to troubleshoot these very issues. A real time toolkit to help them think about their problems in a different way. Off the top of my head, here are a few of those specific problems from our inventory. See if any of these resonate with your own process. I'm struggling to find ideas and can't look at the blank screen anymore. I am hesitant to share my work because I'm paranoid someone will steal it or something bad will happen. I want to do this project, but I don't have deep expertise on it. I think the universe is against me, and my creative projects keep getting derailed. I am scared of not putting my best foot forward and getting rejected before I start. I am a leader in my organization, and I want my team to be more innovative. Sound familiar? Sure they do. All of these are very normal, very common issues if you make things for a living. They've personally troubled me numerous times over the years, and I'm here to remind you that they can be overcome. Every one of them. Because once understand the context behind the problem, see the experiences of others who have had the same problem, and visualize potential tools to prevent that problem from reoccurring in the future, you become unstoppable. You can free up your mental capacity to allocate attention to more meaningful tasks. Like actually doing your work. This metacognitive skill, aka, thinking about thinking, aka, becoming aware of your awareness, is what separates the productive from the prolific. Once the creative professional learns to notice, name, tame and reframe their own issues, ideally in a technology based way, then there's no telling what kind of innovative work they will be able to produce.

***What will free up your mental capacity so you can allocate attention to more meaningful tasks?***



February 29

## **That guy labels everything.**

Naming things always came natural to me. From a young age, the creative process of classifying what was going on in my life has been a deep source of joy for me. Whether it was cataloguing inside jokes with my brother, inventing funny nicknames for my friends, giving branded titles to our family vacations, writing our goofy vocabulary for the baseball team, or just sitting in my room coming up with an assortment of fake products, labeling was my thing. It was never driven by anything unwholesome, either. Pathologize that habit all you want, but naming just made me feel creative, connected, useful and clever. And people in my life loved that about me. In fact, when my friends and family first heard about my nametag experiment back in college, none of them were surprised. Scott started wearing a nametag every day? Of course he did. That guy labels everything. No wonder I made a career as writer, performer, marketer and entrepreneur. In each one of those jobs, you're basically paid to name things all day. But the question that intrigues me is whether naming is a useful skill, a fun hobby, or a quirky personality trait. It's probably all of the above. Because naming is an essential act of human communication. The everyday taxonomy we use to distinguish the objects of our experience, it's what separates people from the animal kingdom. Now, some marine animals have unique click and whistle signatures to identify each other, horses use their whinnies similar to names, and parrots will offer a trademark call when meeting a new peer. But in general, biologists haven't found this behavior much in other species. They have few examples of learned linguistic signals invented for a purpose. Naming is a distinctly human activity. Our brains enjoy the act of naming things, the process of association and discernment is satisfying. What's more, it's rewarding. Any time we can deepen our vocabulary for understanding the deeper principles at play in the world, that's a win. Here's a case study from my adult life. Years ago, I was creating a course curriculum on the creativity process for the continuing education department of a local university. A key component to that system was going to be the lexicon. A robust vocabulary with words and phrases that allowed the students to converse about creativity. Based on a life of working in and researching the subject, I developed an entire language that permitted people to better communicate with themselves and others about their creative process. For someone like me who loves naming things, this was, hands down, the most exciting part of the project. It became clear to me that building a working vocabulary of what it meant to be prolific significantly improved the chance that someone could cultivate healthy a creative habit. Long story short, the project didn't come to fruition at the university. Which disappointed me initially, although it turned out to pay dividends just to go through that process. Naming things gave them greater weight in my mind. My new creativity lexicon ascribed energy and momentum to the work that otherwise wouldn't have been there. In fact, that very taxonomy is what sparked my interest in developing my software platform several years later. I had already laid the groundwork for this new organizational system designed to categorize and explain relationships between various concepts of creativity. My structural framework laid it out in a way that made

sense to me and to others. Proving to me, that naming really is a useful skill. Sorting information and experiences into a more useful form to human eyes, that talent has real cash value.

*How adept are you at structuring and mapping the world in your mind?*

**MARCH**

March 1

## **Trying to build the boat and learn how to sail at the same time.**

Web developers often ask a useful question during kickoff meetings. What are the rules for what happens when this happens? The goal here is for the product team to build out all the information the tech team needs to assist on the front end, which helps them prioritize their reply and action when development issues come up in the future. The elegance and power of this question cannot be understated. After all, computers are systems that work entirely through precedent. When you have this problem, you do this thing, and get this kind of outcome. That's all programming is. It's the order of operations. The agreed upon sequential hierarchy of actions. The priority in importance. And the good news is, this concept of precedence has profound applications beyond just the software world. In the creative journey, for example, people should constantly be asking themselves, what are the rules for what happens when this happens? Particularly during times of struggle. Because lots of resistance naturally accompanies the act of bringing your ideas to form. In the micro, there's the anxiety of staring at a blank canvas, the apathy of not feeling motivated to make things, the confusion of which projects to prioritize, or the paralysis of facing a task that's complicated or overwhelming. And in the macro, there's fear of not being original in your work, the longing to reinvent your creative career, the dread of being in limbo between projects, or the frustration of being a lonely artist. Every one of those struggles needs its own precedent. That's a lot of potential problems. Which means, every creator needs some kind of precedent. A protocol to help them prioritize action. One that brings a higher function to their automatic responses to the inevitable struggles of the creative process. When you have this problem, you do this thing, and get this kind of outcome. For the past twenty years, I've been perfecting my own personal creativity management system to do just that. It contains more than three hundred tools for every stage of the creative process, each of which is a precedent for assessing and dispatching anything appropriately. That way less energy is wasted overcoming resistance and more energy is dedicated to the only act that really counts, which is making things. It's like my therapist once told me about managing anxiety. Never decide how to respond to a crisis during the crisis itself. It's smarter and healthier and faster to have your recovery plan in your back pocket, that way you can execute when the pressure is on. This gives you a significantly better chance of reducing your experience of emotional distress. What are the rules for what happens when this happens to your creative process? What protocol helps you anticipate resistance in advance? If you haven't set those precedents for yourself yet, your work is going to be an uphill battle for a long time. And you will frustrate and exhaust yourself trying to build the boat and learn how to sail at the same time. If you want a sustainable career as a person who makes things for a living, then dedicate some real time building your

own personal creativity management system. It may initially seem like a rigid, cold computer program. But maybe that's exactly what your right brain needs.

*Are you still deciding how to respond to a creative crisis during the crisis itself?*

March 2

## **Too much information at the start can cause you to get scared and stop.**

When a prestigious university gave me the opportunity to create a course curriculum for their continuing education department, you couldn't wipe the smile off my face. This project forced me to do something infinitely exciting for me, which was to uncover the architecture around my own creative process. By deconstructing what I'd been doing rather intuitively and abstractly for pretty much my whole life, the principles that silently guided my unique creative behavior finally started to announce themselves. It felt like discovering plutonium by accident. A few months later, the department administrator sat down with me to review my proposed outline for the curriculum. She said the material looked solid, and now the only thing left to do was talk about the university's content licensing agreement. Excuse me, the what? It's standard, policy, she explained. If you sign a vendor contract with us, in exchange for the opportunity to teach a new class, our department legally retains full ownership of this intellectual property in perpetuity. That wiped the smile off my face immediately. In fact, it scared the hell out of me. The idea of putting tons of work into this highly personal project, and then surrendering ownership forever, thanks but no thanks. You can take my life, but you'll never take my freedom. Suffice it to say, that course never saw the light of day. It was definitely more disappointing for me than it was for the university, but like most failures, it was a blessing in disguise. Because instead of turning that material into a college class, my curriculum evolved into several creative iterations that not only were deeply satisfying to create, but actually had more of an impact over time. There was the trilogy of books, the suite of software applications and the series of workshops, all of which are mine, to own, forever. Those products wouldn't exist in the world without that college course project going kaput. While telling this story to a friend of mine recently, he asked an interesting reflection question. If you had known about the university's content licensing agreement ahead of time, would you still have invested those two months in the project? Absolutely not. Knowing my personality, that caveat would have been a deal breaker from the start. Yet another case study in the executional power of ignorance. Because in many cases, the best way to make something is not to know anything. Whereas having too much information at the start can make you get scared and stop. My favorite basketball player once said that the when you don't know where you're going, nobody can stop you. That mantra applies perfectly to the above story. Had I known where I was going with the curriculum, the person to stop me would have been me.

*Are you obsessed with where you're going, or listening for where life is taking you?*

March 3

## **Why software that predicts hit songs is dangerous.**

The simple strategic centerpiece of personal creativity management is showing up. Playing the long-term statistical averages of the creative process. Being willing to initiate risky projects and be misunderstood for extended periods of time. And executing work for the joy of the process and the compound interest that pays dividends later. What's difficult about this strategy is, you have to make the humble assumption that there won't be some massive success that defines your complete value as creators. You have to dedicate yourself to the practice of achieving small wins on a consistent basis. Turin's outstanding book goes behind the scenes of corporate innovation labs, and his research distilled rigorous set of best practices for creative professionals. My favorite part is when he uses the metaphor of music to drive home the point of about showing up. Innovation labs are like rock and roll bands, he says. They want a monster number one hit, but what they actually need is a string of songs that hangs lower on the charts year after year. Which would you rather have? Most creatives would say the hit, naturally. And in fact, there is research that studies the top forty singles charts from the last fifty years, and songwriters can examine the audio characteristics for hits and flops. Not only is there an actual formula as to what makes for a hit song, but there is also software that can predict those hits. Amazing. This technology is impressive and fun. But here are the two philosophical issues with that. First of all, anytime a creative person, who barely has their shit together, comes flying out of the gate to emerge with a hit single and tons of publicity anointing them as the next big thing, it never turns out well. When you get an infinite amount of approval, applause and money without earning it, it cripples the creative capacity. Because that individual foregoes the chance to practice, experiment and hone their style and skill. They bypassed the necessary spiritual work to uncover their authentic voice. And ultimately, they're unable to sustain themselves beyond their initial effort. The second philosophical problem with hit-making research and technology is training people to climb a ladder that's leaning against the wrong wall. Creators don't need a formula for generating hits, they need a systematic, sustainable creative practice in which achieving small wins is its own goal, regardless of the end result. They need a discipline that helps them craft a long-term strategy that's all about staying power. One that equips them to assemble a portfolio of consistent victories that build forward motion in their creative projects. Indeed, most if not all of those small wins will fly under the radar. Coworkers, bosses, friends, fans and colleagues may not comment or even notice. Fine. Because what that innovator loses in ego gratification they make up tenfold in agility, resilience and satisfaction. That's the only way to bring transformation to fruition. And so, keep showing up every damn day. Keep playing the long game. Keep building momentum and leverage and compound interest. Just because you don't hear your hit single on the radio, doesn't mean you're not winning.

***Does your mindset feed ego, expectation and anxiety, but agility, resilience and fulfillment?***

March 4

## **Overcoming the biggest impediment to creative execution.**

The term starting from scratch has its origin in sports talk. Games like boxing, golf and cricket, all of which involve some sort of boundary line on the ground as part of their regulations, used scratch as the beginning of the match. As it says in the popular eighteen hundreds cricket poem, ye strikers, observe when the foe shall draw nigh, mark the bowler advancing with vigilant eye, your skill all depends upon distance and sight, stand firm to your scratch, let your bat be upright. Over the centuries, this term evolved to become more idiomatic. Soon the idea of starting from scratch meant embarking on any action or process without any prior preparation, knowledge or advantage. Doesn't that sound overwhelming? And expensive? And labor intensive? Especially when it comes to the creative process of bringing ideas to form. That's one of the biggest impediments to execution. Creators don't want to start from scratch, so they don't start at all. The good news is, there's a way to eliminate this problem. You can let your bat be upright with a vigilant eye, without feeling intimidated at the beginning of the match. You simply need a personal creativity management system. What's that, you ask? PCM is revolutionary approach to managing your comprehensive creative process, including the key phases of ideation, organization and execution. The methodology centers on a robust arsenal of hundreds of solutions custom fit for your unique personality, value system and life situation. And when used strategically, can eliminate the need to ever start from scratch again. Imagine the startup founder who wants to author a book to give his company a thought leadership calling card. But since he's never spearheaded a project like that before, it's overwhelming to even think about, much less write the damn thing. He has a packed schedule and limited windows throughout the week to chip away at a task of that size. That is, unless he uses a PCM tool like flooring, aka, corralling the entirety of a project to be viewable in a single frame on the ground. By blocking off a small, dedicated area in the back of his office to work on the book, he could leverage the persistence of information so he doesn't have to generate energy from scratch each time he sits down to work on the book. Coworkers could even stop by periodically throughout the day to add their ideas and give it some much needed momentum. That book could be published in a matter of months, not years. Next let's picture the veteran computer engineer who wants to leave the corporate world and strike out on her own as a freelancer. But she's never worked for herself before, and it's daunting to think about where she will obtain the resources to grow her client base from zero. But what if the programmer learned she wasn't really starting from nothing? What if she didn't have to invent opportunity, but rather, recognize the resources that were already there? The woman could employ the PCM tool of stream stepping, aka, faithfully partnering with the existing flow of opportunities to carry her vision forward. She could ask herself a series of strategic questions. How can you feed those who are already paying attention so that they will spread the word? How can you achieve your career goals with the network you already have? If she physically made a list of every single person she already knew



that might have a professional interest in her goals, and every single person who was already attracted to her and saw her as a resource, that client list would grow faster than she might think. Both of these scenarios quickly went from intimidating to inspiring. Because when you learn how to use personality creativity management, there's no such thing as starting from scratch.

***Which tools will help your work advance with a vigilant eye?***

March 5

## **Loosen the grip of negative thoughts that delay starting.**

When a creative person starts from scratch, it means they have no prefabricated parts. They begin making art with nothing provided in advance, don't use any work done before, and have been allowed zero odds in their favor. Wow, that sucks. Who in their right mind would want that job? You're basically struggling to flow uphill, against the current, against gravity, and probably against your own nature. No wonder so many artists procrastinate when it comes to doing their work. This dilemma has bothered me for most of my career. Because in my experience, both as an entrepreneur and as an employee, you never have to start from scratch. There's absolutely no need to make the already difficult process of executing your ideas any harder. Unless you're a masochist and you like doing things the hard way, in which case, god speed. The good news is, there are numerous efficiencies waiting to be gained. You simply have to open yourself to the new philosophy of personal creativity management. PCM is based on an updated understanding of human nature and the challenges of making things for a living. It's a contemporary discipline of work that takes into account the whole creative process, including the phases of ideation, organization and execution. Most notably, PCM is founded on the concept of not starting from scratch. Imagine if you could sit down to do your work every day, knowing that you could begin where you are, trusting that you had everything you needed to get the project moving in the right direction? Might that alter the way you execute your creative projects? Here's a tool that has been transformative in that regard in my own life. It's called a centering sequence, which is a daily ritual that brings your brain up to operating temperature in order to run properly. Each morning before starting my daily writing, I take a few minutes to affirm rather than dismiss my chances of coming up with new things to say. I employ a series of affirmations and short cognitions that point my mind in the most useful creative direction. This helps me avoid the pain of the cold start in my work and loosens the grip of negative thoughts that delay or derail you from starting. It doesn't guarantee creative outcomes, but it does improve the experience of creating, and that's no small victory. Do you have a centering sequence? If so, then you will go from beginning with nothing provided in advance to tipping the odds in your favor. And that exhausting fear of starting from scratch will fade away like a gently breeze.

***Why are you making the already difficult process of executing your ideas harder for yourself?***

March 6

## **Seeking and finding the barriers within ourselves that we've built against innovating.**

It's true that creativity is the premiere skill of our time, but that doesn't mean it should be dogmatically quantified, tested and measured within an inch of its life. Schools, organizations, companies and other institutions commit the mistake of taking the most fundamental endowment we have been given as a species, our imagination, and bastardizing it into another line item on their annual report. But that's not how creativity works. The solution for driving innovation isn't forcing people into some prescribed, finite space into which they can be creative. The answer is offering people an expansive, generative space in which they can be their authentic selves. See the difference between those two approaches? Remember, there is no one way to be creative. Everybody innovates within whatever mental, emotional and existential contexts their life situation affords them. This is why personal creativity management is so necessary in today's culture. Because it's just that, personal. People are never more themselves than when they are making things. They tap into the fingerprint of their humanity to do that kind of work, whether it's messing around at home with the family, helping their local community generate new ideas for growth, or initiating a project at the office that has the potential to earn millions. And that process can't be conveniently quantified, only authentically liberated. Rumi comes to mind, the mystic poet who famously said that our task is not to seek for love, but merely to seek and find all the barriers within ourselves that we have built against it. Maybe that's a better starting point. Maybe giving people permission to be themselves is more valuable than giving them another meaningless score that shows how well they know how to brainstorm. Here's an example. Have you ever felt guilty about being angry, sad or jealous? It's the worst. Like you shouldn't be feeling what you're feeling. But that's a cultural barrier we have to overcome. Because most of us have not been encouraged to deepen our connection with all of our feelings. Especially the difficult ones. And yet, that's where innovation lives. All forms of emotional tension are usable. If this form of guilt happens to you, a personal creativity management tool you might try is called *staircasing*. It's when you give yourself permission to channel complicated emotions into useful results. You reach catharsis by accepting all your feelings, trusting that they might lead somewhere interesting. In my own career, most of my best ideas at the office came the day after my coworkers did something that made me want to choke them with a printer cable. But that's a good thing. The juice is there. Had those violent and disturbing feelings been rejected, then the new ideas that resulted never might have seen the light of day. What are the barriers within yourself that you've built against innovating? Start from there. If creativity is the premiere skill of our time, then don't test and measure it, liberate it.

***Do you have a generative space in which you can be your authentic self?***

March 7

## **Learning how to troubleshoot your own creative issues.**

Most digital businesses have an external knowledge base. It's the centralized repository where information about their company is organized. Now the customers can pop in anytime and learn everything they ever wanted to know about using that particular company's products or services. There is no longer a need to call their toll free hotline, sit on hold for twelve minutes, transfer between different agents or submit a ticket into the ether, ever again. All the answers are documented and searchable for their benefit. Pure genius. Not surprisingly, these knowledge bases have been statistically proven to improve onboarding service, increase resolution rates, lower employee training costs, reduce the number of tickets and scale support programs for the growing organization. And considering we live in a world where people demand easy and immediate access to accurate information, it's no surprise that knowledge bases have become so popular. I've personally built a few of these portals myself at various startups, and they truly are a godsend to customers and employees. What's interesting about knowledge bases is, companies give them away for free as an added value to support the product or service users are already paying for. But what if the model was inverted? What if the knowledge base itself was the product? And what if the program that people learned to use more effectively was their own brain? Prolific is the world's first knowledge base that allows you to troubleshoot your own issues along the creative process. From motivation to inspiration to procrastination, now you have your own personal creativity management system. Next time you get stuck, come to the knowledge base, name your problem, learn why you might be having it, and then pick the appropriate solution to overcome it. That way you can get back to focusing on the important aspects of your job, like actually executing your ideas. Rather than sitting around waiting for inspiration to come. Look, most digital tools are just distractions. They don't actually make you more productive or creative, they kill time and preserve the illusion of meaningful work. Prolific is different. Our knowledge base isn't another beautifully designed website where you to pretend to do your work. It's the place you come for answers about why you can't do your work. Prolific is the premier personal creativity management system, and now you can get unlimited access to our entire warehouse of tools, for less than ten bucks a month. Whatever problem you have, whatever step of the creative process you're at, we've thought of everything. Because as creative professionals ourselves, we've been there too. And not being able to make things sucks. Check us out for free today. Start troubleshooting your own issues and cultivate healthy creative habits for a lifetime. And you'll never have to face a blank page again.

March 8

## **Are you looking for the tools that will help take you where you want to go?**

The more tools you have to work on a problem, the less likely you are to get stuck. It's simple probability. Since not every tool is going to be effective for every person in every situation, having more options increases your likelihood of success. Having a robust toolkit lowers the threat level when you are confronted with a difficult situation. If you have the right tools, anything is possible. MacGyver comes to mind, the military operative whose astonishing feats of ingenuity and improvisation made for groundbreaking television. Talk about a toolkit. Everything was fair game to him. The guy fixed a car with nothing but water and egg whites. He busted out of jail using a hairpin and a pair of repurposed handcuffs. He scaled a wall like a spider with an industrial strength vacuum. He also stopped a car with a single piece of paper, patched a gunshot wound with a credit card, and everyone's favorite, he escaped perilous situations many times with nothing but a paperclip. What's in your toolkit? How equipped are you to handle all of the inevitable predicaments of your professional journey? This is the hallmark of all prolific creators. They have huge toolkits, which give them a higher likelihood of moving from idea to execution. Now, that doesn't mean they hit the creative wall any less than the rest of us. Anyone whose livelihood revolves around making things struggles with motivation, focus, fear, overwhelm and the like. Resistance cannot be eliminated from our lives. What we can do, however is diminish its ability to derail progress by being in harmony with probability. Prolific was built for that exact reason. Comprised of more than three hundred battle tested tools for every step of the ideation, organization and execution process, now creative professionals can take some of the risk out of the equation. Because you already have the natural talent, which is the raw material from which you fashion your creations. Prolific gives you more leverage with a comprehensive arsenal of mindsets, approaches, behaviors and assets. Whatever unwelcome situation needs to be dealt with and overcome, you are equipped. Langdon, another fictional character with great powers of ingenuity, famously said that evolution is the way the universe continually tests and refines its tools. The most efficient tools survive and replicate themselves, improving constantly, becoming more and more complex and efficient. Prolific is the next evolution in personal creativity management. Get your subscription today. And fair warning, you can't use all the tools at one time. Some tools might not work for certain situations. And some tools are more important than others. But if you can discern which combination of tools is most likely to be helpful at every stage of your creative process, you will dramatically increase your probability of consistently executing your ideas. And the best part is, you don't even need a paper clip.

***What if you visualized yourself as always carrying a creative tool kit stocked with powerful and useful tools?***

March 9

## Wow, that's one hell of a carry on.

Early aircrafts didn't have many navigation aids to communicate with the ground crew. Prior to the Second World War, flying was mostly accomplished by pilot judgment. Aviators relied on their innate sense of balance to detect shifts in movements of the plane, which were transferred to their bodies by the contact with the seat. Corrigan, the aviator who received national acclaim for his transatlantic flight, famously went aloft without various instruments, radio or other pilot luxuries. He ignored the rejection of his flight plan and deliberately flew east rather than west. One newspaper famously described him as the wrong way aviator who, you guessed it, flew by the seat of his pants. Now, this expression wasn't idiomatic at the time. Historians say he literally flew by the seat of his pants, since that was the style in the thirties. Flying involved a heightened sense of awareness, bought on by adrenaline, where all the relative flight data seemed to pass through the pilot's buttocks in preparation for later evacuating them. Wow, that's one hell of a carry on. Maverick's got nothing on that guy. Fast-forward to a hundred years later, and that phrase has flown its way into our vernacular. When you fly by the seat of your pants, it means you decide a course of action as you go along. Instead of relying on predetermined plans or mechanical aids, you work from intuition and perception. You make decisions as each choice comes up. Which, in many cases, can be an efficient and calming and useful way to solve problems. The question is, when does this approach stop being useful and start being dangerous? Should people be thinking about choices or obstacles that might come up and interrupt their path, or forge ahead based on their own judgment? Guess it depends on what you're doing. If you're flying a passenger aircraft that weighs three hundred tons, navigation aids are probably helpful. If you're performing brain surgery, using an endoscope is your best friend for examining the tissue up close. If you're running a million dollar business, sales forecasts might not be a bad idea to do at your annual planning retreat. None of these tasks preclude the invaluable skills of intuition and perception. But to solely depend on those things would be foolhardy. Working by the seat of your pants, constantly making things up as you go, it's just not sustainable or scalable, for individuals or organizations. On the other hand, if you're trying to decide what to have for lunch, making a pros and cons list is absurd. If you're not sure whether to go on a third date with that cute guy who gives you butterflies every time you talk, facilitating a whiteboard session with your roommates to map out your next five text messages isn't healthy or useful. Ultimately, nobody can know for sure if people place too much confidence in human judgment. There's a time for planning and a time for action. Providing a repeatable and innovative experience in which your creativity can thrive is important. But then again, so is your ability to follow your intuition and say, ah fuck it, we're doing this. da Vinci made the first studies of flight back in the fourteen hundreds, and to say that he flew by the seat of his pants would

be an understatement. Then again, his glider supposedly crashed into a mountain. Oh well, small price to pay for being ahead of your time.

*Do you need to work from past planning or present perception?*

March 10

## **Endowing my own chair and granting myself tenure.**

In my early twenties, I briefly contemplated getting an advanced degree. Not because researching and teaching and wearing blazers with elbow patches appealed to me, but mostly because I thought having a degree would legitimize my credentials as a writer. My thinking was, well, maybe having those fancy acronyms after my last name would make people's question marks about my expertise go away. However, after a few days of calculating the immense cost, time and effort of pursuing a career in academia, I soon realized it was smarter, cheaper, faster, simpler and more fulfilling to invest my time publishing a substantial body of work on my own. Treating my creative practice as a lifelong independent study. With its own learning objectives, topics of interest and curriculum. Endowing my own chair and granting myself tenure, so to speak. Now, there is no acronym for that kind of work, but then again, when you're a creative professional, skills are more valuable than degrees. Who cares about your credentials? All that matters are the things you've made, the lessons you've learned along the way, the person you became as a result, and how the combination of the three has made the world a better place. The best part is, you don't have to spend the rest of your life paying back student loan debt. And all aversion to academia aside, there are several aspects to the scholastic process that are still appealing to me. Particularly the process of methodology development. Researchers, professors and academics, when presenting a new theoretical take on philosophical problem, are required to establish their own system used in that particular area of study. Part of their work is building out their professional, repeatable, standardized and documented compendium of tools that others can apply to similar problems in the same field. What's more, when academics write their methodology, they don't just describe their method, but they also discuss the reasons why they've chosen that method, how it conflicts with and replaces the current point of view around the subject, and why it will yield the best results. Wow, now that sounds artistically invigorating. You don't even need to wear a blazer to do it. And that's what brings me here now. Pursuing my own independent path of scholarship is how this software platform came to exist. Prolific is essentially my doctoral thesis. It's my unique intellectual proposition, stated in contradiction with general opinion, that may or may not be true. I believe unequivocally that my methodology of personal creativity management will convincingly add new and important results to the field. This system will demonstrate that trying to innovate by the seat of your pants, constantly making things up as you go, isn't sustainable or scalable, for individuals or organizations. There's no peer reviewed scientific study published in an academic journal by a tenured professor with an acronym after his last name to justify those claims. But if you need that to convince you something is true, then maybe this is not for you.

*Are you building credibility or skills?*



March 11

## **Giving yourself momentum when you have no energy left.**

End framing is a tool in which you paint a compelling, detailed picture of the desired future so you can make meaningful strides toward it. Cartoonists often use a visual version of this tool when they create a systematic storyline that logically leads to audience to that resolution. Disney himself used to always ask his design teams, what's the end frame? But the beauty of this tool is, anybody can use it. Even people like myself who couldn't draw a straight line if there was a gun to my head. End framing is a powerful exercising for keeping yourself motivating when tackling complicated creative projects that require significant motivation and stamina over long periods of time. During the development phase of my software as a service platform, my momentum started to fade around the fourth month. Not for any particular reason, it's just that so much hard work had already been done, and yet, there was so much more work left to do. Kind of reminded me of my favorite existential song lyric, just when you get there, there disappears. Have you ever felt that way before? Like every time you took more steps in the right direction toward your dream, the horizon receded a little bit more? Ironically enough, it feels like you're trapped in one of those cartoons where the background landscape never changes. All the more reason to use end framing. One expression of this tool is writing your own vision narrative. Blank, the entrepreneur turned educator who launched lean startup movement, teaches this technique his stellar book on startup growth. He believes writing a brief that captures your vision for what you want your successful company to become. You shape that vision with a short narrative told in bullet points to convince everyone involved in the project, especially yourself, that this is an opportunity worth the investment. Prolific, my software platform, has its own vision narrative. And it goes a little something like this. Creative professionals hate getting stuck and starting from scratch. We think we can develop the first personal creativity management system to solve that problem in a different way. It will offer hundreds of tools to support people in every step of their creative process, from ideation to organization to execution. Users will subscribe to our warehouse of solutions, learn to properly name their problems, and adapt their favorite tools to fit their creative needs. Millions of people will start using our software to become prolific in a way they thought only geniuses could be. Creative professionals will now have a secret weapon to grow their intellectual capital, drive innovation, grow their personal brands and feel more fulfilled in their work. After we succeed in trailblazing the field of personal creativity management, we will expand our brand to offer a universe of products and services to scale our impact. Prolific will expand into enterprise solutions, educational partnerships, licensing deals, academic research, virtual communities, app marketplaces and live events. Millions of organizations small and large will start using our software to become prolific in a way they thought only geniuses could be. Ultimately, our methodology will revolutionize the way the human race thinks about the creative process. Those bullet points gave me momentum in moments where it was lacking. The vision narrative became useful not only for me,

but also for anyone whose support I needed on the project. That's the power of end framing. It's useful to inspire yourself and your team to stay on mission. It enables you to act as if the desired changed has already occurred. It helps you imagine what you need to become in order for your goals to manifest. It empowers you to speak from the future, then look back to identify the steps that led there. Lastly, it inspires you to paint a compelling, detailed picture of the desired future and make meaningful strides toward it.

*If everyone did exactly what you said, what would the world look like?*

March 12

## **Providing a repeatable and innovative experience in which your creativity can thrive.**

In the absence of a defined and appropriate personal creativity management system, most people are doing projects by the seat of their pants. They're constantly making things up as they go. Which has its merits, no doubt. There's an undeniable freedom and excitement with that approach to creative discovery. And it's important to keep that spirit of spontaneity alive to a certain degree. But the long-term danger of solely taking an extemporaneous path to creativity is, it makes it hard to replicate great work consistently. If every day you and your team sit down to work, and you do so without preparation, making things offhand, fabricating work out of what is conveniently around you, then there will always be a ceiling on what you can accomplish. It's foolhardy to assume people can sustain innovation without some kind of methodology to increase cognitive ease and free up their minds to do their finest work. Eventually the time comes to stop improvising and start investing in system that is designed to provide a repeatable and innovative experience in which your creativity can thrive. Hell, even improv comedy actors rely on various scene structures for their performances. Despite shows being made up on the spot, most performers will agree on which structure they're going to perform that night. Each of which has a set of loose rules that add some order to the show. Now, it's totally understandable if systems don't appeal to you. Many artists are little suspicious of organization because they think it might dull their creative edge. Getting organized might seem antithetical to spontaneity, intuition and freedom. Not true. It's the opposite. Creativity is about constraints. If individuals and organizations are serious about innovating, if they want to actually elevate their creative work, not just execute it, then doing things consistently will need to take precedent over constantly improvising. Prolific's methodology was developed for that very reason. Our professional, repeatable, standardized, discoverable and documented collection of processes, tools, technique and templates are solutions tailored to your creative goals. Prolific helps you do something you are already trying to do, but more simply and conveniently. We use modern technology to take out the exhausting and expensive steps of the creative process. Here's how it works. You choose an element of the creative process you'd like to focus on, and we suggest the right tools to try. Like mindsets to help you access motivation, approaches to help you solve complex problems, behaviors to help you build healthy habits, and assets to help you sustain career momentum. If you enjoy these tools and want to learn more, it's time to subscribe. And when you do, you'll get unlimited access to an entire warehouse of hundreds of tools from our exclusive library. Prolific is your personal creativity management system, aiding everything from ideation to organization to execution. Now the seat of your pants can finally take a rest.

***Are you ready to stop improvising and start innovating?***

March 13

## **Making quick, easy, specific moves that help you achieve your goals.**

Psychologists who specialize in behavioral change often use the term intervention. That word might sound overly clinical and dramatic to most. Images of the drug-addicted person being confronted by a group of friends or family members often comes to mind. But an intervention simply describes an action taken to improve a situation. It doesn't have to be perfect to be effective. Nor does it have to be clinical, complicated or overwhelming. Interventions help people along a spectrum of functioning. They can be quick, easy, specific activities that help us achieve our goals. For example, have you ever found yourself doubting your ability to make progress on a project? The intervention you might try in that scenario is called *futurizing*. It's when you catch yourself in the act of making superfluous complaints and redirect that energy more usefully. Rather than allowing the doubt get a grip on you, you debate it for a change. Attaching your desired outcome to your identity by announcing to yourself, sorry, but people like me do things like this. Then, the moment after you actually make progress on your project, you close the loop. And you can feel proud of that step you took by marking it down on your victory log. That's an intervention. You took action to improve your situation. Here's another one. Think about some of your unhealthiest habits that make it hard to get stay on track with your creative goals consistently. Perhaps everyone in your office eats fast food each day for lunch, and it's hard to resist the social pressure to eat healthy. And then you end up crashing in the early afternoon, making it hard to focus on your work. The intervention you might try in that scenario is called relocation. This is when you reduce your exposure to the kinds of situations and surroundings that enable you in the wrong direction. Rather than putting yourself in a helpless position of temptation, you physically leave the office fifteen minutes before normal lunchtime to proactively pick up healthier food for yourself. That way you can overcome the psychological cues and associative triggers usually trip you up. When the rest of your coworkers come back to the lunchroom with their friend chicken and biscuits, you'll already be enjoying your salad. And when lunchtime is over, you'll feel nourished, connected and ready to get back to work. That's an intervention too. A simple act taken to improve a situation. This is the heart of what personal creativity management is all about. You advocate for yourself on a moment-to-moment basis. Making quick, easy, specific moves that help you achieve your goals. No psychology degree required.

***What interventions have been most helpful for your own behavioral change?***

March 14

## **The more prolific people you have your team, the more your brand can grow.**

Personal creativity management is more than just coming up with a lot of ideas. It's about building leverage, momentum and equity through your intellectual capital without burning out along the process. This is a business discipline that has the power to impact everything in your company. When approached intentionally and collaboratively, personal creativity management can reimagine the way you think about every aspect of your business. From product development to marketing to sales to customer service to recruiting to retention. Whether you're a one-person enterprise, small business, large corporation or global institution, PCM is a true business revolution. Here's one case study from my own career. I've worked as head of content at multiple startups, and one of the most rewarding parts of the role is watching the slow but steady impact of personal creativity management on the broader team. Because these tools are contagious. Especially when you have a company who has never implemented a system like this before. When the group goes from having one or two prolific team members to having a dozen, the impact is exponential. The whole becomes greater than the sum of its parts. During my first week at this one marketing agency, I was convinced that not a single person on the team gave two shits about my vision for growing our brand through thought leadership. They were mostly analysts, and so, the leaders had never hired a creative like me before. I'll never forget our team meeting on day one. The founder of the company introduced me to my coworkers as follows. Scott has the most creative job at this company, and he is here to help each of you grow your personal brand and build your career. The room fell silent as a tomb. Fifteen pairs of eyes glazed over. My whole body started sweating. And I think I spewed out some bullshit about the value of mentorship and writing and knowledge management, but who knows. After two minutes, one thing was abundantly clear. These people had no idea what to do with me. Which felt lonely as hell. Nevertheless, I still committed to my vision of personal creativity management anyway. Even if I had to be the lone writer for the first few months, so be it. As my mantra goes, my love will wear you down eventually. Slowly but surely, our team started to see strong results from our content and branding efforts. Not only through metrics like site traffic, inbound leads and media mentions, but also team engagement. I spearheaded a new company ritual with the tool *goldmining*, aka, immortalizing key learnings that would otherwise just live inside one team member's brain. These sessions went so well that not only did more employees start participating in the ideation and publication process, but also they actually enjoyed it. Eventually I didn't even have to bother people anymore. They just wrote stuff and sent it to me. Clients loved it, company leaders loved it, competitors hated it, partners appreciated it, the media valued it, and the candidates who applied to work at our company always talked about it. In fact, about two years later, that agency was acquired, thanks in part to the people's prolific execution. This brings us back to my original point. Personal creativity management is more than just coming up with a lot of ideas. It's about building leverage and

momentum and equity through your intellectual capital, without burning out along the process. I've seen this play out firsthand multiple times, and I believe the same can happen inside your organization. The more prolific people you have your team, the more your brand can grow.

*What did you write today?*

March 15

## **Increase your chances of effectively managing the creative process.**

Words become worlds. Language becomes leverage. How we structure our speech affects how we perceive and categorize and construct our reality. Heidegger was accurate when he observed that language is the house of being, and in its home man dwells. And so, if we want to achieve breakthrough results in our creative work, then it will be helpful to learn and employ a robust vocabulary for that experience. Because once we have a language that permits us to communicate with others and ourselves about our creativity, then we can start to make sense of this otherwise ambiguous process. Once we start thinking and speaking the words that support our artistic intentions, then we can conceptualize and describe the experience of bringing our ideas to form. That's just as much of a superpower as the act of creating itself. Prolific is purpose built to help you do exactly that. Our personal creativity management system teaches you a new lexicon of words and phrases that allow you to converse about creativity. Consider terms like downstreaming, frontloading, haybarning, shitstorming and thumbprinting. At first glance, these words might seem like gobbledygook to you now. But once you've been exposed to them a few times, they soon become a key part of your creative process in the future. Or concepts like compression, whitespace, lubrication, totem and clearinghouse. You may be familiar with these words generically, but once you've started to deploy them specifically in service of your creative efforts, you will perceive reality differently. Allow me to share one example from my own creative practice. Working modular is a term from the lexicon that fundamentally transformed my ability to execute ideas on a high volume, high value basis. The official definition which goes like this. Working modular is to treat each idea as an uncategorized chunk of creative material; an objective, portable piece of content that accumulates and categorizes into its own structure. Why? Because in my experience, in any creative endeavor, you win when you approach the work like a builder. If each idea is a prefabricated unit, then that makes for an easy assembly and flexible arrangement of the information. You're not authoring a book, you're writing literary modules, the accrual of which become a book. You're not recording an album, you're composing musical modules, the collection of which make up your album. Learning how to work modular changed the way my brain worked. For better and for always. All of my creations, from books to speech to records to films to this very software platform, once started out as modules. This is how language gives you leverage as a creative professional. It expands your repertoire of mindful awareness, allowing you to notice the opportunities to increase your return on experience everywhere you go. By building an evolving glossary of what it means to be prolific, you can significantly increase your chances of effectively managing the creative process.

*What new vocabulary might facilitate your learning faster?*

March 16

## **What if you had incontrovertible proof that you already know how to do this?**

You can't teach focus. There is no guidebook that helps creative professionals figure out where their focus should be, how to apply their energy to it, and how to execute work in the face of the unrelenting succession of pleasurable distractions that surround them on a daily basis. The good news is, your ability to concentrate might be stronger than you realize. It all depends on how you frame it. For example, when a professional golfer stands over a putt, he hears everything. Murmurs from the crowd, porta potty doors slamming, birds chirping, cell phones buzzing and camera shutters clicking. He cannot not hear those sounds. No matter how focused he is on the ball, it's impossible to tune out the noise. And yet, he's still able to perform his job competently. Sinking that birdie putt on the seventeenth green to tie up the score is simply matter of course, no pun intended. But how? Does that athlete possess a constitution with an unusual ability to concentrate, or is it a skill he worked at? It's both. Because certain people do have an amazing innate ability to focus on what they're doing, while still processing other stimuli outside and inside of their minds. While other personalities are easily distracted, bounce from one thought to the next very quickly, and can't finish a task if their life depended on it. However, all creative professionals can boost their ability to lock in at a moment's notice, anytime, anywhere, and get to work. They can take control over their psychic environment, and take extreme responsibility for the energy they bring to the world. It all depends on how robust of a personal creativity management system they have. Here's helpful exercise to deepen your ability to concentrate that has been a game changer for me. Consider one thing in your life over which you've had a lifelong obsession. It might be a hobby, interest, passion, intellectual pursuit, or extracurricular activity. Doesn't matter if it's dopey or bizarre, as long as it always has the potential to galvanize you and never thwarts your pursuit of joy. And now know this. That thing is your ticket to concentration. Because regardless of your personality, or the story you like to tell yourself about your distractibility, that lifelong obsession is incontrovertible proof that you already know how to focus. It's a matter of deconstructing something you've done intuitively and abstractly for years, *genericizing* it, and then replicating it into other areas of life. This exercise will prove that while you can't teach yourself to focus, you can uncover your existing ability to concentrate, and use it in service of your creative dreams. Next time you're feeling sensitive to the clamorous pull of distraction, take the training you already have and apply it. Use the history of yesterday to help you focus today, and you'll execute creative work you're proud of tomorrow. Talk about a hole in one.

*Are you reaching for something that's already inside yourself?*



March 17

## **How could you give yourself a part time job changing the world?**

One of the errors artists make is turning a single activity into the center of gravity of their creative universe. Doing so is ultimately disappointing for them, and also unfair to that one project. Because that's too much pressure to put on a single endeavor to fulfill their artistic needs. It taints both the process and the product. What's more sustainable is to build a diverse portfolio of creative investments. That's the only path to making sure the inevitable delays, derailments and discouragements along the journey don't knock them off course. If someone's day job is boring right now, but their side hustle is thriving, then they will still feel fulfilled. Or if their painting practice is firing blanks at the moment, but development of their new software app is gaining traction, then they're less likely to be standing out on a ledge somewhere. Because in the back of their minds, they know they're trying to remake the world into somewhere worth traveling through. This diversification is critical to effective personal creativity management. All thriving creative professionals encircle themselves with an assortment of projects that fulfill their various needs. And not to the point that they're spinning too many plates, but it's enough of a mixture so that they're not dumping their entire creative load onto a single activity. Do you have multiple centers of creative investment that have an active role in adding to your growth? If not, here's a suggestion that's been helpful in my own career. Give yourself a part time job changing the world. Okay, this might sound idealistic and grandiose, but that's kind of the point. The prospect of starting your own thing, particularly a project that has the potential to ratchet up our species to the next level, gives you enormous amounts of energy. Launching a new endeavor that makes you feel like you're using your gifts to bring something worthwhile into the world that wasn't there before, it's the most powerful antidepressant on the market. Theil, the billionaire inventor and investor, wrote a bestselling book about changing the world. He says that as a good rule of thumb is, proprietary technology must be at least ten times better than its closest substitute. Anything less than an order of magnitude better will probably be perceived as a marginal improvement and will be hard to sell, especially in an already crowded marketplace. This rule applies to all of us, whether we're in the technology game or not. Once we frame our extracurricular creative pursuits around an exponential degree of global impact, waking up in the morning isn't so hard anymore. Getting through the day isn't such a slog anymore. Even if other areas of our creative life are status quo at best and depressing at worst, our part time job changing the world compensates for that. Even if the culture around us is going to hell in a bucket, at least we're energized by the thought of making the world a more efficient place. Remember, personal creativity management is a function of diversification. Don't make a single activity the center of gravity of your universe. Carve out time in your daily routine to make the world a better place with your gifts. There are worse ways to spend an evening.

*Are you making a single activity into the center of gravity of your creative universe?*

March 18

## **How you innovate is why you win.**

Everyone remembers the famous nine dots puzzle. The goal of the puzzle is to link all nine dots using four straight lines or fewer, without lifting the pen and without tracing the same line more than once. To do so, you have to think outside of the box, both literally and figuratively. The puzzle is cool the first time you see it. But useful as it may have been thirty years ago to promote lateral thinking, here's the reality. The old brainstorming games and creativity tricks are fine for handling the task of idea generation. But what people and organizations really need is a system to approach the creative process holistically and systematically, not just sporadically. Thankfully, in the last few years, a new discipline has emerged. It's the philosophy of personal creativity management, and it's spreading into home offices and board rooms alike, transforming the way that everyone from artists to freelancers to entrepreneurs to employees think about their ideas. Now that people have a guide to this groundbreaking new model, creative professionals can abandon the old approach to innovation and embrace a different one. Rather than struggling to carve out the time to do meaningful creative work whenever they can, individuals and teams are learning how to use this system for making innovation a permanent fixture in their lives. Instead of allowing their creative expression to fall by the wayside when things get a little too chaotic, they are using a new tool kit with hundreds of solutions to help themselves innovate during tough times to sustain a competitive edge. I began developing the playbook on personal creativity management about twenty years ago, long before it was its own category. Since then, I've continued to research, develop, practice and test that system. I've seen proof of its efficacy from clients, coworkers, colleagues and strangers alike. The discipline of personal creativity management truly informs behavior, decisions, and actions, both on the individual and organizational level. Considering that we work a crowded marketplace, where anytime you make anything you compete with everything, how you innovate is why you win. If you want to achieve greater output, faster execution, lower burnout, deeper focus and higher engagement, personal creativity management can be the game changer for you. People and teams who build a unique system for managing the comprehensive creative process, including ideation, organization and execution, will always have a critical competitive advantage. And they won't need to waste their time trying think outside the box and connect nine dots.

***What creative problem are you not paying attention to because you never thought there was another way?***

March 19

## **Being prolific means having an awareness plan.**

A metacognitive procedure or mental recipe for perceiving and thinking about the environment around you. A lens for interacting with the world. A plugin for the human operating system. For example: What if you saw everything as edible? What if you dreamed up alternative interpretations for the events you noticed? What if you hypothesized people's potential relationships with each other? What if you imagined past and future reincarnations of every object you encountered? Those are awareness plans. The simple idea of choosing an awareness plan helped me realize that with the right lens, the right posture and the right filter, inspiration can actually seek you out. As long as you have observations to make, as long as you can see things and let them register against your template, and as long as you're able to take impressions and compare them with the old ones, you will always have material. You can't run out of ideas as long as you keep getting new information and you can keep processing it. And so, what creativity requires is a continuity of concern, an intense awareness of one's active inner life, a sensitivity to the external world, and an unbearable frustration to express the combination of the two in some creative way. Once you find the awareness plans that work for you, whether they involve technology or just a way of comparing and contrasting your experiences, they become a precursor for prolificacy. You create a framework for inspiration to stimulate insight and curiosity, improve cognitive readiness and psychological openness, influence your feelings and views of the world, free yourself from the bonds of traditional perceptual sets and begin to treat things in life in a constructive and enlightened fashion. By training your brain to be on the lookout for anything in any interaction that has potential, creative blocks will become quaint relics of the past.

March 20

## **Which tools in your kit work in tandem to assure bigger and more sustainable success?**

Each tool in your personal creativity management system may not be transformative in isolation. However, the magnitude of having hundreds of mindsets, approaches, behaviors and assets at your fingertips gives you an unprecedented source of leverage as a creator. Because now you can combine them. You can use the connectedness of the tools to your advantage. Think of it as the meta skill. A higher order ability that enables and empowers other skills to work in tandem. This chaining process almost becomes a tool itself. For example, take the three skills of gasketing, solvitas perambulator and excursioning. Gasketing, if you remember, is a daily ritual of emotional release in which you metabolize your experiences, make serious mental headway into your ideas and get the intellectual faucet flowing. Perhaps journaling is your way of achieving this release. Awesome. What if, rather than simply journaling for twenty minutes in isolation and then going to work, your immediate next step in the prolific chain would be to use rhythmic and repetitive exercise to boost the production and release of endorphins to pump your creative well? And don't stop there. What if, during your walk, run, swim, whatever, you also did a bit of excursioning? Meaning, you took a short mental journey of creative fantasy to envision alternate and absurd realities for your future? After sixty to ninety minutes of integrating all three of those tools, you'd multiply their effects exponentially. Not only would you feel physically, mentally and spiritually invigorated, but also you'd likely strengthen your ultimate level of output. That's the genius of personal creativity management. It's a support system that's highly generative. The more tools you combine elegantly and orchestrate with care, the more your results multiply exponentially. There is a sense of prolific emergence. Things come alive when their elements are integrated into one another. What's your favorite chaining sequence? Which tools in your kit work in tandem to assure bigger and more sustainable success? Look, single tools in isolation are never enough for long-term success. If you want to take personal creativity management to the next level, then consciously try to imagine new ways to configure your assets. Unlock greater leverage and momentum for yourself by using two, three or four tools sequentially.

*How many different creative tools have you employed in the past hour?*

March 21

## **If it's good enough for the flu, it's good enough for you.**

Career reinvention involves thinking outside of what you're used to delivering. Lovingly saying goodbye to the work you've done in the past, even if you've been doing it quite well. Remember, originality always demands a willingness to experiment. And the good news is, if you're someone who is on the lookout for the next digital advancement to express your artistic vision and make a contribution to the world, then all those reinvention opportunities will consistently show up on your radar. A question that's useful to hold in your awareness is, how can you leverage modern technology to take something you're already doing well now, and elevate to still another level? Prolific, my software as a service platform, was born out of questions just like that one. Because at age forty, after twenty plus years of professional experience, it had become abundantly clear that my leading superpower was helping people overcome their blocks at every stage of the creative process. And since selling my time was no longer a sustainable or scalable business model for me, it made sense to invent something that gave the world a solution it'd never seen before. In my case, it was the world's first personal creativity management system. Upon sharing the concept with a few close confidants, everyone echoed similar remarks. Scott, this is the most obvious next thing for you to be doing. It's the clear vehicle for your next reinvention. Now, the startup philosophers and venture capital veterans would refer to this moment as product founder fit. Meaning, I was equipped to tackle this problem at the time, I had the resources to build it, and the likelihood of me seeing it through was through the roof. Man, do you have any idea how profoundly motivating that is? Who needs an alarm clock when you have that? The fire under your ass is so hot, it could crack a window across the street. Point being, we can't allow the circumstances of our lives to destroy our ability to reinvent ourselves. Matter of fact, the key is to reinvent yourself before the inevitable decline occurs. That's what the flu does. Did you know that something as gross and deadly as a viral infection reinvents itself too? Yep. Learned that during my stint as a copywriter at an ad agency whose largest client was the state department of health. Turns out, the flu has an amazing ability to rapidly evolve and render older vaccines useless against it. Read the research from the centers for disease control. Unlike other diseases that have been eradicated over the years, every year, a new influenza vaccine is composed and distributed, and every year, the flu virus evolves its immunity to it, and continues to hurt and kill tons of people. It's kind of a morbid example, but hell, if reinvention is good enough for the flu, it's good enough for you. Now that's what you call a quality public service announcement.

***What are you interested in accomplishing that requires you to reinvent yourself to accomplish?***

March 22

## How do you feel about everything?

You don't need talent; you need perspective. A creator's number one currency in this world is their point of view. Skills, abilities and talents are helpful for execution, but the one thing that will propel your story forward is the way you think about and look at the world. That's what audiences buy, whether they realize it or not. If your work isn't grounded in your unique perspective, then it's just another throwaway piece of art added to the slagheap of bullshit that makes little impact on your success. Thinking back to the most disappointing projects in my own career, the commonality of all those failures was they came from a place of scarce perspective. Doesn't mean the work was garbage, doesn't mean there wasn't pride in the output, and doesn't mean there wasn't fulfillment along the way. But the products would have done so much more for me if their philosophical spine were in alignment. Carlin once said the most important question for a creator to ask themselves is, how do you feel about everything? That's how you figure out what your point of view is. And then your material is everywhere. Naturally, putting a stake in the ground and owning your point of view brings a psychologically and potentially a financial risk. Making what you feel is missing in the world isn't for the faint of heart. But then again, why else are we here? What other reason do we have to create anything than to show people how we see life? Prolific, my software as a service company, was launched for this very reason. Because my point of view has always been that personal expression is a bedrock of human need. And that bettering our relationship to creativity is a moral imperative of our species. But what bothers me is that most people stand in an unfortunate relationship to their own creativity. They have few ways of quantifying or speaking sensibly about it. Hence, the launch of my personal creativity management system. It's just my life philosophy in ones and zeros. The software is my way of telling the world, hey, here's my perspective. Since the product embraces a new and different way of approaching the creative process, I wrote a manifesto to summarize and simplify my point of view. Creativity is systematic, not sporadic. You are never starting from scratch. Volume and speed trump accuracy and quality. Mindset matters more than environment. Giving yourself permission is half of the work. If you don't write it down, it never happened. All forms of emotional tension are usable. Whatever is unsexy gives you leverage. You have plenty of time to do everything you want to do. If fulfillment isn't the answer, then rephrase the question. Energy is the organizing principle that gives you the greatest momentum. Nobody is paying attention anyway, so you may as well enjoy the process. These statements represent what I believe are the most important principles about personal creativity management. How do you feel about everything? What is the perspective you are fighting for and taking a stand on? Remember, it's not your talent, but your point of view that influences your behavior. Create from there and you'll give yourself the greatest chance of fulfillment, regardless of the result.

*Are you creating anything that shows people how you see life?*

March 23

## What separates the productive from the prolific?

The creative process, because it's a distinctly and fundamentally human activity, can be ridiculously difficult to figure out. Mostly because people are complicated. And not just that, they're uniquely complicated. Each individual rests at the nexus of a vast number of interwoven causes and conditions that influence their behavior. There are no two people whose mental, emotional and existential contexts are the same. And so, each creative professional, in addition to making art, and in addition to making the opportunity to make art, must also learn how to troubleshoot their issues around art. It's totally a pain in the ass, but apparently tracing and correcting your own faults along the creative process is part of the job description. The challenge is making sure it's not your entire job description. Learning how to solve your creative problems efficiently so you can get back to the real work of making things. My friend, a talented graphic artist, struggles with this balance. Bless her heart, but the woman is so bloody neurotic, unfocused and ambivalent about her work, that she burns most of her calories trying to solve her creative problems, rather than actually creating product. She hasn't figured out how to free up her mental capacity to allocate attention to more meaningful tasks. This was precisely the individual I had in mind when developing my software platform. The whole purpose in launching the first personal creativity management system was to give people a technology based way to troubleshoot these very issues. A real time toolkit to help them think about their problems in a different way. Off the top of my head, here are a few of those specific problems from our inventory. See if any of these resonate with your own process. I'm struggling to find ideas and can't look at the blank screen anymore. I am hesitant to share my work because I'm paranoid someone will steal it or something bad will happen. I want to do this project, but I don't have deep expertise on it. I think the universe is against me, and my creative projects keep getting derailed. I am scared of not putting my best foot forward and getting rejected before I start. I am a leader in my organization, and I want my team to be more innovative. Sound familiar? Sure they do. All of these are very normal, very common issues if you make things for a living. They've personally troubled me numerous times over the years, and I'm here to remind you that they can be overcome. Every one of them. Because once understand the context behind the problem, see the experiences of others who have had the same problem, and visualize potential tools to prevent that problem from reoccurring in the future, you become unstoppable. You can free up your mental capacity to allocate attention to more meaningful tasks. Like actually doing your work. This metacognitive skill, aka, thinking about thinking, aka, becoming aware of your awareness, is what separates the productive from the prolific. Once the creative professional learns to notice, name, tame and reframe their own issues, ideally in a technology based way, then there's no telling what kind of innovative work they will be able to produce.

*What will free up your mental capacity so you can allocate attention to more meaningful tasks?*

March 24

## Optimizing instrument in this symphony called life.

Once you've named your problem, you're halfway there. Now that there's a label attached to the unwelcome situation that needs to be dealt with, you've loosened its hold on you. You've created just enough space to overcome it. Think of it as an open door to a locked room. Naming the problem drives a wedge in the crack so you can get your fingers into it and inch your way out. But remember, you're only halfway home. The second half is finding and executing the right solution. My therapist used to call this the toolkit. Each person's robust arsenal of solutions custom fit for their unique personality, value system and life situation. When an unwelcome situation comes crashing or creeping in, you whip out the toolkit on moment's notice, calmly consult the menu, and start transitioning from the experience of the anxiety to the experience of the relaxation. Easier said than done, though. Building the toolkit takes years of practicing, failing and honing. It's not something you learn overnight by reading a book or attending a ten-day silent-meditation retreat. The good news is, there is a simple framework you can use to expedite the development of yours. It's called a solutions taxonomy, and it's not only been transformative in my own personal growth, but this was also part of how I launched my successful software platform. Here's how it works. For any given problem in your life, choose from one of four classifications of tools. Mindsets, approaches, behaviors and assets. Let's review each. Mindsets are fixed dispositions that determine your responses to situations. Those might be intentions, narratives, assumptions and so on. For example, one of my favorite mindset tools is called *upsiding*. It's when I use the placebo power of an optimism filter during traumatic experiences to get more of what I want. Quite a powerful tool during times of stress. What mindsets do you use to solve problems? The next classification in the toolkit of solutions is approaches. These are particular procedures for addressing or accomplishing something. They might be checklists, strategies, equations and so on. In my experience, one of my top approach tools is called the railroad switch. It's when I catch myself in the act of making some superfluous complaints and redirect that energy more usefully. Perfect for when I start beating myself up about screwing up. What approaches do you use to solve problems? Category three of the solutions taxonomy is behaviors, which are specific ways in which you act or conduct yourself. Could be habits, rituals, exercises and so on. One that comes to mind for me is called *turfing*, which is building an alternative workspace tailor made to my creative tendencies that gives me an advantage. Ideal for extended periods of travel. What behaviors help you solve problems? And finally, we have assets. These are specific things that can be intentionally used to produce value. For example, resources, objects, materials and so on. In my toolkit, one of the assets that has, pardon the pun, saved my asset on many an occasion, is called the victory log. It's a small weekly calendar that I populate with any and all victories, large or small, that I achieve each day. Hugely important during periods of depression. Okay, let's review. The solutions taxonomy is a classification of tools in your toolkit, including mindsets, approaches, behaviors and assets. It's something you develop and perfect over time, as you learn more about yourself. My



recommendation is, treat the toolkit like a computer program. If this, then that. Create a chain of simple conditional statements for the various problems in your life, like recipes, which are triggered based on the type of unwelcome situation you experience. If you can become a master of this process, you'll become an optimizing instrument in this symphony called life. And the music will be beautiful.

*How have you evolved in your ability to diagnose and solve your own problems?*

March 25

## **How could you keep the door to irrationality open by a tiny crack?**

From a psychological perspective, it's wise to assume that making ourselves feel upset is the downstream effect of a strongly held irrational belief. That is the source code that almost always accompanies unhealthy negative feelings. And learning how to substitute more realistic preferences for irrational demands is a key tenet of positive mental health. But as we know, extremes in anything accomplish nothing. Which means there are moments in our lives when we need to throw lucidity to the wind and bypass the scrutiny of our logical minds. Hell, human beings are fundamentally irrational anyway. And so, maybe there's a way to program ourselves for higher levels of fulfillment than we currently enjoy. Maybe irrationality can be channeled to get the results we want. Consider the courageous choice to embark on a new creative endeavor. You spend hundreds and hundreds of unpaid hours creating something nobody needs or wants. You forge ahead under the flawed and baseless belief that your new project will actually gain traction. Tell me that's not a fundamentally irrational act. That kind of life defies logic. Figuring things out has no place in creative growth; it's mostly instinct. And logic is the illusion that defies instinct. This is the thing we have to remember about dreams. We can't apply logic to them because the world of inspiration doesn't follow that dynamic. Sometimes, we have to accept that irrationality is just another tool in the kit. One that can be deployed judiciously to get what we want. Look, most creative professionals spend their days alone in a room with nothing but their minds to rely on. And most of them will attest that you have to be a little deluded to stay motivated. Because if you can't delude yourself into thinking your work is significant, you should find another career. If you don't have an ability to exaggerate the importance of what you're doing, you won't generate enough momentum to lift off. If you don't irrationally believe that this piece of shit you're creating is the greatest thing that ever was, then you're finished. It's grandiose, but it's part of the job description. Particularly at the beginning of a new creative project, you have to stop trying to fight against your irrational self and let the crazy own your ass. You have to lower the volume of your logical brain, put whimsy on wheels and take action on your intuitive leads.

***How will you know when you're being delusional, and when everyone else is wrong and they just can't see yet?***

March 26

## **Timing isn't everything; it's the only thing.**

And the great creative discipline is simply knowing what season it is. Which means much more than the changing of the leaves or the melting of the snow or setting your clocks back an hour. The word *season* actually comes from *saison*, which means, the right moment, the appropriate time. Our job as communicators, then, people whose work involves creating something and then turning it loose in the world, is to develop an exquisite understanding of our own timing. Let's use breathing as an example. From a respiratory perspective, there are three possible actions: Inhaling, pausing and exhaling. Physiologically, each of these actions only lasts a few seconds. Unless you're a sea turtle that can hold his breath for seven hours. But psychologically and emotionally and existentially, each of these actions can last anywhere from an hour to a week to a month to a year. It all depends on what season it is in our creative life. I'm reminded of what Einstein once said, that every occurrence, including the affairs of human beings, is due to the laws of nature. That's why I started to believe in seasons. Not supernatural prophetic agencies like fate, serendipity, synchronicity, luck, the law of attraction and god's will. Nature's agenda. The geometric order and rhythm of life. You know, something I could actually prove. The more I ran my experiences through that logical filter, the more patterns started to emerge. Turns out, you can actually design systems and structures to align yourself with nature's timing. And since there's not much we can do to control that, the best we can hope for is to hone that discipline and to creatively leverage the right moment and the appropriate time. Figure out what season it is. Inhaling is the creative season of inspiration, or input, meaning listening for what wants to be written. Pausing is creative season of organization, or throughput, meaning managing your ideas as an inventory system. Exhaling is the creative season of production, or output, meaning shipping work out of the factory.

***Which one are you doing?***

March 27

## **A time machine that only goes one direction.**

Here are two pitches for a new television series. The first show is a documentary program about the history of inventions and their inventors. It's encyclopedic in scope, entertaining in the extreme, and educational in nature. Our host explores the dates, details, and amazing stories of how some of our most interesting and useful inventions first came to the marketplace. The second show is a gameshow program where three contestants actually become inventors themselves, creating new innovations in real time. It's absurd in scope, hilarious in the extreme, and inspirational in nature. Our host will challenge contestants to solve real problems, and then brainstorm ridiculous inventions to help make the world a better place. Both of these programs would be interesting and highly watchable. They appeal to different audiences on different channels, but with the right production and promotion engines behind them, both shows could ostensibly receive solid ratings, generate a loyal viewership and garner advertisers. Which show would you rather watch? Which program would you rather work for? My vote is for the second one, and here's why. The first show, fascinating as it may be, is focused on the past. It's a time machine that only goes one direction. And innovation is about future. Show number two, on the other hand, considers the complete possibility of what might be, rather than a record of what once was. It's completely original. It stretches people's brains to imagine how we could ratchet up the human species. Plus, it's way more fun. And funny. And most audiences, nine times out of ten, would rather laugh than think. Thinking is work. People work all day. Laughing helps us escape from work. Okay, confession time. This is the exact thought experiment that ran through my head when brainstorming my most recent project. My original idea was going to be show number one. The documentary about innovation. It sounded interesting and engaging initially, but once we got the ball rolling, it lost momentum quickly and was abandoned within weeks. Because it wasn't original. We didn't create anything. And that's a problem for me. However, over the course of about five years, the other idea for the gameshow actually did come together. It built momentum slowly in my mind, but once we pulled the trigger and recorded a pilot episode, there was no stopping that train. It not only galvanized me, but everyone around me. And you can tune in right now. Steal Scott's Ideas is the product development and innovation gameshow where we perform execution in public.

*How do you decide which of your ideas to pursue?*

March 28

## **Accepting the biting reality that the system is unfair.**

Nobody said being successful as artist was going to be easy. But if you're an underappreciated, undiscovered genius, whose fault is that? The talentless gatekeepers who wouldn't know human emotion if it sat on their faces? The ivory tower corporate dolts who wouldn't know culture unless it came with a tax break? The liberal media who can't tell the difference between a literary classic and amateur pornography? Sorry, but that chip on your shoulder where you think you deserve to be appreciated and you shouldn't have to stoop to do things, it's not helping your situation. Take the music industry. Most bands have to play their way out of obscurity. Coyne started one of the great alternative rock bands in his early twenties, and his group didn't have a hit single until a decade later. Leonard labored in vain as a poet during the fifties and most of the sixties until he finally released his debut album when he was thirty-three. This is both the attitude and behavioral pattern we see with so many successful creators. Once they accept the biting reality that the system is unfair, all there is left for them to do is hire themselves and go create something undeniable. There's no guarantee that anyone will care about their work, but it's a whole lot better than brooding around while bitterness and envy eat up their hearts. They may as well spend their time cracking open their soul and bleeding out something that might inspire the world, rather than bemoaning how underappreciated and insufficiently compensated they are by it. If you've ever felt that way, you're not alone. Making art can be as equally liberating as it is soul crushing. People have committed suicide over less. But let's not forget that it's not the world's job to value the things we make. The onus is on us. Not only to value it for ourselves, but to generously share it with all. To pass our gift along as the final act of gratitude that finishes our labor. Besides, even if we did wake up tomorrow and we were suddenly appreciated and discovered, would that really change everything? Or even anything? Would it set us free and make us whole? Or would it simply put greater pressure on us to ratchet up the treadmill of external approval to that elusive next level? Duritz sang in his legendary hit single, when everybody loves you, then you can never be lonely. But once he became a globally recognized icon ten years later, he changed the lyrics to say, when everybody loves you, that's just about as fucked up as you can be. Do it for you. Bless your soul with the intellectual food of your own creative joy. Learn to treat everything else that happens to your work as the icing on top, and you will be able to have your cake and eat too, every bloody day.

*When will you have finally done enough to be okay with who you are?*

March 29

## **Allow yourself to feel abundance now.**

Buechner, the great writer and theologian, famously said that the place god calls us to is where our deepest gladness and the world's deepest hunger meet. It's nice work if you can get it. But the more practical challenge is, how do we actually arrive at that place? What frame of mind propels us toward that holy intersection of need and passion? It's faith. Not in the omnipotent sky daddy, but in our own inherent value. We believe that someone somewhere is searching for exactly what we have to offer. No matter how many rejections we receive, no matter how many people shrug off our enthusiasm, and matter how many of our ideas are met with nothing but yawns and golf claps, we retain a sense of faith that what we're moving toward is already done. It's only a matter of time. Each of my four jobs, two roles at marketing agencies and two roles at startups, were preceded by literally thousands of failures. Hundreds of hours of filling out applications and networking and interviewing. That process was exhausting, demoralizing and lonely. And there were multiple times when my faith had worn wafer thin. But that little lamp of idealism never stopped burning. Not fully. Thanks to my genetic makeup, and thanks to my robust support system, there was always a burning ember left where my raging fire once glowed. Reminding me, psst, someone somewhere is searching for exactly what you have to offer. Just stay in motion. Keep your opportunity flow open. Each season will be marked by new, enriching challenges. And it's only a matter of time before your deepest gladness meets the world's deepest hunger.

***How are you teaching your brain that the world is more abundant than you thought?***

March 30

## **An act that evokes aliveness.**

In the filmmaking world, the producer is often the first person to get involved in a project. They are involved throughout all phases of production, from inception to completion. Which means, a critical part of their job is constantly mustering up slivers of initiative and moving forward, even when they do not know all the answers. On a daily basis, they leap into the unknown because it has a message of promise within it, and they infect others with their enthusiasm along the way. And over time, they turn their idea into something great by their very act of beginning. Or they completely eat shit and nobody notices. That happens a lot too. Most movies are ignored. Only a few rise to the top. However, this skillset, that of shaping and selecting and shepherding, is not limited to the movie arena. Donning the mantle of producer is something all of us will do in our careers, whether we want to or not. And in my experience, it is deeply rewarding. Because it allows us to engage every part of ourselves. We can integrate all of our talents and skills. Especially the unrealized or unknown ones. This is perhaps the greatest benefit of staying the course of an entire project from start to finish. It not only shows what we are, but it empowers us to become what we never thought we could be. And that gives us license to do even more on the next thing. Rodriguez, the indie filmmaker famously known as the one-man crew, summarized the role of a producer perfectly. It is more rewarding because you have everything to learn, but it is more terrifying because you have nobody to blame. Next time life decides to put you on every possible side of the camera, say action and see what happens.

***Will you turn your idea into something great by the very act of beginning?***

March 31

## **An existence with no resistance.**

Buffett has a mantra to help wealthy parents whose children expect to become heirs to a fortune. If you want them to avoid laziness, he says, leave your kids enough money to feel like they could do anything, but not so much money that they could do nothing. Even for people who don't have kids, this insight is brilliant. Because the last thing anybody needs is to become trapped in a zero gravity environment. It's an existence with no resistance. There's nothing substantial to sink your teeth into. And in the same way that an astronaut loses muscle mass and bone density while floating around in space, somebody with nothing to push against loses motivation and a sense of meaning. Which is fine, by the way. There is no rule that says everybody has to become a hyper motivated meaning making machine all of the time, or any of the time. But if somebody is struggling with lack of fulfillment in their life, hoping to reignite the hunger in their soul, one of the root causes worth investigating might be a lack of gravity. Reminds me of a woman from my writers group. Thanks to some fortuitous investments about ten years ago, her savings account was approaching seven figures. She had hit a good lick, and we were all thrilled for her. But the tragic part was, even though she had many aspirations around doing art and creating social change, and even though a part of her wanted to do everything, since she had so much money, she ended up doing nothing. She became locked in a zero gravity environment.

*Where in your life do you lack gravity?*



**APRIL**

April 1

## **An ounce of initiative is worth ten pounds of intention.**

Arendt once wrote that our only reliable property in this world is our skill and our labor power. But she was not paranoid or cynical, merely experienced. And her words are a sobering reminder that people aren't here to facilitate us. Nobody is going to just give us an outlet to prove how talented we are. Permission is not the prerequisite to freedom, agency is. If we don't create a vehicle for ourselves, then we may never accumulate enough momentum to get where we want to be. Today is the day we start building something that allows us to make full use of our talents and abilities. Something that doesn't insult our skills. A blank canvas on which we can project our deepest dreams, one that we stand before naked, free to create a world of joy, that creates real value for others and ourselves. This is more than a philosophy; it is a strategy. And it's particularly useful when we find ourselves pressed up against the wall, fighting for our lives, swimming through a sea of rejection, bleeding and bruised from battling against the unbreakable systems of the world. In this moment, we must channel our rage creatively. We must double down on our initiative as a counterweight. Because by exerting an opposing force equivalent to the pressure we feel, we restore a greater sense of balance and stability in the system. And recharged with energy through the direct agency of human will, we will finally be able to lay our heads on our pillows at night with the divine feeling of being flattened tired from working on our dreams.

*Are you willing to accept that your agency and autonomy will bother and infuriate people?*

April 2

## **And you memorized that instead of doing what?**

Intellectual patent attorneys have a most fascinating job. Every week, they are exposed to the outrageous ideas of complete strangers. Every deadbeat within a twenty-mile radius shows up to pester them with their idiotic brain waves. And each of these inventions, of course, is guaranteed to make millions of dollars. You just don't understand. This is not merely a great idea, but a dream of a whole new life for me that's light years away from my current reality. Our new golden dinglehopper will revolutionize the entire personal care industry. And yet, speak with any patent attorney, and they will tell you just how many people waste their time, money and energy filling out paperwork for some idea that will ultimately be rejected or ignored. For many reasons, but mostly because the inventions don't meet something called novelty requirement. Meaning, the idea is not new and therefore not patentable. Contemporaries in the field would not consider it to be nonobvious. The idea lacks what the legal system calls the nirvana of newness, and the nadir of knownness. Reminds me of a corporate consulting program that my company launched years ago. Brandtag, in my opinion, was the greatest thing since the invention of printing. And so, it felt like the diligent thing to do to ask a patent attorney if it was legally protectable. Which I did. And it was. But the lawyer took me aside and said, look, this seems like a novel idea, and our firm can certainly trademark it for you. But that process will be expensive and labor intensive. Are you sure this is the smartest use of your time, money and energy at this early stage of your business? Perhaps you would be better off investing your resources in making the product as good as it can be first. She was right. My desire to trademark the idea wasn't coming from a place of lucid business judgment, but from an immature posture of fear, scarcity and ego. My patent was never registered. It didn't need to be. What mattered more was acquiring actual paying clients, and then executing great work. Not going blind filling out paperwork to appease my own notions of paranoid grandiosity. Look, every entrepreneur worries that someone will steal their idea. And there are enough cases of idea theft to make even the most trusting and optimistic creator paranoid. But before you get dragged down some expensive legal rabbit hole, honestly ask yourself what the best use of your financial and emotional capital would truly be.

***Would you rather feel safe, broke and time poor; or alive, useful and lean?***

April 3

## **Are you prone to interpreting rejection as the evidence of your lack of ability?**

Do you transform a single rejection into a negative perception of your whole professional life and sense of worthiness? Welcome to the club. The world is filled with people like us who globalize our wounds. Football players do it all the time. Purdue conducted a compelling sports psychology study on how an athlete's performance can influence the perception of the size of the target. According to the researchers, after a series of missed field goal kicks, players began to believe that the field post was taller and narrower than before. But when they started to see more successful kicks, they reported the post to appear larger than before. Funny how our poor performance can affect our perception of the larger world. We really do believe a single rejection is a verdict on everything we are. We really do believe this is a disaster that has long-term consequences. Of course, it's just a story. It's just fear fucking with us. The goal posts don't change size, the mind of the kicker does. Seligman's term comes to mind. Learned helplessness is when we feel an utter loss of hope and a reluctance to take risks in the face of constant rejection. And yet, sitting there licking our wounds, gazing at the formidable world around us, won't move us much closer to our goal. But the opposite of this term is learned responsiveness. It's when we learn to discern differences in situations and develop positive expectations around them. Much more useful. My thought is, because rejection is more than inevitable, it's a strong guarantee; and because it is to be expected more than not, then we might as well change our mindset around to it. Hell, if they are going to say no to us anyway, then why not take risks? Why not go down swinging? Why not try harder to succeed than take action to avoid rejection? The yogis are always saying that we have nothing to lose because we had nothing to begin with. Seems appropriate for whatever it is we are afraid of not getting.

*Are you globalizing your wounds or doubling down on your risk?*

April 4

## **It's not insanity; it's all relative.**

Whatever is unsexy gives you leverage. Things like discipline, diligence, patience, practice, repetition, organization, delayed gratification, these are the unspectacular force multipliers of the creative process that dramatically amplify your effort, elevate your potential and increase the probability of winning. Einstein might have observed that doing the same thing over and over again, and expecting different results, is the definition of insanity. But keep in mind, he also worked six days a week as a clerk at the patent office reviewing invention applications all day. Do you have any idea how tedious that job is? All you do for eight straight hours is search existing documentation in the technical area of each application to make sure the invention is in line with the legal requirements of the patent convention. Not exactly the playboy mansion. And yet, it was in that worldly cloister, the great physicist once remarked, that he hatched his most beautiful thoughts. Albert produced four of his most groundbreaking papers while holding that job, and his work changed the course of history. Pardon the pun here, but maybe his observation about insanity was all relative. It seems like the discipline and diligence of doing the same thing over and over again is precisely how he achieved different results. What's your relationship with discipline? How patient are you willing to be? Now, to be fair, there are some personalities for whom these unsexy force multipliers come more naturally. People who have a high tolerance for repetition will likely have a natural talent for persistence as well. They're the kind of creators who can persevere with almost any task, artistic or otherwise, where the repetitive daily practice energizes their work, rather than detracts from it. Other people will have to work harder at it. Discipline and organization in their creative process will require greater intention and attention. What's more, they'll become frustrated with themselves for not being more diligent, and grow resentful toward others for being able to tolerate repetition like it's nothing. But that doesn't mean doing the same thing over and over again is completely out of the realm of possibility. Because while it takes humility to accept your innate personality with all its strengths and weaknesses, your native working doesn't have to completely delineate the type of work you do. Anyone can develop a higher tolerance for repetition, as long as their personal creativity management system is solid. If someone is willing to designate these traits as important to themselves, and find ways to get discipline and delayed gratification in alignment with their motivational system and values, then there's no reason their creative work can't travel at the speed of light.

*Is doing the same thing over and over again really insanity, or is it all relative?*

April 5

## **Are you using entirety of your inner life to serve your dreams?**

Frankl knew better than anyone that meaning in life was the primary, most powerful motivating and driving force in humans. He pioneered the field of logotherapy, stating that each of us can retreat from terrible surroundings to a life of inner riches and spiritual freedom. The intensification of our inner life can help us find refuge from the emptiness, desolation and spiritual poverty of our existence. In fact, as our inner life becomes more intense, we also experience the beauty of art and nature as never before, to the point that we forget our own frightful circumstances. Talk about keeping perspective. If concentration camp survivors can thrive with that existential strategy, then there's no reason any of us can't do the same in whatever struggle we're currently embroiled. Years ago, my startup got acquired by an enormous holding company, resulting in layoffs, transitions, title changes, office moves, team rotations and the other usual suspects of corporate transition. It was bonkers. If you've never been through a company restructuring, buyout or other merger and acquisition before, highly recommended. You learn a lot about resilience. Or the lack thereof. When the organizational rug suddenly gets pulled out from under a group of people, it's very clear who has a toolkit and who doesn't. During orientation of our transition, at least half of my coworkers were out sick. Some of them for an entire week. And understandably, it was also one of the worst flu seasons in decades, according to top infectious disease doctors. But not everyone was sick. Which got me wondering about the role of the existential in this kind of biological pattern. Because as we learned from the good doctor, meaning is made, not found. It's not a decision; it's a discovery. Each day is a negotiation where we make choices about feeling fulfilled with the experiences we've been saddled with. Personally, the acquisition made me feel shitty like anyone else. I had symptoms of headaches, nausea, dizziness and exhaustion. And I was sad watching thirty of my friends feel the same. I won't pretend to be immune to the noxious effects of organizational change. But thanks to my rich inner life, thanks to my many years of work around creating my own meaning-making mission, bouncing back was surprisingly fast and easy. Everything from meditating to journaling to exercising to making art buoyed me during this frightful time. Between you and me, and the internet, I found it exhilarating to watch myself take out my tool kit and predictably pop myself out of this state of imbalance. But not everyone on my team was the same. Particularly the junior employees, for whom this was their first job out of college. Poor kids. They didn't know what hit them. Probably still don't. Lesson learned: meaning is always an investment worth making. Not only does it create fulfillment in the moment, but also the existential muscle memory that we build over time becomes a stabilizing force when the shit hits the fan. Meaning making moment after meaning making moment builds the foundation of our resilience, creating an inner resourcefulness that not even the worst of circumstances can destroy. Reminds me of the advice my hypnotherapist once gave me. We are only a few breaths away

from a calmer physiology. Similarly, we are only a few choices away from making meaning.

*Are you using entirety of your inner life to serve your dreams?*

April 6

## **Defining success by how others fare because of our efforts.**

Typically, high bounce rate indicates a poorly constructed website. If a large percentage of visitors navigate away from your site after viewing only one page, it's a sign that something is broken or not working. Whereas low bounce rate suggests things are running smoothly. Of course, there are always exceptions. It depends on your goals as a brand. Prolific, our personal creativity management software, hopes to have one of the highest bounce rate in the industry. We want users to leave our website immediately. Because a high bounce rate means that user found what they were looking for on the first page. Prolific did such a great job satisfying our searcher's query that they don't need to go further into the site. They showed up with a problem, found a solution and left. Now they're energized to get back to work on what matters most, which in their case, is executing their best ideas. This web strategy is deeply counterintuitive. It flies in the face of most site optimization advice. Hell, it probably costs us money. But we don't care. If we built the premiere knowledge base where creative professionals can troubleshoot their problems right away, everybody wins. Our customers are successful because they're driving innovation and earning greater profits, without burning out in the process. The world is a better place to live because of people's prolific work. And our brand grows in value as personal creativity management becomes part of the collective consciousness. At that point, does it really matter how many pages of our website people visit? Ultimately, our brand vision isn't about bounce rate. It's about defining success on our own terms. Isn't that why entrepreneurs go into business in the first place? So they can do their own thing according to their own values? When I first started developing this software program, one of my friends made a point about success that always stuck with me. He said that if we ended up building the de facto piece of technology for professional creators, then nothing else mattered. He asked me, if you can help a bestselling author write one more book that sells millions of copies, then what are you worth? Quite a lot, that's what. His words always remind me that defining success by how others fare because of our efforts is a good and noble thing. Prolific's vision is for creative professionals to have a secret weapon to grow their intellectual capital, grow their personal brands and feel more fulfilled in their work. We're trailblazing the field of personal creativity management. And if that means having a high bounce rate, then so be it.

***How can we create a product that helps customers become successful beyond their wildest dreams?***



April 7

## **As we stand on this increasingly fragmented pixel.**

As we get older, it becomes harder and harder to tell what's a dream, what's a memory, and what's a lie. Because many of the things we remember are a combination of all three. The boundaries blur between what actually happened, how we remember what happened, and what we need to believe about what happened. Isn't that beautiful mysterious? What's inside our mind exists impressionistically. Linklater's films serve as vehicles for this phenomenon. There's a mind-boggling examination of the philosophy behind his creativity that outlines it. His movies pay tribute to those moments in aesthetic creation that often go unnoticed. Even moments leading up to a finished aesthetic work, ideas and sketches that might eventually become their own separate and more finished creations, these things also have a satisfying existence in their own right. This type of art doesn't contain the satisfying narrative that mass media has conditioned us to expect. The work looks scattered and fragmented as its unfolding. But that's why it feels so real. Because life itself rarely happens in some predictable, linear way. It's not something we can track in a formula. Life happens in cycles, convergences and explosions, and it's confusing and bizarre and absurd. All the more reason to create art that mirrors this pace. To express ourselves freely in nonlinear fashion by recording our incomplete and fragmentary associative process, and share it with the world. Who cares if it doesn't make sense? Who cares if the audience can't keep up with it? We can't fail at expressing ourselves. The literal meaning of the work is not the point. Giving myself permission to start projects in this spirit has been liberating for me as an artist. How calming it feels to be able to compose songs or make movies or write ideas that feel more like lucid dreams and less like polished products. How joyful it feels to make a series of fragments that are better felt than analyzed. To quote the aforementioned art philosophy book again. The underlying structure is a correlative collage. The form is a variegated composition that adds up to an exploration of the textures found within. And the planes of objects, characters, backgrounds, times and spaces interpenetrate one another to create a shallow ambiguous space. Is it a dream, a memory or a lie? Doesn't matter. As artists, as human beings, we all have the option to move beyond the social standards that require us to justify our creative actions with logic and linear analysis. We can turn our sketches into our masterpieces.

***What stops you from expressing yourself and creating?***

April 8

## **Asking improves your chances of receiving.**

Chronic vagueness makes it hard for us to move forward with our goals. Especially if we've enlisted other people to help us. Web developers and graphic designers and video editors and even tattoo artists go through this on a daily basis. Instead of clients being specific and clear and direct about what they want, they simply expect the service provider to read their minds and deliver everything perfectly up to spec. And the moment they discover that the result isn't exactly what they hoped, they throw a fit. This isn't what I had in mind, they complain. This moment represents the simple problem of expectational clarity. Chronic vagueness. It's at the root of all transactional unhappiness. And if we have any intention of making our dreams a reality, it's something we have to anticipate. We have to learn how to be better customers. Over the years, I've hired hundreds of vendors and service providers and third party contractors to help me move forward with my goals. And every time we start a new project, I always remind myself, asking improves your chances of receiving. Remember to make their job easier. Tell them exactly what you want. Otherwise the process is going to take longer, cost more and satisfy you less. Think of it as a form of kindness. Don't just do it to get what you want, do it to help make other people's lives easier.

*Have you mastered the technology of making an effective request?*

April 9

## **Begin the process of living strongly.**

Beneath the fear of letting go is the fear of having nothing underneath. That we might not be supported and strengthened by a sound foundation. But history has shown that humans are remarkably resilient and resourceful creatures. Most of the time when we reach into ourselves, we find yet another reserve of strength and nerve to carry us through. And we quickly learn that fear is an illusion that largely comes from believing that we are alone. Allen writes in his book about being ready for anything that each of us must learn to not only trust our own process, but also to trust that the resources for its manifestation will unfold in the grander scheme. That's how we allow ourselves to play our bigger game. Ask anyone who has spent more than ten years as a performer. In the early years of their artistry, they over prepare. Before every show, they ramp themselves up to the max. Because god forbid they go off script or forget their line or seize the moment when something unexpected occurs. That's fear. They can't let go because they think there's nothing underneath. And whatever crisis might happen during a performance will not only shake their foundations, it will shatter them. But that same showman, after a decade of racking up the nights under the lights, evolves their relationship with that fear. Twisted but strengthened by the vast creative experiences they have endured, there is a trusted and thrillingly alive force that supports and fuels their art. Because they know how to let go and lose themselves. They don't eliminate fear, but they transcend it to defuse its paralyzing effect. They know that their hands and voice and body and soul will be there when they most need them. Underneath, they contain multitudes. Performer or not, just know this. The benefit to not letting go is zero. It's only a matter of time before you begin the process of living strongly.

*When will you trust the foundation on which so vast an ambition rests?*

April 10

## **Behind every closet door lurks a confused mess.**

Carlin used to joke that he didn't have hobbies because hobbies cost money. Interests, on the other hand, were quite free. His distinction is not insignificant. It's one thing to have a diversity of interests that bring you meaning and joy, balancing out the rest of your life. My cartoonist friend coined the term tinker project, which is any playful endeavor of any size or scope that gives you permission to experiment with something that's been tugging at your soul, without regard to any particular outcome. That feels healthy and useful to me. But when people jump head first into project after project, drop a ton of cash on it, fill up their spare bedroom with hobby paraphernalia, only to grow increasingly estranged from their endeavor and abandon it a month later, something's off. Psychologists might chalk this behavior up to lack of commitment, indecisiveness or attention deficit disorder. One study even found that an abundance of abandoned hobbies was a telltale symptom of internet addiction. Here's my theory. If behind every closet door there lurks a confused mess, then there's something much darker going on. Underneath all that boredom might be an ocean of despair. Kierkegaard, widely considered to be the original gangster of existential philosophy, addressed this issue in his magnum opus. He used the metaphor of crop rotation to describe this manic behavior. He said it was a vulgar and intrinsic effort to overcome boredom by constantly seeking new stimulation in the external world. That's why people with too many hobbies end up dissatisfied no matter what they do. If too many things are important, none of them are. Kierkegaard said that the true rotation method comes in changing the crop and the mode of cultivation. Here we have at once the principle of limitation, the only saving principle in the world. The more you limit yourself, the more fertile you become in invention. One character you might know comes to mind. Kramer, the hipster doofus neighbor on the greatest sitcom of all time. There's a thought-provoking book about the philosophy embedded in each character, and here's the passage that struck me. Kramer has endless jobs, preoccupations, and breadless arts with which he has occupied himself. He wards off boredom with these fleeting commitments, and never truly faces himself, lost as he is in the spectacle of the moment, of the interest du jour. And when it ceases to be of interest to him, it ceases to be of value to him, so it is abandoned. This character makes for amazing television. Kramer merely had to walk into his neighbor's apartment, and the entire studio audience would erupt in applause. But in real life, this is not an aspirational character. When people have no moderating influence on their hobbies and buy endless supplies for projects that will never start or finish, it absolutely breaks my heart. Because their heart is in the right place. They want to create meaning and find joy and embrace their passions, but somewhere along the way, their primitive brain hijacked their heart in favorite of keeping boredom and despair at bay.

***What hobbies are you using to avoid truly facing yourself?***

April 11

## Who's on first?

Baseball leagues present a variety of annual awards and trophies to players. Achievements include rookie of the year, pitcher of the year, manager of the year, gold gloves, highest batting average, highest slugging percentage, top on base percentage, and outstanding designated hitter, to name a few. But there's one award the baseball leagues have never given out in over one hundred years of the sport. No player wins the singles crown at the end of the season. Because there's nothing exciting about small ball. Baseball is a sport, but it's also business that's optimized for live and broadcast entertainment. Stadium crowds and television viewers don't want to see another hot shot grounder up the middle. They want to be thrilled and awed by booming blasts over the outfield wall that defy gravity and make you stand up and scream. McGwire going yard seventy times a season into center field is what sells tickets. Sosa literally hitting the cover off the ball and crossing home plate with his trademark kiss pat kiss pat peace sign is what sells tickets. Not singles. Otherwise the game is boring. Think about how many times you've attended an unglamorous, low scoring three-hour ballgame where nothing happened except an unwholesome consumption of nachos and beer? But that's just it. When you hit singles, something does happen. Singles are the most unglamorous of hits in this sport, but singles win games. They consistently and regularly produce better returns over time. When you hit a ton of singles, bases fill up, runners advance and score, and the runs just keep coming in. A string of them can prove more powerful than a home run because it's easy to amortize what happens going forward when you keep putting a man on first. This analogy of hitting singles has been adopted in almost every area of life, from personal fitness to stock market investing to being married to raising children. And personal creativity management is no exception. Your strategy as a creator should be to step up to the plate and hit a single every day of your life. Prolific has a popular tool to execute this strategy called micro execution, which is the practice of creating incremental and meaningful work in a limited time frame. Doing so lowers the perceived threat level of execution so you can grow your leverage through small, daily bursts of action. You hit singles creatively, and it builds compound interest that adds up to big things over time. By tapping into the law of large numbers, your organization can consistently make reach its goals. Who's on first? Wow, maybe that's more than an absurdist comedy routine, but a viable business strategy. If you want to drive innovation at your company, hire steady eddies who hit singles all day long. Be content being in the business of getting on first. You won't win any trophies at the end of the season, and your stomach will still be full of nachos and beer. But your team will come out on top.

*Are you attempting to win by hitting home runs in the market when hitting singles typically outperforms?*

April 12

## **Behold, the brimming universe, awaiting our creative touch.**

Every creator has inner promptings that keep leading them where they are meant to go. Inspiration bubbles up like oil from a well, trying to tell the person that their spirit needs new form, and their only real job is to pay attention. Because whatever this thing is, it's here to tell them something. They may want to judge or control it, but the only question that matters is, where does this energy want to take them? This process is surprisingly difficult. Equipping ourselves to spot a new story with our own eyes, that's some high level creative labor. For me, it has always come back to questions. What does this feeling want from me? What wants to be written here? What type of flesh does this word demand to become? But the trick is, there are no immediate answers. That's not the point. Some questions aren't meant to be answered, rather, continually held in our awareness as we notice how they filter through the kaleidoscopic realm of our senses. This is the fertile void from which we receive breakthrough ideas. Personally, it makes my heart race and my skin flush. That's the first indicator to me, at a sensational level, that magic of creative inspiration is coming through my body. My mentor used to teach me about these prompting in terms of gender. It's a compelling way to frame the process. Because on one hand, there's the energy we generate, which contains more of an aggressive, outwardly masculine force. But there's also the energy that we open ourselves up to, which contains more of a receptive, inwardly feminine force. Which might not feel as virile and vigorous, particularly to men. But we learn to trust that this fire still has its own pyrotechnics that are profoundly bright and warm, and they can give us the light we need to move forward. Hell, we don't even need to see the entire path to know what our next step is. Just enough to put one foot in front of the other and advance to the next stone. Behold, the brimming universe, awaiting our creative touch, imploring our loving intention and attention. It's the best part about the job.

*Next time inspiration taps you on the shoulder, will you trust its invitation?*

April 13

## **Surrender to the past and spiral up instead of downward.**

Heraclitus, the great stoic philosopher, originated the saying, you cannot step in the same creative river twice. He observed that since ever-new waters were continually flowing on, change was inevitable. For it's not the same river and you're not the same man. The meditation was later adopted by many of his philosophical successors, who added comments like, all things are always in flux, all entities move and nothing remains still, the only constant is change, and so on. But the image of the river is still powerful. Especially as a metaphor for the creative process. Because one of the traps artists fall victim to is comparing their current project with their previous work. We remember all those mistakes, failures and rejections from the last time we attempted to do execute something like this, and the shame weighs us down. Our memories crush our confidence and slow our momentum. If you've ever stumbled through this state before, welcome to the club. It sucks. Downward spirals are difficult to get out of. That's why it's important to cut them off at the pass. There's a useful tool in personal creativity management called intercepting, which is when you lovingly step into your worry stream with a sense wonder to buffer against unhealthy behavior. This therapeutic intervention can be a godsend. It can help build mindfulness in otherwise impetuous moments. Say you're negatively comparing your current project to something you did years ago. Feeling the positive energy drain out of your body. Intercept your critical self. Knowing that it's not the same river and you're not the same man, ask these questions. With the new perspective you've gained since last time, how might you approach your work differently to be more efficient today? How might you approach this problem you're having with more mature and experienced eyes? Simply pausing and reflecting on how you are different and better than last time does wonders for your confidence. Now, if you're not big on questions, here is another way to use the tool of interception. At the moment of doubt and shame, try inserting some of your favorite quotations. Literally have them queued up on your phone to access at any time. There's a passage from a personal development book that always does it for me. Beck writes, a spiral is always growing, yet never covering the same ground, not merely an explanation of the past, but it's also a prophecy of the future. While it defines and illuminates what has already happened, it is also leading constantly to new discoveries. Those words remind me that whatever project I'm working on, I can't step in the same river twice. For it's not the same river and I'm not the same man. Hell, I've launched hundreds of products and services in my entrepreneurial career. Some were profitable, others were money pits. Some are embarrassing to go back and look at now, while others stand the test of time. But all of them mattered. All of them were practice for something else down the road. There was nothing that didn't contribute to the upward spiral of creative journey. Do you accept and forgive your past work in that way? If so, then that's going to serve your work well next time the shame comes crashing in and tries to derail your progress. Remember, we can't

benchmark normal in the past. History yields to instinct. When in doubt, try a little interception. Surrender to the past and spiral up instead of downward.

*What if you believed that was then and this is now?*



April 14

## **Building small monuments to our immortality.**

Creative people are enchanted by the possibility of building something that outlives them. Work that exists in the world after they're gone and touches the lives of millions and goes down in the history books. Ah, the faint hope of artistic immortality. Sounds pretty glamorous. And the scary part is, now that we have technology that will upload our memories to the cloud to allow us to live forever in online virtual worlds, immortality has never been more possible. But like many things in this life, just because we can, doesn't mean we should. Ambition is a beautiful thing, and everything wants to live a creative and meaningful life, but let's not reject the ancient truth that we are all mortals who must one day die. People who constantly obsess about building something that outlives them might be creative visionaries, but they're also denying death. Becker named this brand of transference the taming of terror. He called it an immortality formula. And if the transference is successful, then it alleviates a substantial weight off their shoulders. They can move through their daily with a certain amount of comfort. Because when they're gone, a piece of them will still be here. Person, the psychoanalyst whose book redefines the notion of power, researched the many dangers of our drive for complete dominance and our ruthless lust for total immortality. She found that when such a mindset dictates much of our behavior and consume much of our interior lives, our power actually becomes limited. And our grandiosity becomes one of the greatest enemies of actualizing our creative potential. Which doesn't mean you should just give up and go live beneath a bridge. The fact that we're all going to return to the dust doesn't doom any of us to obscurity or poverty. But if the cost of having a delusional sense of significance is our inability to grasp the moment we're living in right now, then it's probably not worth it. If our quest for eternal optimization deprives us from provoking joy while we are still alive, then it's probably not worth it. If our goal is to accrue as many small monuments to our immortality as possible, then it's probably not worth it. Holiday's book on ego being the enemy summarizes it beautifully. Though we think big, we must act and live small in order to accomplish what we seek. Because we will be action and education focused, and forgo validation and status, our ambition will not be grandiose but iterative. One foot in front of the other, learning and growing and putting in the time. Perhaps there is more to life than becoming the mythic man who has divinized and made immortal.

*How might you be denying death?*

April 15

## **Staying sane in a career landscape where nothing is predictable or stable.**

How do you professionalize your creative practice as legitimate, meaningful work? By punching out. You need a ritual of leave taking at the end of your workday. Doing so sets healthy boundaries to demarcate the line between personal and professional. One of the inventions from my innovation gameshow took this idea to a whole new level. Here's the ad copy for the commercial for my new product. Creative people have always needed a way to treat their art as working class job, but there's no physical way to commemorate that. Until now. Punchly is a wall-mounted time clock that helps professional artists embrace a blue-collar mindset and professionalize their creative practice. Combining modern industrial design with the latest smartphone technology, our product makes it easy for artists to clock in and clock out of their pretend workday. Plus, our compatible cloud communications technology is directly connected to your social media applications, that way it's fun and easy to compete with your other unemployed artists friends to see whose workaholicism is most severe. Clock in before your slacker friends, and you can earn badges and unlock new features! Punchly helps you clock in, make art, and clock out. Despite most of my ideas being absurd, offensive and impractical, this is one I'd actually like to see come to fruition. For many years, I kept a classic hotel concierge call bell on my desk. And every day when I finished my mission piece, I slammed my hand bell as hard as I could. Initially, it was sort of a joke. But what I found was, the physical movement of hitting the bell combined with the piercing chime that echoed through the room was deeply satisfying. In a career landscape where nothing is predictable or stable, discipline is the only thing creative people have control over. From your clients to your coworkers to industry trends to emerging technology, being an artist in the modern world can be a daunting quest. Particularly for those creators who work out of their homes. Boundaries don't exist. Ultimately, punching out is what helps the professional place punctuation marks throughout your day to gain a sense of normalcy and rhythm. That's where prolificacy lives.

*How do you know where you end and the work begins?*

April 16

## **Being grateful for steady progress.**

Persistence has two elements. First is our continued labor, our obstinate continuance in our course of action. That's the easy part. It's just physics and forward motion. The hard part of persistence is the second element, which is our unwillingness to abandon our approach because of outside influence. Our ability to sustain ourselves even without the input of others. The reason it's so hard is that we have to see something that isn't there. We have to be open to the complete possibility of what could be. Believing in our whole heart that our efforts will yield something, even if no one else does. Hoping that we'll gradually see things that will give us some recompense for our sacrifices, even if everyone thinks we're crazy. Most creative people know this intuitively. We resist work that would otherwise give us the greatest payoff, focus on things that probably won't yield the most dramatic and immediate results, and trust that who we become along the way will be worth it in the end. This growth process is frustrating and labor intensive and very few people will congratulate us on our persistence. In fact, many will shit on our entire journey. Probably because they're bitter about their own. And yet, there's really no shortcut. Seinfeld used to say that it takes seven years to find yourself and become a great comedian. That's a conservative estimate. Reminds of a screenwriter friend of mine who once joked, if people can talk you out of something with a question, then you don't really want it. Remember, persistence is never sexy, rarely popular and seldom rewarded. At least not from the outside. However, if you can train yourself to love the slog, to do the work for your own reasons, to make your sacrifice worthwhile simply by believing in it, then nobody can take it away from you.

*Are you seeking shortcuts, or being grateful for steady progress?*

April 17

## **What's the cash value of your existing fulfillment?**

During the recent global pandemic, there was a productivity meme going around that said, after years of wanting to thoroughly clean my house but lacking the time, this week I discovered that time wasn't the problem. It's funny because it's true. Human beings truly have a remarkable ability to delude ourselves. It's the talent that separates us from the animal kingdom, aka, is kicking the can down the road for months or years at a time, promising ourselves that we'll get around to certain things, yet knowing in our hearts that they're simply not going to happen. Denial, the, is an adaptive defense mechanism. It's evolutionarily advantageous for the propagation of our species. That is, until it's not. Until some crisis comes along and calls our bluff. And an unprecedented event happens that exposes the cracks in our armor. That's what makes tough times tough. They drag all our issues out of the dusty closet, and we're forced to confront the biting reality of our hidden feelings, neglected needs, human fragilities, toxic dependencies and inglorious pasts. What about you? Did the pandemic surface any of those bloody bits in your life? Sure did for me. Quarantine very much reminded me of my work at home days when I was a full time entrepreneur. And not in a good way, either. Sheltering in place made me realize just how poorly I ran my business for so long. Not to mention, how lonely of an existence it was. Oof, it makes me sad just thinking about it. Honestly, part of me was laughing at my younger self during the pandemic, thinking, wow, I would have been completely fucked if this virus struck a decade ago. My business would have evaporated like a fart in the wind. Dodged the bullet on that one. However, crisis does more than just expose our weaknesses. It may punish us for our previous bad decisions, but it also rewards us for our good ones. My mentor used to tell me that your life will always catch up with you, either to pat you on the back, or kick you in the ass. That's another one of those evolutionarily advantageous, adaptive traits of the human species. If our meaning making machinery is already in fine working order, then we're harder to kill. If we've already put in the work to build a life of individuation and wholeness and connection, then we're more resilient. And if we know how to interpret traumatic events in such a way that we don't lose our innate peace, then survival is a matter of course, rather than a hard fought, brutal victory. It doesn't mean there aren't challenges and frustrations along the way. But if there was ever an underrated source of leverage in this life, it's our current state of fulfillment. Did you ever notice that happy and healthy people are harder to control, harder to scare, and harder to sell consumer goods to? There's a reason for that. Because when you already have a satisfying life to begin with, stupid bullshit won't distract you from it. Those messages don't work on someone who is already okay with themselves. It reminds me of another meme that was going around during the pandemic. In only two weeks, this man lost two weeks.

***What did your last crisis reveal about you?***

April 18

## **Low expectation doesn't mean a lack of ambition.**

The thing about changing the world is, it depends on your definition of change, and it depends on your definition of world. Now, for those of us whose little lamps of idealism are still burning, this is a liberating insight. Because instead of feeling burdened by the weight of our expectations, and instead of setting ourselves up for disappointment and exhaustion with our overly romantic standards for attaining utopia, we can actually change the world in way that's uniquely appealing to us. As my coach reminds me, our ambitions don't have to be grandiose to be meaningful, they only have to be clear. My favorite songwriter was recently reflecting on his thirty-year career as an artist. Phillips explained that he is now in the business of reaching less people more deeply. He was becoming more useful to the people closest to him, rather than becoming a global superstar and changing the lives of millions. Less people, more deeply. Those four words had a profound effect on me. Because his definition of changing the world came from a place of humility and purpose, not romanticism and ego. It was uniquely appealing to where he was in his life, career, and relationships. A humble reminder that having low expectation doesn't mean a lack of ambition. Look, as long as we're expressing our gifts to make a difference in all parts of our life, then the number of people we reach, and the scale of the change we create, is irrelevant. Obviously, the practical is never as heavenly as the ideal. We'd all love to be the linchpin that changed the world on a global scale. But accepting that our ambitions are humbler than they used to be, and being totally okay with that, this is precisely what allows fulfillment to have a real chance at us.

*What if you changed the world just by being alive?*

April 19

## **Breaking open the seal and letting the light in.**

Brandeis, the Supreme Court justice who pioneered the concept of right to privacy, is famous for his maxim. Sunlight is the best disinfectant. In his renowned article on what publicity can do, he outlined how transparency with respect to the dissemination of information promotes the social acceptance of an idea or institution. That publicity is justly commended as a remedy for social and industrial diseases. And in fact, the original version of his quotation, while not as lyrical, still holds up. If the broad light of day could be let in upon men's actions, it would purify them as the sun disinfects. There's a powerful business application of this maxim. It's the great forcing function of reality. Like when a startup publishes their entire funding history. Or when charities post all of their revenues, donations and expenses. Or when software companies reveal public salary details of every team member. Or when the favorite restaurant has an open kitchen to reassure customers of their impeccable hygiene conditions. They're breaking open the seal and letting the light in, trusting that it's not going to burn them alive. This topic has been a great passion of mine since the first day of wearing a nametag. Because in my experience, anytime anyone gives themselves less incentive to get away with bad behavior through a healthy dose of social pressure, it's better for everyone. What's more, the sunlight principle also has applications on a productivity level. Employees can introduce sunlight in their interactions to help build accountability, which helps build momentum. Hoffman, one of my favorite entrepreneurial mystics, explains that speed is more important than having an exquisitely run organization. You don't have time to be patient and wait for things to work out, he says, you have to act quickly and decisively. There's always a lot of change, and much of it isn't voluntary. In the interest of speed, you might even surprise or blindside your people to reduce the time required to make and implement important decisions. This doesn't mean throw your boss under the bus, but merely expose them to more sunlight. Say you need a final answer on the design of your new landing page. Don't send a calendar invite and set up a brainstorming meeting and spend forty minutes of everyone's time hashing out the details. Simply walk up to the creative director's desk with two pieces of paper in your hand, present them with the different design options, ask them to quickly pick a or b, thank them for their decision, and let them get back to work. Catch them off guard if you have to. Force the decision to be made publicly and quickly. It will be fine, and more importantly, it will be fast.

*Whose behavior could you positively influence by introducing a little sunlight?*

April 20

## **Busy stoking the boilers of innovation.**

There's a famous article in a science periodical from the thirties that profiles the outstanding contributors to human welfare. My favorite section is when the journalist reveals that most of the world's greatest inventors don't even know how many inventions they've made. Edison probably had one of his staff members keeping an inventory of his thousands of creations, but odds are, he couldn't spit out his final number on a moment's notice. Nor would he care to. The inventor was too busy making things to count how many things he made. This approach to creation is counterintuitive to today's mindset. Management gurus and entrepreneurs preach that what can't be measured, can't be managed. But innovation is a much broader concept than the black and white world of sales or customer service. The creative process is actually more meaningful than what it produces, so the mantra is different. Because if it's never been done before, then that means you can't quantify it. Which means, what can't be measured, probably matters. Ask someone who makes things for a living. Do you think they give a damn about vanity metrics like views, likes, shares and traffic? No way. They're far too busy giving everything, and that's why they quantify nothing. Harvard once surveyed two hundred senior innovation executives and found that many companies were suffering from measuring too much. There's a danger that measurement sucks up resources better devoted to cultivating and testing new ideas, researchers said. Companies may find real comfort with their reports and governance, but it means they can spend all their energy measuring stuff if they're not careful. In fact, there may be an inverse correlation between the intensity of a company's obsession with measuring innovation and the breakthroughs it generates. Now, does this mean we should be measuring nothing? If it were up to me, yes. But being a businessman isn't really forte. I'm the most right brained, process oriented, noncompetitive, infinite game player you'll ever meet. But for those people who are busy stoking the boilers of innovation on a corporate level, it's worth asking if there's a proper balance between executing the work and assessing it.

*Are you the fastest at something not worth measuring?*

April 21

## **Caveat auctor, aka, seller beware.**

Starting a company has become the thing to do. It's the default activity for today's seekers. Like swing dancing in the forties, belonging to a civic organization in the fifties, starting a garage band in the sixties, joining a cult in the seventies, enrolling in business school in the eighties, going to therapy in the nineties, or taking improv classes in the two thousands, every decade has its zeitgeist. It's simply a matter of economics and culture. Consider the factors at play here. We have instant connectivity, rampant globalization, resource abundance, workforce shifts, economic prosperity, funding availability and most importantly, Shark Tank. Is it any surprise that everyone is now infected with the entrepreneur bug? And yet, it's seductive. The fact that it's sexy and everyone is doing it and loving it and sharing pictures of their incredible entrepreneurial journey, that seems proof enough. But as someone who ran a publishing business full time for many years, and then retired to enter into the corporate world, allow me to offer some perspective. Just because some bubble has created a hugely overvalued market based on nothing more than whimsical fantasy, doesn't mean you should start a company. Just because you think that launching an independently run business is a viable option, doesn't mean it makes sense in the current economic climate to do so. Just because you have a brilliant idea and a desire to create your own schedule, doesn't mean your enterprise will attract wealthy investors and establish a loyal consumer base. Just because you're passionate and smart and everyone you know is starting a business, doesn't mean you should quit your day job tomorrow. Statistics from the bureau of labor remind us. Eighty percent of companies survive their first year in business. Sixtyish survive their second year. Half survive their fifth year. Thirty percent survive their tenth year. Caveat emptor, the old saying meaning, buyer beware, might benefit from its opposite. Caveat auctor. Seller beware.

***Will the thrill of your passion dissipate once it becomes a daily task?***



April 22

## **Champion your team so everyone wins.**

Certain people have a special talent for finding third-party support. It's the intersection of several different abilities, each of which can help build momentum in the execution of their ideas. There is the vulnerability of asking for support, the resourcefulness of locating support, the leadership of infecting others with a vision, the craft of delivering creative direction for the work, the humility of surrendering control when necessary, the resilience of collaborating effectively over time and distance, the nuance of being a great client to work with, the habit of project completion that makes both partners want to work together again, and the connection of building an ongoing and mutually valuable relationship. There's a lot there. But it's all part of the equation. In fact, it makes me want to create a software product. Because for those of us who do find and use a lot of third-party support, it would be helpful to have a way to spread the word as an expression of our gratitude. Rahster is the name. For anyone who has ever struggled to refer vendors that they hire in an easy and public way, now your problems are over. Our new web application will help your small business organize, rate and share your list of vendors that you use to execute your projects. Anytime somebody asks who you hired for a certain task, you can simply send them to your company profile and they can do the same. Rahster. Champion your team so everyone wins. Remember, honoring our humility in admitting our need for help is only the first step. Finding third party help is a real talent, and the sooner we develop it, the faster our ideas will become real in the world.

*Do you know a universe of people you can ask for help?*

April 23

## **Choosing not to believe in the devil won't protect you from him.**

The corrupting vapors of the world are impossible to ignore. There is widespread political exploitation on both sides of the aisle. Greed seems to be elevated to the status of a virtue. Ruthless bullies are elected into high offices and celebrated as heroes. Public figures are regularly committing shamelessly immoral acts. Multibillion-dollar corporations screw over customers and it has no effect on their bottom line whatsoever. Narcissistic power hungry sociopaths break the law with zero consequences. This is our reality. But allowing the vapors to overwhelm and consume our life is not the answer. Choosing not to believe in them doesn't make them go away either. We have to find a way to not give nourishment to the world's evil. What is useful is processing those vapors through an awareness plan. Leff coined this term in his book about cognitive science. It's a metacognitive procedure or mental recipe for perceiving and thinking about the environment around you. A lens for interacting with the world. A plugin for the human operating system. One awareness plan we can use to cope with the crushing reality of the world is the filter of our individual role. As an example, let's say there was high-ranking public official who was crucified by the media for multiple political scandals. Shouldn't be hard to imagine that. Depending on your temperament, circumstance and preference, here are several awareness plans you might use in response. As an activist, use your anger as fuel to fight back and get laws passed that create real change. As a stoic, accept that the world is fighting an unwinnable battle and focus on your inner life instead. As a mystic, simply let the chaos drip away like water and go tend to your own little garden. As an optimist, find grace and harmony in places others overlook and use that energy to infect others. As an artist, make meaningful use of the chaos by metabolizing your emotions into creations that inspire others. As a spectator, divorce yourself from the horror and try to enjoy the freak show from a distance. As an absurdist, surrender to the madness and revel in the sheer ridiculousness of being human and being alive right now. As a comedian, reframe your pain into joyful moments that give people permission laugh in the face of misfortune. Which role do you most identify with? Which role was not on the list that you might try? Listen, there are no guarantees that any of these awareness plans will salve the pain. But when society seems to be coming apart at the seams, and you start to believe that it's utterly foolish to try to stop the descent into chaos, it might be worthwhile to bring a greater level of awareness to your response.

*What are you still pretending not to know?*

April 24

## **Clogging up the pipes of prolificacy.**

And now for a brief list of things that don't exist. Closure, certainty, consistency, consensus, control, cleanness and completeness. To name a few. Kind of absurd that they all start with the same letter, right? God bless the absurdity of this mess called life. But the good news is, in the absence of all of those things, each of us still has the ability to get clarity around our own intentions. That is worth its weight in gold. Being an entrepreneur taught me this lesson numerous times. Because from a personality standpoint, planning isn't my thing. Never has been. Structure and routine and ritual, yes, but when it comes to the ideation and execution of projects, planning is both an allergy and a four-letter word. In my experience, my finest work comes from responding to the world from an inner sense of what I'm feeling in a particular creative season of my life, not what was carefully mapped out on document seven months ago. That's the power of clarity, and it has never let me down. What about you? To what degree are you much of a planner? Has that trait been helpful for your work, or has it clogged the pipes of prolificacy? In many cases, people become addicted to planning because they crave certainty. Which makes total sense. We live in a circus of a world that's as insane as it is unjust, and as disappointing as it is confusing. It's only human to want certainty. But once you discover that certainty doesn't actually exist, you have to pick something else. In my experience, you can aim for clarity instead. My startup founder boss was big on clarity, as he was not a planner by nature either. He used to remind our marketing team, planning too far in advance is a waste of effort, since our reality is only going to change six months from now anyway. Sure enough, that change happened multiple times during my tenure at the company. We worked in the travel industry, and it was amazing how a single isolated event, like a viral video of a passenger being forcefully removed from an overbooked airplane, could impact the competitive landscape, stock market, consumer preferences, industry behavior and federal policy. Overnight our company experienced a public relations nightmare that lasted for months. So much for all of our clever plans. Good thing we had a crystal clear brand intention to anchor us. Point being, whether planning is your thing or not, the goal is understanding which moments belong to you, like clarity; and which moments are out of your control, like certainty. If you're feeling that creative tug to start something, concert your tug into a clear, directional and specific intention. And then let go of the rest. Because change is taking place everywhere at every moment, and it's not interested in how certain you want to feel.

*Are you still chasing something that doesn't exist?*

April 25

## Since when was comfort a prerequisite for creativity?

Most organizations pay lip service to the idea of innovation, but they secretly want their employees to just do their jobs. Innovation might be something they want to want, and know they should want, and enjoy telling people that they do want. But spend a few minutes inside one of these companies, where the majority of people's jobs is to not get fired, and quickly you'll see that what they really want is to pick the safest idea with the greatest potential to keep things exactly as they are. Strangely enough, that's okay with me. It's not my job to be the world's innovation manager. My savior complex isn't that strong. My interest is not in convincing organizations that don't practice innovation that they're wrong. Rather, my focus is on the people and teams who actually want to become prolific in their creative work. To quote the founder of my startup, a company is, among many things, a marketplace of ideas. It's this magical bazaar where people regularly gather to sell and purchase intellectual effects, conceptual assets and creative goods. Does that resonate with your organizational culture? If so, read on. Today we're going to explore two tools from the personal creativity management system that will help keep your ideas marketplace open for business. The first one is called notes junkie. It's a hyperactive listening model for giving team members more approachable, memorable and actionable feedback. After all, much of your work as company leader is paying attention. Reflecting people's creative realities back to them. My recommendation is to figure out a unique template for processing and delivering that feedback. Create a personalized way to people them a front row seat to their own brilliance. Quick case study. Years ago, my public speaking colleagues used to tell me that one of the things they appreciated most about having me in their audience was the way my notes were structured. After watching one of their speeches, I'd send them a one pager of ideas, encouragements, observations and recommendations. And apparently, the way those notes were compartmentalized and memorialized made for easy digestion and application. That's why I built software to help others do the same. Check it out, [here](#) and think about how you can become your own notes junkie to plant seeds of innovation in people's minds and give them optimism and momentum. Speaking of planting seeds, let's talk about another tool. It's called caving, which is a tool for trusting the creative process to lead you toward profitable discoveries. The whole concept hinges on a question that, frankly, should be plastered on your office walls. How can we do something we've never done before today? It may sound like a zen koan, but it's exactly what innovating feels like. Walking through a cave where you can only see six feet in front of you. And so, if somebody on your team has potentially game changing idea, something that is difficult to visualize in its nascent state, give them the green light anyway. Encourage them to surprise themselves as they learn what the idea wants to be, rather than forcing it into a box. It's the difference between creating and discovering, and it's a powerful awareness plan for driving innovation. Ultimately, if you truly want your organization to innovate and influence the broader culture with your products, then the tools are

ready for you. It may not feel as safe as the status quo, but then again, since when was comfort a prerequisite for creativity?

*Are you interested in innovating, or interested in looking like an organization that innovates?*

April 26

## **Compels us to lift ourselves up out of the mud.**

Motivation doesn't happen to us, it happens in us. Which means the question we should ask ourselves is, what is the cost of inaction? After all, if the pain of staying the same doesn't outweigh the pain of change, then we will never create a strong enough reason to motivate ourselves. It's the simple calculus of human motivation. People rarely do anything about their pain until it gets to the point where they just can't take it anymore. What we really need is a healthy sense of disgust. One of my fake inventions was to create app for people who can't work out alone. Fitbud would be a calendar and meetup service for gyms and fitness centers that want to help unmotivated members meet their fitness goals. No longer would unmotivated people lean on the excuse that they don't have an accountability buddy. Now people can get connected, get guns, and get their life moving in a healthy direction. Fitbud makes sure people never sweat alone again. It's a cool idea, but despite my incorrigible optimism, it might be too positive to work. Won't change the fact that people's fear of taking action is probably great enough to cause them to cling onto their current state. Maybe what people really need is a social mirror function that reflects their sad state of affairs back to them. Not to the point that they lose all faith and hang themselves with a bungee cord, but just enough disgust so that the cost of staying where they are isn't worth it anymore. Maisel takes a humanistic approach to motivation. He writes in his encouraging book on depression that when a meaning crisis occurs, we become emotionally unwell, usually calling the experience depression. But rarely do we recognize that a meaning event has just occurred and that, in order to feel better, we must take action by making new meaning. The secret that his philosophy taught me was, we don't even need to take that much action in the beginning. All we need is that little spark of disgust at what our lives have become to compel us to lift ourselves up out of the mud for, say, sixty seconds, just to get started doing something, hell, anything, and we might just accrue enough momentum to pull ourselves out. Because each time we take action, we strengthen the motivating force behind that action. Making it easier the next time, and the next time after that, and the next time after that, and so on and so forth until motivation has become second nature. It's simply calculus. The pain of staying where we are must outweigh the pain of changing. If we want to create a new expectation about our ability to motivate ourselves, then we need to train ourselves to evaluate whether our distress is significant enough to compel action.

*Is your fear great enough to cause you to cling onto your current state?*

April 27

## **Compost for worlds we cannot yet imagine.**

Rock once observed that when it comes to hecklers, both in person and online, people can only offend him if they mean something to him. His joke was, we can't break up if we didn't date. It's a shining example of someone who isn't worried about losing a game that he isn't playing. Rock is free to create the game he's most committed to playing, not to mention, motivated to reinvent that game while he's playing it. Even if you're not a celebrity millionaire performer like he is, that doesn't make the concept any less applicable. Because so many of us develop the feeling that we're losing our game. Or that we're playing the wrong one. We're drowning in work, dying of thirst from the lack of it, or worst yet, becoming dehumanized from the loneliness of trying to find it. Take it from someone who has slogged through all three of those agonizing scenarios. Brutalizing to the soul. The upside is, when you feel like you're losing, you can still change the game you're playing. When you feel like you're done with the game or the game is done with you, you can still pivot to something else. But only if you are willing to surrender. Only if you're ready learn to operate outside of your precious identity, let go of some ways you defined yourself in the past and break some of the rules you worked so hard to build. For me, that process of letting go meant taking my career, something that used to be the heart of me, and making it just a part of me. It's not an easy task for a workaholic. When your career is your only conduit to a sense of self and your sole point of identification, letting go feels like a death of the darkest order. Which probably explains the panic attacks. Whyte wrote it best in his inspiring essay about ambition. We are all compost for worlds we cannot yet imagine. Realizing its inescapable nature, we all can see heartbreak not as the end of the road or the cessation of hope, but as the close embrace of the essence of what we have wanted or are about to lose. And so, letting go of playing our outdated game doesn't mean we don't care. It doesn't mean we're giving up. It simply means that we are no longer invested in building a brick wall to keep things from changing. It's a tough way to live, but a damned good way not to die. Jason, my cartoonist friend and kindred spirit, says that if we're not careful, we can get duped into playing a game we don't even care about, and end up making choices that distract us from a game that does.

***Once you let go of the ego's stranglehold, what will become available to you?***

April 28

## **Convert mistakes into lessons and lessons into habits.**

The greatest motivator for starting new habits is public embarrassment. The experience creates just enough guilt and fear and humiliation to positively change our behavior for good. When my boss chewed me out for overlooking a very obvious spelling error on an important client-facing document, all of the blood drained from my face and a wave of humiliation flew threw me. Stupid, stupid, stupid. Excuse me while I go slam my head repeatedly into a piece of electronic equipment with small knobs and buttons. However, instead of spending the next three days pouring salt on that wound, I remembered something my mentor once taught me. Convert mistakes into lessons and lessons into habits. And so, I built out a new editing workflow for client documents. One that forced me to take extra time and be more mindful of the details. This process involves printing pages out, reading them aloud, editing with a different colored pen and even cutting and copying text into different formats, just to make sure there weren't any spelling or grammatical errors. It's a little extra work, but it doesn't eat up too much time, and it's worth it to avoid the embarrassment of being yelled at again. That's a habit. It started as a mistake, and then turned into a lesson, and now each time I practice it, I reinforces my new pattern of smarter thinking. Remember, failure doesn't have to be expensive; it merely has to be embarrassing.

*What moment helped your habits get engraved so deep that they became natural and instinctual?*



April 29

## **Correcting the habits that have limited us for so long.**

Happiness is a mental habit. But so is depression. Both of these emotional states result from our lifelong practices and sequences and patterns of conscious thought. What's encouraging, though, is that we don't have to remain biological slaves to our routines. Cognitive behavioral psychology research indicates that any conditioned habit the human brain has learned, can also be unlearned. Even if we're predisposed to a particular behavior, we can still train ourselves to act otherwise. It just takes time. And patience. And forgiveness. And delayed gratification. And the willingness to guard against anything that might weaken our valuable new habit. Without those elements, we might never give our bodies and minds the necessary time to memorize the new habits we start. We might never be able to engrave habits so deep that they become natural and instinctual. Rubin's research on the invisible architecture of everyday life offers a solid suggestion. Don't focus on rewards to motivate yourself. That undermines habit formation. Instead, she says, find your reward within the habit itself. Give yourself a sense of advancement, but without the risks presented by a finish line. Continuous progress is more important. That was my challenge with meditation is for many years. Because as a classic racing brain creative, sitting still was like torture for my mind. But with the help of a brilliant therapist, I learned to stop treating meditation as a tranquilizer that helped me get more ideas for my next project, and started delighting in the daily practice of making the creative container bigger. There was no finish line. All that mattered was enjoying the race. Whatever habit you're trying to learn, or in most people's case, unlearn, find your reward within the habit itself. Be patient with yourself. Humans always assume things are going to be easier in the future. We think to ourselves, okay, starting tomorrow, I'm going to be perfect for the rest of my life. But changing habits takes real work.

*How are you learning to let go of the subtle notions that limit you?*

April 30

## **Create abundance where there appears to be scarcity.**

Anger is based on the false belief that things are finite. That the more other people have of something, whether it's inspiration or money or attention or success or adulation, the less there is available for us. But that's just the grip of competition and scarcity squeezing our hearts. It's like the newly rescued dog who thinks he's competing with other pets in the house at mealtime. And so, every morning, he inhales his food without even chewing, but then pukes it up five minutes later. Meanwhile, underneath the kitchen sink is a forty-pound bag of grain free kibble packed full of protein and omega fatty acids that supports the dog's skin and coat health. He just doesn't realize it. Because he's too locked into survival mode. That's how humans behave when it comes to competition. We're so deeply lulled into the mindless trance, that we don't realize that the pie is massive. We don't realize that there are more slices than we could possibly imagine. And we don't realize that because other people have these things that we want is the very proof that prosperity is available. In fact, every time comparison tries to cloud the clarity of my vision, I always recite the following mantra to myself. The fact that it happened at all means that it's possible. That's what helps me remain a stranger to the economics of scarcity.

*What will you say to yourself to create abundance where there appears to be none?*

**MAY**

May 1

## **Criticizing is a defense against joy.**

Flexing our intellectual muscles can be intoxicating. Using our brains for real stretches of time is a satisfying meaning investment. In fact, for many people, intellectual life is a form of spiritual survival. It's a trusted weapon to stave off bitterness and despair. And yet, there's a fine line between expressing ourselves and taking major issue with things most people don't care about enough to think about, much less form an opinion on. For example, everyone has that one friend who is constantly swept away by their natural urge to criticize every goddamn thing in sight. Always following some bizarre train of thought in their head, they never actually experience joy. They just try to fix everything. Collecting injustices like beads on a string. Which can get very exhausting very quickly. Not only for the people in their presence, but for the person themselves. Maisel explains in his book about mental spaces that this fierce need to assert ourselves can produce lifelong emotional consequences. Rage against injustice, he warns, but also observe what that rage is doing to your system. Is this fight really worth the wear and tear? Do you honestly need to go on another useless crusade to prove something that does not need to be proved? Batman himself said it best. A vigilante is just a man lost in the scramble of his own gratification. On the other hand, when we stop trying to figure out everything, and switch gears to simply enjoying it, it's amazing how much lighter life becomes. Remember, never underestimate the human brain's ability to intellectualize life into a mess. Use your mind, but never as a defense against joy.

*As you criticize the trees, are you missing the beauty of the forest?*

May 2

## **Cynicism has become our chief export.**

Two things that can't exist simultaneously. Negativity and inspiration. That's why cynics have such a difficult time innovating. With all that bitterness coursing through their veins, their minds can never be fully freed up to create an endless flow of creative ideas. There's too much blockage. Even if a couple good ideas are floating around in there somewhere, they'll never drift into a position where they can be used. Like a hockey player falling through a frozen lake and not being able to swim back to the surface because of all those pesky blocks of ice. Point being, it will be extremely hard to unlock your innovative capacities if you're encrusted with layers and layers of psychological defenses. Fortunately, there's an exciting new product to solve that very problem. It's ideal for creative people who live in big, cold cities, where the temperament is as brutal as the temperature. Cynync is a positive affirmation app for people who move to big cities and can't stand all those cynical jerks walking around. If you live where people are cold, hard, rude and all-knowing, our hourly push notifications send you personalized words of encouragement. Never let the burden of bad attitudes weigh you down again. Our app gives you the heart to be happy and the nerve to be hopeful. We help you stay up when the city brings you down. Download now. Truth be told, this is not a real app. It's one of the many inventions from my product development and innovation card game. But it could be real. And maybe it should be. Imagine how many innovative ideas people would come up with if their minds were finally freed through the power of positive mindset. Sound old fashioned? That's the point. Optimism used to be national hallmark of our culture, and now it's a quant relic of the past. Cynicism has become our chief export, and it's blocking the flow of originality that used to define us.

*How will you shuck off the impenetrable shroud that keeps out the positive?*

May 3

## **Why wearing heels is good for creativity.**

Do you want your audience to respect your talent? You need a stiletto moment. Don't worry, no need to slip into the most uncomfortable shoes known to man. Instead, think of a stiletto as a moment of compressing your portfolio of talents into a tight little package that demonstrates the full firepower of your creative arsenal. Becoming a master of this personal creativity management tool will help you make holy shit moments that help persuade audiences to keep coming back and clients to rehire you in the future. Allow me to share a case study from my own journey. Nine years after shutting down my failed home video production studio, an insurance company who had hired me for a few trainings over the years commissioned me to be the guinea pig of their new learning and development initiative. Scott, would you be able to create a corporate education program about goal setting and deliver it live at our in house production facility? Absolutely, I said. Done that kind of thing hundreds of times before. Let's book a date, and here's my fee. Sixth months later, I found myself sitting in the middle of a cutting edge video production studio with a thousand dollar microphone on my lapel. Staring at me were five members of the production crew, along with several people from the insurance organization, unsure of what to expect, as this was their pilot program. Once the audio and video tests were a go, people quietly and nervously walked back to the control room, closed the soundproof door, and awaited the start of my presentation. The room was silent, cold and fertile for creation. Nothing but me and a bunch of expensive cameras. Okay, here goes nothing. When that red light goes on, it's showtime. Action, yelled the producer over the loudspeaker. Sure enough, the next hour flowed like water. It was an absolute joy. I quickly discovered that I could rest in the center point of my quiet competence, because all of that practice in my apartment years before had prepared me to excel and rise up and meet the challenge of the moment. Saying those words felt like taking the full spectrum of my talents and focusing them through the prism to create one pure light. Even in such a silent room, my confidence was trained to hear an audience reaction when there was none. Sixty minutes later, somebody yelled out. The staff and crew came out of the production studio clapping their hands, saying it was not only phenomenal, but also efficient. No need to do another take, we got everything we need. Thanks! My friends, that was a stiletto moment. This is the power of unconscious competence. When you're willing to trust your talents, when the red light goes on, you will be able to execute without the need for excessive preparation or editing. Like the heel itself, you concentrate a large amount of force into a small area.

*When was the last time you create a holy shit moment?*

May 4

## **Dancers mustn't kick too high, and buildings shouldn't reach the sky.**

Aristotle said that quality was not an act but a habit. Ruskin said that quality was never an accident. Lasseter said that quality is the best business plan. They're all right. Before we even sit down and get to work, each of us must contend with this complex and misunderstood concept. Asking ourselves tough questions like, well, how do we uniquely define quality? What choices will we make as we think about it? And how will we set such a high standard with our work that a cheap version would simply not be acceptable? Without this kind of intention around quality, it won't happen. It's just not one of those things that gets left to chance. What's more, we won't be able to capitalize on luck without quality to anchor it. Roark's speech from the legendary trial comes to mind. We have, let's say, sixty years to live. Most of that time will be spent working. But we've chosen the work we want to do. If we find no joy in it, then we're only condemning ourselves to sixty years of torture. And we can find the joy only if we do our work in the best way possible to us. But the best is a matter of standards, and we set our own standards. We inherit nothing and we stand at the end of no tradition. We may, perhaps, stand at the beginning of one. Naturally, this approach won't guarantee acceptance, appreciation, adulation or achievement. Just because something is great doesn't mean anyone will care. Which is why it's so important that we care. That we drip quality, bit by bit, day by day, because doing so makes us feel more alive. Not that everything we do has to be the greatest thing there ever was, but hell, in a world where everything seems to be just good enough, it feels pretty damn electrifying to make something great. Focus your energy on the part of the equation you control, which is the greatness of your work. Answer only to your own artistic standard of excellence. And lift your standing in the marketplace only by the quality of your work, not by pushing other people down. Because when you give the future something to respect, you give yourself a history to be proud of.

*Are you working for your own high standards, or for someone else's approval?*

May 5

## **Dare to lose control and let the joy carry you.**

Reacher once said that life was built out of freak chances, however much people would like to pretend otherwise. And so, we shouldn't waste our time fantasizing how things might have been different, burning our energy away with useless speculation. It's a helpful mantra for dealing with the unsettling uncertainties of life. Specifically, when it comes to our work. Because we can pore over the metrics on sales and readers and views and shares and comments, killing ourselves trying to recreate lightning in a bottle, but the reality is, moments of creative brilliance are mostly luck. They're a byproduct of beautiful timing. We just like to look for meaning where there is none, because we're too afraid to accept randomness. When I first started my business, I used to keep detailed records of monthly web traffic, number of daily users, statistics about which articles performed the best, even a detailed ledger on positive word of mouth about my brand. And although it made me feel professional and organized and popular, it didn't ultimately make a difference in my enterprise. I was just soothing myself. Inventing superfluous metrics just to gain a sense of control. Eventually, though, I began to release my grip of control on my life and just let the joy carry me. Instead of speculating about the past, I created for the future. Instead of being the voice that condemned the darkness, I became that light that illuminated it. And slowly, life started to become more relaxing, more productive, more meaningful and more profitable. Remember, once you recognize control for the illusion it is, there's nothing to fear, nothing to prove, nothing to hide and nothing to lose.

*Are you trying to control life or allowing it to flow abundantly through you?*



May 6

## **Declare the pennies on your eye.**

My friend was once telling me how she received stock options from her previous employer. Unfortunately, the ninety-day period was closing in. And if she didn't exercise her options, her shares would expire. She wasn't sure what to do about the situation, so my other friend, who has a background in accounting and finance, jumped in. Here was his advice to her. The emotional and psychological burden of having to think about this is very high. Holding the stock means that you're psychologically tied to a company that you don't even work for anymore. You're focusing on this thing that you're not a part of anymore, and it's not the healthiest way to think. And so, my recommendation is, take what you can get, sell the shares, take your bonus, go treat yourself to something nice, and close this chapter of your life. His advice reiterates my theory about something called the sanity tax. It's when we take proactive action to wipe a problem out of our life. Even if that means incurring some kind of opportunity cost, it's worth it for the privilege to not think about something ever again. We all have things like this in our lives. There is some minor cost that is disproportionate to the massive value we get in return. We pay more to get what we need rather than settling for less out of guilt, pride, consistency or frugality. We spend money to save time, reduce stress and increase joy, not the other way around. Unfortunately, for people who haven't yet been schooled in the time value of money, the sanity tax won't make sense. And that's okay. Not everyone has achieved a station in life where they can abide by such a principle. A game changing exercise that might help you is to calculate your hourly rate. Divide your annual salary by two thousand, and you'll get an approximate number. It's not perfect, but it will help you become more protective of your time, your talent and your treasure. Keep that number in the back of your mind throughout the day, and soon you'll train yourself to identify moments in which paying the sanity tax is absolutely worth every penny. Life is already burdensome enough. There's no need to psychologically tie yourself to more things than are necessary. Harrison had it right when he sang, now my advice for those who die, declare the pennies on your eyes, cause I'm the taxman, and you're working for no one but me.

*What price have you earned the right not to pay anymore?*

May 7

## **Demonstrate to yourself that you are determined to move forward.**

The problem with revenge is, it keeps pain and violence in circulation. And from a purely economical scale, it's not an intelligent use of resources. There are better ways to spend your time and money and energy. I'm reminded of a great line from an old western novel. The cowboy says: All that time you're spending trying to get back what was taken from you, more is going out the door. And after a while, you just try and get a tourniquet on it. The question is, how do you stop the bleeding? How do you reconcile the thieves and cheaters and freeloaders who believe they're entitled to wet their beaks on your every achievement? Simple. Take action. Make progress. Cut yourself loose from the dead hand of the past. Keep your eyes off the rear view mirror, keep adding energy to the system and keep moving the story forward. That's the most economical, least stressful way to live. Whereas sitting around feeling sorry for yourself, proclaiming that everywhere you leak the world hangs a bucket, is a recipe for disappointment and bitterness. It's just another distraction to diminish your sense of progress. I've been publishing my writing for over fifteen years. And I've lost count of the number of people who have blatantly pirated and plagiarized my material. But taking legal action and sending strongly worded letters and calling people onto the carpet wasn't doing a damn thing. And so, I let it go. I accepted the leaks in my bucket as the cost of doing business. I stopped looking into the rear view mirror. I started demonstrating to myself that I was determined to move forward. And over time, I freed my heart from bitterness and came out on the other side with clean heart. Take your momentum wherever you can find it. Buoy yourself by the prospect of any kind of progress. Because there's nothing more infuriating than being left hanging silently over the path on which no steps were taken.

***How will you demonstrate to yourself that you are determined to move forward?***

May 8

## **Speed in the micro, patient in the macro.**

Sometimes you're the tortoise, and sometimes you're the hare. The great creative discipline is knowing which animal your moment calls for. Because both approaches are useful in achieving different goals. As we learned from the old fable, there's a time to use the hare's ingenuity and trickery, and there's also time to use the tortoise's patience and persistence. It all depends whether you're thinking micro or macro. How effective are you at detecting which cycle to use? Consider the day-to-day team environment within an organization. Building a bias for speed is disproportionately useful in the micro. When you learn to start projects quickly without obsessing over the details, your team gathers the necessary momentum to move from idea to implementation. And that ultimately increases the velocity at which your collective creative engine generates meaningful output. This is why most development teams at tech startups use two to four week sprints. This timeboxed iteration of continuous development helps them iterate quickly, get user feedback, and iterate again. Incrementally improving each time they ship. Score one point for the hare. Speed in the micro wins. On the other hand, many teams will simply leave projects alone to percolate on their own sweet ass schedule, casually saying that they'll get around to them whenever they find time. And entropy ensues. This fundamental nature of group dynamics comes into play and things go from a state of order to disorder. Good ideas stay stuck in idea form for years, if not forever. And innovation ends up being a nicety, not a necessity. Maybe the tortoise wasn't the right animal. Now, that example refers to a day-to-day team environment. Building a bias for speed clearly gives you leverage. But what about the macro? Which animal is more useful when your team is looking to the distant horizon months or years into the future? This is when patience and persistence win. If you're willing to play the long-term statistical averages of the creative process, then the hare doesn't stand a chance. If your team commits to initiating risky projects, even if that means being misunderstood for extended periods of time, then the payoffs will be that much greater. This is the tortoise mindset. It's patience in the macro. Show up, do slow, steady, solid work day after day, and your brand will grow in ways nobody can take away from you. Because you will have trained yourself to find your fulfillment during the process, even when the product isn't in sight. Hares don't have the stamina for that kind of work. They burn themselves out working at an unnatural cadence. Their inherited cultural guilt of not overworking takes precedence over pace and proportion. Ultimately, speed and patience are dual attributes. Both help your team achieve its creative goals. The secret is knowing which animal to the moment calls for.

*Do you need trickery and speed, or patience and persistence?*

May 9

## **Desperately trying to protect the narrative.**

There's part of us that believes the very act of trying will contaminate the result. That the harder we chase after what we want, the more it will deny and elude us. That's why we just sit back and relax and allow it to be organic and land softly on our shoulder. But in many cases, that's just cop out. A cozy little story we enjoy telling ourselves because it removes all the responsibility from our shoulders. It's like the chronically blocked artist. After a certain period of time, he grows to enjoy being an unsuccessful creator. Because being blocked has become part of his identity. It's the story he gets to carry around with himself, and it's bulletproof. But here's the reality check. No matter how hard we try not to try, sitting around twiddling our thumbs, waiting for the universe to deliver our dreams to us is not an effective strategy. We have to be proactive and hungry and intentional and disciplined. There has to be a sense of agency and urgency burning inside of us. And there has to be a buttress of action underneath our dreams. Otherwise we'll be stuck in limbo for a very long time. I once interviewed with a consulting firm that claimed it badly needed to develop more rigors around the company's intellectual property and knowledge management, creating infrastructure and machinery to publish on a consistent basis. As luck would have it, I literally wrote the book on how to become prolific. And so, I pitched them a proven intellectual property development system. And they balked. As soon as I presented a viable solution to their problem, they suddenly had a change of heart and decided it wasn't that big of a problem after all. Funny how that works. The moment you give somebody the keys to the kingdom, they drop them. Perhaps it's because they don't want to give up that story they've been carrying around all this time. It's like insulation to them. It's just easier to not try.

*Are you waiting for your dreams to come true, or is it the other way around?*

May 10

## **Get on the scoreboard of creative survival.**

If you want to become more prolific, reduce the effort of completing the first version of your work. Few things will give you more momentum in the creative process than this. You can call it a draft, a prototype, a minimum viable product, or whatever, but the ethos is still the same. The goal is to create just enough so that you have something to react to and iterate on. My term for this is called oxygenation, which is stolen from the yoga world. My instructors have told us countless times that when you're practicing in a hundred degree room with forty percent humidity for ninety minutes straight, breathing is your lifeline. Think about it. When you experience a health emergency, the first thing paramedics provide patients is oxygen. Humans need air. Breath is life. It's the source of all things. The rest is a close second on the scoreboard of human survival. The same goes with personal creativity management. If we don't oxygenate the process, both internally and externally, we'll never complete the first version of our work. Oxygenation, as it's defined, is the process of giving new ideas a fighting chance to breathe and grow. We can do this inside our heads, aka, inner oxygenation; we can do it with our coworkers, aka, team oxygenation; and we can do it over the course of a project, aka, process oxygenation. But however we do it, the key is using our thoughts and words and actions, with others and ourselves, to nurture our ideas with encouragement and freedom and affirmation. Because make no mistake, cynicism will rear its ugly head. Especially early on in our creative projects. And the only way to prevent that attitude from gridlocking execution is with oxygen. Optimistic energy. Harvard scientists named this feeling psychological safety, the belief that you're safe for interpersonal risk taking. A sense of confidence and trust that you will not be embarrassed, rejected, or punished for speaking up. Google's leadership team has actually collected surveys, conducted interviews and analyzed statistics of their fifty thousand employees for almost three years around psychological safety. It's now become the organizing principle for the way they build project teams. Clearly, oxygenation is stoking the fires of innovation in a big way. If you want your team to get on the scoreboard of human survival, learn to breathe into the creative process. Get that first version of your work complete, and let the momentum carry you.

*How does cynicism kill your team's innovative flames?*

May 11

## **No drawing board needed, thank you very much.**

During the Second World War, there was a famous editorial cartoon that featured various military men and ground crew racing toward a crashed plane. The frustrated architect with a roll of plans under his arm huffs away and says, well, back to the old drawing board. That was the first time the phrase had been uttered in popular culture. Arno, the cartoonist who first produced this image, had no idea that his phrase would gain idiomatic currency. By the late forties, the mainstream media adopted this drawing board idea as the way to describe any creator's acceptance that their design had failed and a new one was needed. How often do you experience that feeling of frustration in your creative process? Do you ever throw your hands up in resignation and announce to yourself that it's time to go back to the old drawing board? If so, it's possible that you're being too hard on yourself and not trusting the process. That's one of the benefits of personal creativity management. The tools help you avoid the stress of starting from scratch. Even when your plane crashes into the ground and explodes into a ball of flames, you very rarely have to go all the way back to square one. Not if you change the way you think about the process. One tool you might try is called *forestation*, a system for cultivating innovative ideas systematically rather than sporadically. Instead of starting your project with an intimidating blank canvas, trying to will innovation into existence, you begin the work by reviewing all the current materials you already have. Parsing out any words, phrases, ideas, concepts and other assets that have their own energy behind them. I personally use this tool on a daily basis, and it's critical for building creative momentum. No drawing board needed, thank you very much. Here's one other tool that's more conceptual, but equally effective. It's called *baselining*, aka, figuring out where you're already been trusted for a history of delivering quality, and using that to your advantage. Imagine you're working with a new team and coworkers are sabotaging your momentum, either intentionally or unconsciously. No need to rebuild your confidence from scratch. Instead, take a moment to motivate yourself by remembering where you've already been successful. Remember some things that are true about your own abilities. You are creative, you are organized and you are knowledgeable. And this team hired you for a reason. You've done this kind of work before, and you are going to do it again. Mantras like these have personally been a lifesaver for me. Because they remind me that I'm starting from a place of experience, not from scratch. No drawing board needed, thank you very much. Remember, just because your creative plane crashes, doesn't mean an entirely new one must be delivered. Start where you are. Trust the process. Don't make it harder on yourself by starting from scratch.

***What if you aggregated so much experience that you could no longer fail?***

May 12

## **Do you have innovation regret?**

When we encounter a kindred spirit, someone whose heart resonates with our own, it's only natural to start missing them in our past. Cursing the world for not connecting us earlier our journey. As if to shake them by the lapels and scream, dude, where have you been all my life? A similar feeling happens when we stumble into exciting new idea, one that galvanizes us with newfound enthusiasm and productive energy. We develop innovation regret, in which we miss the idea in our creative past. Beating ourselves up for not thinking of or taking action upon it sooner. As if to grab the idea by its haunches and yell, goddamn it, where the hell were you six years ago? Albon beautifully summarizes this tendency in his book about the timekeeper. As mankind grew obsessed with its hours, the sorrow of lost time became a permanent hole in the human psyche. People fretted over missed changes, inefficient days, because counting life's moments had led, inevitable, to counting them down. In this situation of innovation regret, our healthiest posture is a combination of kindness, acceptance and gratitude. Instead of beating ourselves up for not taking action on our idea sooner, we give thanks to the muse for delivering such an abundant gift. Knowing that most people go their whole life without executing a single one of their creative dreams. And instead of trying to make up for lost time by demanding too much of ourselves now, we ease into this new creative relationship with patience, trusting the tempo of our own timing. Knowing that who we are right now is precisely the person through which this new idea must grow. As the song lyric goes, you don't need the whole world on the first day, joy is but a sin away.

***What new idea are you missing in your past?***

May 13

## **Does a lower fee make you more affordable, or less attractive?**

You are what you charge. Price is a story. And most businesspeople are telling it incorrectly and inefficiently. My mentor used to joke that if prospects say yes too quickly, then you didn't ask for enough. Which got me thinking. There must be other telltale signs that someone's fee is too low. Here we go. If you're feeling resentment at all, you're not charging enough. If prospects don't take the time to think about your offer, you're not charging enough. If they're not complaining about how much you charge, you're not charging enough. If you have too much work and you're too busy, you're not charging enough. If you're not embarrassed by your fee, you're not charging enough. If you are working too hard and just barely turning a profit, you're not charging enough. If you quote your highest price and the customer says, wow, is that all, you're not charging enough. If you've never been turned down on the basis of price, you're not charging enough. If you think you can't afford the money to test new ideas, you're not charging enough. If a few dollars make a difference to you on the average project, you're not charging enough. If you present your quote to the client and then slap him across the face, and he's more shocked by the slap than the quote. Weiss writes in his groundbreaking book about value based fees, ironically, but completely understandably, the tendency to set low fees to attract business actually reduces business and, worse, establishes a horrible precedent that is difficult to overcome. Fee resistance isn't about money. It's about trust, need and urgency. And money can always be found if you have those other three things first. The paradox of price is no joke. You may think having a lower fee makes you more affordable, but it may also be making you less attractive.

*What are you not charging for that people are telling you they would pay money for?*



May 14

## **Don't assume it works well just because it feels right.**

Think back to the last time you heard the classic public service announcement. This station is conducting a test of the emergency broadcast system. This is only a test. If this had been an actual emergency, the attention signals you just heard would have been followed by official information, news or instructions. These announcements have become a significant part of our cultural fabric. Who doesn't remember their favorite gameshow or cartoon being interrupted by that annoying ten-second beep? No wonder there are so many jokes, skits, memes and parodies around it. But here's a piece of trivia most people don't know. The emergency broadcast system has never actually been used for a national emergency. Thankfully, of course. But it was activated more than twenty thousand times during the seventies, eighties and nineties as a test. That's not an annoyance, that's an inspiration. It's a cultural artifact that reminds us to allow for the creation of a portfolio of experiments. We must test, evaluate, tweak, and then test some more. Hell, this country was built on experiments. It even preaches it in the scriptures. Remember to test all things, and hold firmly to that which is good. Now, for those of us who work in the chaotic but fun world of startups, building a culture of experimentation is second nature. Instead of saying we have an idea, we say that we have a hypothesis and we want to go test it. Instead of assuming it works well just because it feels right, we defer to objective market feedback. And instead of making subjective arguments and relying on hunches, we point to the concrete data. The tricky part is, this approach to company growth requires a high degree of intellectual honesty and flexibility. Testing means trusting the data and allowing it to change our opinion along the way. And not everybody is ready for that. Catching a case of the humbles is simply too crippling to their ego. How, then, do you create an island of freedom where people can experiment as necessary? Perhaps broadcasting one of those public service announcements is a good place to start. Just tell people, look, this is only a test.

*Are you willing to test your concepts without the hassle and risk of a big capital outlay?*

May 15

## **Don't criticize something when it's all you have.**

Collins famously wrote that good is the enemy of great. That the reason few people attain great lives is because it's so easy to settle for a good life. But in some cases, the tables are reversed. People become victims of their own impossibly high standards. In an effort to avoid the good, they put the bar for quality so high that they never do anything at all. Great becomes the enemy of done. It's like the insecure developer who overreacts to every piece of immediate user feedback and micro optimizes himself into oblivion. Or the quantitative analyst who constantly adapts to every minor variation in her metrics, which prevents her from ever making the big bets that have the potential to change everything. Look, it's understandable that you want to put your best foot forward, but you'll never impress anyone by putting no foot forward. Here's a helpful mantra to remember. Imperfectly done now is better than perfectly done never. Reminds me of my old boss. He was always complaining about how our advertising agency didn't publish enough editorial pieces. Fair enough. But the moment we started writing, he red penned every goddamn word within an inch of its life. And it took weeks just to ship a single article. After the first few attempts, our motivation for writing diminished to nonexistence. We wanted to tell the guy, look, don't criticize something when it's all you have. Great had become the enemy of done. Proving, that even if we are going in the wrong direction, we can still create momentum. Even if our actions aren't leading us directly to our goals, we can still generate energy. Ultimately, the bias should be on output. Volume over accuracy. Quantity over quality. We can always course correct later. For now, just get something up on the board. Put the wheels in motion. Keep the moving the story forward.

*Are you becoming a victim of your own high standards?*

May 16

## **Don't follow your passion, but bring it with you.**

Which path we take isn't that important. It's what we carry with us that matters. And so, instead of the hackneyed advice to follow our passion, we invert the process. We let our passion follow us. Meaning, we make a decision and commit ourselves to a new project or a job or an endeavor. And then, once we start moving, we find various ways to embed our passion into the pavement that leads the way. That's a more realistic and less pressured career strategy than merely following our passion. Because for most of the world, finding your passion is luck, and getting paid for it is a miracle. For example, when a growing travel startup hired me as their brand manager, it wasn't because my contagious passion for travel won them over during the job interview. Quite the opposite, in fact. Because in my previous career as a public speaker, traveling every week for ten years gave me legitimate posttraumatic stress. The idea of having to go to the airport caused me significant anxiety, and the idea of not going to the airport, aka, not making money, provoked even more anxiety. And yet, my new job as brand manager for the travel company was an ideal fit for me. Because once I settled into the position, I began to discover dozens of outposts within the company to employ my many passions. From writing to storytelling to strategizing to mentoring, there wasn't a part of my heart that couldn't be engaged to make a difference. And that felt deeply fulfilling. Remember, we take ourselves with us everywhere we go. Passion isn't just a place we get to, but a place we come from. And so, focus less on choosing the path of passion, and more on channeling your passion in whatever path chooses you.

*What is the one thing that people couldn't pay you not to do?*

May 17

## **Don't reinvent the wheel, but whatever you do should be round.**

Stop me if you've heard this one before. A bear jumps out of a bush and starts chasing two hikers. They both start running for their lives, until one of them stops to put on his running shoes. His friends yells, what are you doing? You can't outrun a bear! And the man replies, I don't have to outrun the bear; I only have to outrun you. The applications of this old chestnut to the startup world are vast. Because when you work for a small, scrappy company, a big part of your job will be taking ownership. Doing things without being asked. Identifying areas that need to be improved and proactively finding ways to help fix them and make them better. Does that sound overwhelming? It's not. Once you train the problem solving apparatus of your mind, it gets really fun. You learn to see holes and whitespaces and opportunities into which value can be created. Here's a trick. Just listen closely when the owner or founder complains. Listen for the inconvenience of time, effort or money. Pay attention to what they're too busy to do, but would really help the business. Every one of those little challenges that your executive mentions is probably some kind of value waiting to be created. To increase profits, reduce costs, and so on. And here's the best part. Once you pinpoint problems, you don't actually have to create the greatest thing there ever was to solve it. You just have to create something that is significantly better than anything the company has had to date. Forget about perfection and precision. It's not about outrunning the bear, only outrunning the other guy. And in this case, the other guy is whatever thing they had before you showed up. Which, if you've ever worked at a startup before, is almost certainly nothing. Usually just a bunch of ideas trapped in somebody's head, or buried in a spreadsheet on the company drive somewhere. This is the secret to creating value. Perspective, comparison and contrast. Just figure out a way to outrun the other guy. The bear will never catch up.

*How will you turn off the problem solving mechanism in my mind?*

May 18

## **Don't take things personally; people are only talking about themselves.**

Most creative people have developed a hypersensitive relationship to the world. And that's what allows them to do the work they do. Artists think and feel things that other people can't express for themselves. They can deliver something that their audience can't find on its own. Unfortunately, that hypersensitivity results in artists taking everything personally. They overanalyze, ruminate and even become depressed and anxious over brief interpersonal interactions, wondering if their criticizer was onto something. I once spent an entire summer beating myself up over a one-line email from an angry reader. And I became trapped in a bitter, ruminative loop that left me awash in fury and resentment and made me feel irritable and on edge most of the time. A woman I practice yoga with once gave me a great tip for this very situation. She said, don't take things personally, because people are only talking about themselves. It's so true. Most people are just projecting their autobiography onto others. Spewing their emotional bile onto whoever crosses their path. And so, if we allow people's external criticism to trump our own belief in ourselves, the joke's on us. Because we'll grow so busy and stressed trying to absorb and neutralize everyone's feedback that we'll never get anything done. Bikram famously reminds us that nothing can steal happiness and peace away from us. If someone makes us angry, we are the losers. It's all about ownership. Refusing to give people you're not even invested in more power over you than they deserve or should be allowed to have. Remember, hypersensitivity is an asset, but it's also a liability. Learn when to exert it, and learn when to holster it.

*Are you allowing the words and actions of others to define your reality?*

May 19

## **Raising your ability to thrive in any work environment.**

Recent research from a software company studied the data of hundreds of thousands of their users. They analyzed millions projects and tasks, and learned when people are the most likely to be productive. Here are a few data points. Monday is our most productive day of the week. Friday is our least. October is our most productive month of the year. January is our least. Fall is the most productive season. Winter is the least. Eleven in the morning is when the highest percentage of tasks have been completed. Getting stuff done after lunch is an uphill battle. To what degree do these statistics match up with your own productivity patterns? Is that an accurate description of your work routine? Personally, this research has zero resonance for me. Hours of the day, days of the week, months of the year, seasons of the calendar, who cares? None of that impacts my ability to do what needs to be done. Sure, there are basic mathematical variables like going out to lunch and taking time off for vacation that skew the averages. But when you have a robust personal creativity management system, the clock and the calendar can't control you. Because your locus of control is internal. There may be temporal forces attempting to befall you from an outside agency, but that doesn't change the fact that you have work to do. There are many tools to help reinforce this mindset. One of them is called domestic oil, which involves reducing your dependency on optimal and external creative circumstances to thrive. It takes time to master this skill, but any creative professional can learn to become less superstitious and more agnostic in their process. Like the writer who unexpectedly has to travel out of town for a week to handle a family commitment. Just because they don't have their favorite desk chair doesn't mean they can't carve out time to work each day during the trip. Or the composer whose bandmates take the winter off so they can work on other projects. Just because he doesn't have his collaborators doesn't mean he can't work on some new material in the quiet of his home studio. What about the illustrator whose digital tablet shatters on her first day at a new job. Just because he can't draw on his precious device doesn't mean he can't ask the office manager for some pen and paper to work analog until he buys a new one. If you're prolific, your work doesn't come to a halt because of some external force. You learn to reduce your dependence on foreign oil, grow more flexible and less rigid with your preferences and raise your ability to thrive in any work environment. No excuses. Doesn't matter what time of the day, day of the week, month of the year or season on the calendar it is. Creators create, always.

***When turbulence happens, how will you figure out which opportunities to exploit in the service of your goals?***

May 20

## **Dude, what the hell is wrong with you?**

Glee is a word that means great delight. The etymology of the term goes back to the root word meaning, to shine. But what's beautiful about having glee is, it's more than simple joy. Glee has a cheerfulness, gaiety, hilarity and, of course, musicality to its expression. It also happens to be one of the greatest television shows in history. One that has been widely credited for lifting the planet's spirits in dispiriting times. And if you think about it, there is no other emotion more important to the creative process? It's certainly a driving force for me to make things. Because at this point in my career, making things is no longer about impressing my heroes or earning approval from strangers or even making money from my work. It's mostly about creating mutual glee. Recently, I was listening to a radio interview with a horror filmmaker who was explaining his creative motivation. Anytime he makes a new monster movie, the conversation he has with himself goes like this. Make the most you thing you possibly can. Make something that makes your friends and family think that you've finally lost your mind. Nothing brings an artist more glee than when people they love say, dude, what the hell is wrong with you? Every artist can relate to this experience. The satisfaction of knowing that your art had the exact intended reaction on somebody is important to you, there's nothing better. Let me share a case study from a recent project. When the official card deck of my innovation gameshow first arrived from the manufacturer, the only word that could describe my reaction was glee. Just holding the damn thing made me as giddy as a schoolboy. Probably because the spirit of the entire project is rooted in my inability to mature beyond twelve years old. But that's the point. When my friends, family members and colleagues received their boxes in the mail, at least half of them responded with some variation of the phrase, dude, what the hell is wrong with you? Behind my back, most of them probably told their spouses the same thing. Scott has officially lost his mind. Good. That's the goal. Like when my face appeared on national news years ago with the job title under my name as, nametag wearer. My parents could only respond with glee. Well, you've really outdone yourself this time. Four years of college really paid off. Money well spent son. That's the shine of glee, and the more of it we can get on others and ourselves, the better the world will be. In a world where dispiriting times never seem to be far away, keeping people busy with great gasps of delight seems like a worthy cause.

***When was the last time you made something that made someone think you had finally lost it?***

May 21

## **Electricity so cheap that only the rich will burn candles.**

Edison didn't invent the lightbulb right out of the gate. His first successful invention was the phonograph, a machine that would record and play back sound. Which was groundbreaking. In fact, his first one hundred inventions all revolved around the phonograph. And with the help of public demonstrations of this new machine, the inventor became world famous. Thomas, however, knew there were bigger creative fish to fry. Proud as he was of his maiden voyage with the phonograph, he set it aside six years later to work on an invention that was, shall we say, a little bit brighter. The world's first practical commercial incandescent lightbulb. This invention had a widespread impact on the modern industrialized world and enabled him to start his legendary lighting company. Edison even joked during one of his famous demonstrations, we will make electricity so cheap that only the rich will burn candles. Proving, that one invention does not a successful career make. Creators have to repeat the process by returning to the mountain over and over again, rather than milking a single idea for a lifetime. The question entrepreneurs have to ask themselves is, will you build a business that outlives its first good idea? To do so, you must maintain your hunger to learn and grow. Even beyond what you thought was capable. Continuing to call on yourself a little more with each effort. Doesn't mean every idea has to be a home run, but the ideal is to be elevating in addition to simply executing. To stick around long enough until the world is finally ready for you. Nolan famously conceived his innovative war film in the nineties during a family vacation as a young man, but postponed production until he had acquired sufficient experience directing large-scale action films. Ten movies, three decades, and nearly two billions dollars in box office sales later, he finally felt up to the challenge. And his patience, persistence and passion paid off. Dunkirk was a massive international triumph. All because the filmmaker was willing to outlive his first good idea, not to mention, many other good ideas after it. One invention does not a successful career make. Sandler's book on writing and selling television scripts comes to mind. He gives filmmakers advice for breaking into the business, and here's his advice. You will know if an agent really does like your work if, after you hear that they love it, you also hear, what else ya got? Remember, in television, an agent or a producer is not looking at your spec to find a script, but to find a writer. Note the distinction. He's talking about the invention versus the inventor. The latter is what people are buying. That's why we have to outlive our first good idea. Because anybody can be good once. If you want a chance at beating the odds, do it with a massive amount of output. Because the best way to have a good idea is to have a lot of ideas. And then be willing to grow beyond them.

***What old invention are you not willing to let go of?***



May 22

## **Every conquered wave brings us closer to the land we long for.**

If we keep coming up with new ideas, everything else just falls into place. It's this fascinating law of creative probability. The more things we make, the more context we have, the more patterns we recognize, and the more we understand which new creative opportunity wants to be seized next. To quote my favorite theologian, our experience produces hope, and every conquered wave brings us closer to the land we long for. And so, the silver bullet that every creator is searching for is volume. It sounds so simple. Just keep making things. Keep exploring new ways to make them. And keep finding new people to make them with. Good things will come. It reminds me of a structuring framework problem from the consulting world. There's a term consultants use to describe an optimum way of organizing information; it's called *meece*. Mutually exclusive, collectively exhaustive. Every branch on the tree is independent of the other, but together, they're all part of the same family, contributing to the overall life of the same organism. This concept has profound applications for our creative lives. Because each new branch that we grow on the tree matters. Regardless of how large it grows, or what fruit it ultimately produces. As long as we keep giving it new life, we're on the right path. But people love to convolute the creative process. Introducing extra layers and decisions and technologies for no apparent reason. And it's understandable. Complexity is attractive because it feels like progress. But we don't have to game and hack and strategize our way to creative immortality. Not if we just keep coming up with new ideas. Schultz famously wrote that he focused on drawing one good comic strip every day. All the movies, the television specials, the merch, his entire animation empire, it all flowed from that. At the time of his death, he had created nearly eighteen thousand comic strips. Which is almost exactly one a day, every day, for fifty years. You can call it a strategy if you want to. But it's much simpler than that. Mutually exclusive, collectively exhaustive. Just keep coming with new ideas, and everything else just falls into place.

***What did you make today?***

May 23

## **Everything is produced within an inch of its life.**

All of us fall prey to desiring the illusion of a perfect future. In our search for the platonic ideal, we become so enraptured by the opportunity to choose, that we kill ourselves trying to optimize a melting ice cube. But we only end up getting in our own way. Delaying our decision and causing more stress than we need. When in reality, the best way to get any process moving is to step aside and give it a chance to find its own way. Hiring at a startup is a common example of this phenomenon. Company leaders will drag out their interview process, hoping their perfect candidate will walk through the door. Over analyzing every micro interaction and spelling error and nonverbal cue, they find nuance where there is none. Did anyone else notice how the last woman kept fiddling with her wedding ring the whole time? She's clearly manic and has trust issues. Let's keep looking. We can do better. And my thought is always, well, you're right, we could do better. But when speed is our number one priority, good enough will do. Hoffman's book on startup growth addresses this issue beautifully. He says that our job is to make decisions and commit to them, even though our confidence level is substantial lower than one hundred percent. We accept the risk of making the wrong decision and willingly pay the cost of significant operating inefficiencies in exchange for the ability to move faster. This is actually something you learn as a writer, which is how to develop the ability to stop gathering data and start judging it. Having written dozens of books, hundreds of songs and thousands of articles in my career, my head and heart have found their own way of knowing when something is done. It's not a formula; it's just a feeling. You think to yourself, look, being petty and picky about this thing will only waste time, so let's decide to call the work finished for now and move on. Popova waxed poetic about this when she said that in the face of life's dilemmas, there is often no right or wrong choice, what matters is only that we do choose, that we make up our minds and march forward, for nothing dulls the little time we have more surely than the paralysis of indecision. Most people are really bad at this. Particularly under high stress situations, their terror of losing control compels them to grasp for order and certainty. And one of the ways they soothe themselves is by being petty and picky. But as the legendary football coach said about his decision making process for which quarterback to play, you don't have to spend a lot of time circumcising the mosquito. Look, it may sound sacrilegious to suggest good enough standards, but the risk and cost of being too slow is simply too high. Find the confidence and resolve to just say yes or no, and then stand firm in that decision. This isn't a pop song that needs to be produced within an inch of its life. In art, as in life, seek for expression, perfection.

*What is the decision you have been avoiding?*

May 24

## **Everything you want to create is already inside of you.**

When confronted with a new task or project or challenge, our default response to find a way to make it a story about how we've never done this before. How we're not qualified or experienced or smart enough to execute. But that's a copout. An excuse not to face something big and scary and different. We're always more prepared than we think we are. Everything we want to create is already inside of us. It's simply a matter of permission and trust. Using our history to find something that can support us in the present. Here are three questions that I find helpful to ask. What do I already know that will help me solve this problem? When have I experienced a similar issue in another area of my life? What is it that I know how to do that needs doing here? These tools allow us to step back from the task at hand, assess our inner resources and consider how they might be deployed. And every time we ask them, trust in ourselves grows a little bit more, and aversion to risk grows a little bit less. A few years ago, I built a software program to help people facilitate this very process. Leverage Junkie is a strategic framework for increasing the rate of return on your assets. And so, next time you're faced with a problem that appears to be on the bleeding edge of your competence, ask yourself a few of these questions. Give yourself a pep talk down off this ledge of insanity. And discover that the story you're telling yourself about your competence is completely invented. Remember, everything we've been through is more grist for the mill, more input to scan and more data to bounce off a richer matrix. It's not about getting better; it's about growing less afraid.

*Which challenges would feel less threatening if you trusted that everything you wanted to create was already inside of you?*

May 25

## Feeling joyful and alive in the giving moment.

Generosity has historically been at odds with marketing. First, from an economic perspective. Anytime we give something away for free, whether it's an idea, a product or a service, scarcity ceases to exist. The balance of power shifts. Value perception plummets, since people believe they get what they pay for. And because everybody wants things that other people can't get, they no longer feel special. By giving things away for free, we've robbed them of that privilege. The second challenge of generosity is, while it's easy to scale, it's harder to track. Because when we are promiscuous with our work, taking real time to give things away without the obligation of remuneration, we're less likely to build a strong attribution model. Looking back at my twenty years as a book publisher, there is no possibly way for me to calculate the number of copies in circulation, since the majority of my books were given away for free, downloaded anonymously or straight up pirated. Which is awesome, since my overall goal is to be heard, not paid. But try telling that to the marketing director of your organization. When your team cavalierly errs on the side of abundance and ubiquity, giving everything away and hoping for a bigger payoff down the road, measuring that on some spreadsheet is an exercise in futility. That would be like eating a slice of pie and trying to calculate how much the apples cost. You simply can't do it. Not enough information. Anderson summarizes it perfectly in his groundbreaking book about free. People often don't care as much about things they don't pay for, and as a result they don't think as much about how they consume them. Free encourages gluttony, hoarding, thoughtless consumption, waste, guilt, and greed. We take stuff because it's there, not necessarily because we want it. Charging a price, even a very low price, can encourage much more responsible behavior. Point being, there is no right or wrong answer to the question of giving ourselves away. It's not a black or white issue. It's something that exists on a spectrum. Some people will surprise the world with their neverending flow of generosity, and some people will build scarcity into their work and keep score from the very start. Both types of people will win; both types of people will lose. But the question each of us has to ask ourselves is this. Is feeling joyful and alive in the giving moment worth it? Or are the generous among us fools and easily taken advantage of? Guess we will never know until we try.

*Are you willing to become generous beyond measure, just to see what happens?*

May 26

## **Find an easy answer so we can wrap this thing up fast.**

The hard part about suffering is that it doesn't have a pie chart. There's no clean way to accurately break down the source, or sources, of our pain. It's not thirty percent job stress, forty percent political climate and thirty percent ordinary depression. Truth is, whatever stuff we're going through is a complex convergence of multiple factors. Some of which we can see, some of which we can't see; some of which we can control, some of which we can't control. And until we accept that, we will continue to ensnare our minds in the why of our suffering. This is a fatal flaw of our culture. We live in a society of mastery and closure and problem solving and wanting things to be over, so we can just move on to the next thing. We demand to know why things are so fucked right now, or else. But if there's one lesson life seems to keep teaching me, it's that there aren't intellectual answers to suffering. Explanations might come later at the earliest, or they may never come at all. Which is infuriating, but then again, trying to will answers into existence is a waste of the limited energy we have. Tracing the source of our pain like some computer glitch that we troubleshoot for twenty minutes is a distraction that steals us away from our current reality. What we need to focus on is triaging. Stop the bleeding. Determine the severity of our condition and apply immediate care might to make the most positive difference as quick as possible. Dude, the grandmaster of zen, is someone who demonstrates an unwillingness to judge or jump to conclusions, and he is slow to arrive at any easy answers. This is not a personality; it's a practice. It's something each of us can work on during our own moments of suffering. We can resist the intellectual low hanging fruit supplied by everything from our ego to our culture to mythology. My favorite tool for of doing this is to recite an incantation in the form of a provoking question while drifting off to sleep. I wonder what wants to be written? I wonder what wants to be written? I wonder what wants to be written? It's amazing what kinds of ideas are waiting for me upon waking. They don't necessarily solve my problems, but they certainly add color to whatever is plaguing me in the moment. To quote the wise poet. Live the questions now, and perhaps someday far in the future, you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the answer.

*Are you adventurous enough to commit to an uncertain outcome with an open heart and mind?*

May 27

## Why aren't you guys more excited about this?

Have you ever worked on a team project that was doomed from the start? You know, one of those initiatives where nobody was psyched up about doing it except for one person, and the life force immediately drained from everyone else's bodies at the mere mention of that project? Blech. Not fun. And not a productive use of people's time either. Because if a team has little or no momentum around an idea, execution will almost certainly fall by the wayside. Even when there's an initial burst of enthusiasm. If there's just the one person trying to carry the torch for everyone, then the group energy will soon become unavailable, and work will gradually decline into disorder. As the second law of thermodynamics states, the total entropy of an isolated system always increases over time. All the more reason to use momentum as the organizing principle for the creative process. When you focus your team's efforts on tasks and projects for which there is an existing reservoir of energy, you can overcome the natural resistance to progress. And granted, we all have to fight our disinclination and learn to create productively despite fickle forces like mood and desire. That's part of being a mature and professional adult. But there's a difference between doing things you don't want to do because they achieve a higher team goal, and doing things you don't want to do when there is no good reason to do them in the first place. My old boss was frequently tone deaf to these kinds of energetic patterns. Kelly was smart, creative, strategic and ambitious. But she wasn't very sensitive to powerful group forces like momentum and entropy. Some days she would bound into the office in the morning, call an impromptu brainstorming session, and then start rapidly murmuring these big ideas into our ears. You guys, doing this free webinar, is going to change everything for our brand. Lots of other startups in our industry are getting great results with this strategy, so I'd love to see our team do something just like it. Here's the outline I think we should use. Now, to her credit, these weren't necessarily bad ideas. They simply didn't have any energy behind them. The momentum of her projects stopped at the tip of her nose. The team would respond positively and take notes and really try to get excited about the projects, but in the end, it just wasn't there. Entropy ate away at us. To which our boss would look at us dumbfounded, as if to say, why aren't you guys more excited about this? Because, well, we're just not. We can't explain why that's the case. It just is. You can't fake momentum. You can't manufacture heat. If it ain't there, it ain't there. Lesson learned: few team metrics are more meaningful than energy. Use that as your organizing principle, and the creativity process will never be an uphill battle.

*Are you focusing on tasks and projects that create a ripple of excitement, or a vacuum of apathy?*

May 28

## **Find some way to make it suit your purposes.**

Kierkegaard once stated that there is only one real problem of life, only one worthwhile preoccupation of man. What is one's true talent, his secret gift, his authentic vocation? In what way is he truly unique, and how can he express this uniqueness, and give it form, dedicate it to something beyond himself? How can the person take his private inner being, the great mystery that he feels at the heart of himself, his emotions, his yearnings and use them to live more distinctively, to enrich both himself and mankind with the peculiar quality of his talent? It's an awfully big ask. But considering life is blind and purposeless and the effect of billions of mostly mundane yet chaotic events, the project of purpose is our best hope for not going completely off the rails. How else are we supposed to grasp the full extent of this existential nightmare we call life on earth? The word *project* is critical here, because purpose is a complicated journey with many iterations. Defining and practicing it takes time, patience, and hardest of all, faith. Luckily, there is no right or wrong way to do it, and there is no committee to judge whether or not our purpose is worthy enough to matter. Our purpose has meaning because we decide it does. Period. Nepo writes in his lovely book of awakening meditations that purpose is that which we most passionately are when we pay attention to our deepest selves. That's an ideal place to start. Each of us can define our own personal sense of purpose in a way that both inspires us, but also makes us a little nervous. Some organizing principle for daily living that, when we think about it or announce it to others, makes us feel an internal prick, a small subterranean twinge of aliveness. The reason this slight edge is so important to our project of purpose is, it keeps moving our story forward. We increase our existential strength by articulating our life purpose. We provide ourselves with more motivational energy when we frame activities as life purpose choices. It may feel a bit woo-woo and grandiose, but sometimes it's the only way to galvanize ourselves. Besides, if our purpose keeps the wolf of panic away from the door, who cares if it sounds a bit lofty? Our serenity is more important than other people's perception of our spirituality. Maisel, in his seminal book on humane helping, says that we must hold this key intention. We must remember our life purposes, even in the moments when we are tired, bothered, distracted, upset, and otherwise not in our best frame of mind. Otherwise our listlessness remains. Sounds like a worthwhile preoccupation to me.

***How can you find some way to make things suit your life purposes?***

May 29

## **Finding those small hidden islands of freedom.**

The freer we are in our heads, the faster we are with our hands. This is why so many people are so slow to execute. The mental mistakes they make before they even get started sabotage the work from within. And when the time comes to finally hunker down and ship something out the door, all their generative energy is prematurely exhausted. The bird has already flown. Let's explore several personality types. Some people are perfectionists who are scared of making mistakes. Some people are micromanagers who dedicate an excessive amount of time and energy to organizing details. Some people are hypersensitive to feedback and afraid of criticism. Some people are approval junkies who obsess over what other people are going to think. Some people are impatient toddlers who have no capacity for delayed gratification. Some people are simply not finishers who prefer to talk their ideas into the ground. Which of those personalities do you most identify with? Point being, each of these archetypes has one commonality. Poor energy management. Misallocation of mental assets. People's minds aren't free, so their hands aren't fast. Reminds me of a meditation my hypnotherapist used to give me. With each breath, make the moment between your inhale and your exhale just a little bit longer. Find your small hidden islands of freedom, and keep returning to them, over and over. After twenty minutes, my breaths would elongate to sixty seconds apiece. Twenty for the inhale, ten for the pause, twenty on the exhale. Like floating through the ocean like a sea turtle. That's freedom. The more we can create that kind of space within our minds, relieving it of the tasks of remembering and reminding and ruminating and racing, the faster our hands will work.

*Have you allowed lots of unnecessary noise to mount up into a fortress around you?*



May 30

## **Freaking out at the first few signs of trouble.**

Buffet once said that the stock market is a device for transferring money from the impatient to the patient. It's an inspiring quotation about playing the long game. The only problem is, patience is not sexy. Nobody brags about how good they are at waiting. Our culture has primed us for immediate gratification, and if we don't have to be patient, we won't. This, in my opinion, is the number one reason people's ideas stay trapped in idea form. Their impatience provokes them to throw in the towel far too early and for the wrong reasons. Let's explore several scenarios around quitting. Think back to your own history and see which ones most apply to you. Did you quit because you didn't want to force something that wasn't working, or did you quit because you didn't see immediate results and grew impatient? Did you quit because you were legitimately on the wrong path, or did you quit because you didn't meet your own perfectionist standards of what good should be? Did you quit because this new adventure was clearly not going to pan out and you knew it, or did you quit because you simply didn't want to tolerate the discomfort of the moment? Did you quit because overwhelming feedback from people you trusted was spot on, or did you quit because one asshole's unsolicited opinion triggered an old wound? Did you quit because your time, money and energy were going to waste, or did you quit because you demanded immediate results and became disappointed? Did you quit because of an intentional decision to divest meaning, or did you quit because your expectation of what the world should be was shattered? Did you quit because you've reached the point of diminishing returns, or did you quit because you didn't want to give it enough time to get an accurate picture? Did you quit because it was no longer a prudent use of your time, or did you quit because you hadn't yet found the satisfaction of success you were promised? Did you quit because it had run its course and it was time to move on, or did you quit because people are idiots and the world is stupid and you're taking your ball and going home? Do any of the above examples sound familiar? If so, then it may be time to rethink your relationship with patience. Listen, we live in world where same day delivery is no longer a novelty but a norm. And that's an amazing thing. But if we are expecting to experience fulfillment without delay or deferment in every area of life, then we're setting ourselves up for a world of hurt.

*Are you quitting because it's hard, or because it's right?*

May 31

## **Free from the impediment of mood.**

My coworker once told me that he was doing the feel workout. You only work out when you feel like it. It makes for a great joke, but it's not especially dependable. Because whether you're pumping iron, writing a novel or cleaning the house, waiting for the right mood is a huge time waster. Those who rely on their moods rarely get things done. The goal is learning to do things before we're ready. Training ourselves to access good feelings like motivation and inspiration, whether we feel like it or not. Because if we're ready, it's already too late. Are you free from the impediment of mood? Can you move your muscles whether you feel ready or not? This is the most underrated skill of flourishing individuals. After all, we live in an endless army of amusements that can distract us from what matters most. And if we consistently allow the excuse of mood to beat us, then we are going to lose our motivational energy. It's one of the reasons playing football was so transformative in my teenage years. It teaches you to run, whether you feel like it or not. Because, as our coach used to say, that three-hundred-pound linebacker doesn't care about your mood. But what you learn is, every time you take action, you strengthen the motivating force behind that action. Momentum builds. And before you know it, you've forgotten all about the fact that you don't feel like doing the thing you're currently doing. Thoreau once wrote that the mind is subject to moods, as the shadows of clouds pass over the earth. Pay not too much heed to them. Let not the traveler stop for them. They consist of the fairest weather. When it comes to our motivation, feelings are not good or bad or right or wrong, it's what we do with them that matters. In the case of mood, sometimes the best thing to do with our feelings is set them aside and go to work.

*When was the last time you did something before you were ready?*

**JUNE**

June 1

## **Free the mind of detritus, and your calendar follows suit.**

Life doesn't always give us a chance to stop, think, catch a break and organize ourselves. We have to carve out time and space for that effort and put real energy into streamlining our attention, otherwise it will get frittered away and pushed to the back of the queue, while world continues to overwhelm us. One proverb comes to mind is. Measure twice, cut once. Carpenters have been saying this mantra for years as way to avoid wasting time and material. But anyone can do the same with their own energy. Because it's a finite resource. We can't just react to shit all day. At a certain point, our energy has to be less of a spontaneous phenomenon and more of an organized system. It all begins at the most basic level, which is the breath. It's not only the source of life, but also the bridge from where we are to where we want to be. Ask anyone who's spent time meditating, doing yoga or practicing martial arts. Oxygen is the great organizing force. Once you gain greater control of your breath, you gain better control of your choices, and the structure of your day somehow snaps into alignment. That's the mistake people make when it comes to productivity. They think it's a business system, but it's really a mindfulness practice. Allen, the modern zen master of getting things done, says that our ability to know we can get control is a certain level of freedom, because we know we can get control, then we don't need to be in control all the time. As we say at our yoga studio, take a breath, and tell yourself that you're okay. By announcing this message to ourselves, we can nip overwhelm in the bud before it become a chronic problem and our brains start knocking around like a pinball in a scoreless game. Take a breath, tell yourself that you're okay. And if you're someone whose emotionally sensitivity, perfectionist tendencies make it easily to feel overwhelmed, then trying taking ten breaths. Do whatever it takes to reestablish your connection with your own resources and marshal them on a moment's notice.

*What if the reward for breathing was not applause but air?*

June 2

## How can this space become an area to assert my identity and needs?

Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences suggests that each person has their own unique cognitive profile. Some of us are more visual, while others are verbal, whereas others are more interpersonal, and some are existentially driven. Which best fits you? Personally, spatial intelligence is fascinating to me. Because it's not my strength. The ability to visualize the positions of objects, their shapes, their spatial relations to one another and the movement they make, that's hard for my brain. Words and ideas are more my thing. However, working at an innovation studio for a few years helped me develop this skill. Our founders were fanatical about building physical products and building out immersive environments for our clients, like museum exhibits and other interactive experiences. Their mentorship helped me develop a few tools in the spatial realm that have been incredibly useful. The key is defining space as an area to assert your identity and needs. Understanding it that way makes spatial intelligence easier to express. For example, have you ever found yourself out of your physical element and struggling to snap into the right creative mode? If so, the spatial tool that might help you is called *turfing*. This is when you thoughtfully and intentionally build an environment framed to support your individual pursuit of meaning. No matter where you find yourself doing your creative work, optimize the user interface for your mind, body and spirit. Give yourself permission to modify your physical environment to nurture and relax you. If you're on the road, transform your hotel room into a space of psychic effectiveness. If you're working out of a different office for a few weeks, organize your temporary desk so that it triggers healthy creative habits without thinking. If you're home for the holidays, set aside a dedicated space and carve out specific time where you can process all your feelings and thoughts productively. In short, make the space yours. If you can't play on your home turf, roll it up and bring it with you. Here's another spatial tool that improves your ability to visualize objects, processes and relationships between them. Flooring is where you corral the entirety of your project to be viewable in a single frame. By spreading out your work on the floor, it gets you out of your chair and physically grounds you. It's healthy for the soul. What's more, flooring speeds up the visualization process of evaluating ideas. It becomes easy to recognize patterns in a mass of information. What's more, it allows other people on your team to stop by and spontaneously contribute to and interact with your project. When you're down on your knees, pushing papers and notecards around on the floor, curious coworkers won't be able to resist engaging. Sure, it's a bit performative, but that's kind of the point. Even if you're not really working that hard, it has the optics of a movie detective trying to solve a crime. Both of these tools, turfing and flooring, are useful strategies to help you become more prolific.

*Even if you're a more verbally or interpersonally motivated personality, consider engaging your spatial intelligence to drive innovative results.*

June 3

## **Get busy living, or get busy dying.**

Dufresne tunneled out of the worst prison in history, one handful of cement at a time. Each morning he would stroll along, whistling softly, hands in both pockets, while the concrete grit trickled out of his pant legs and onto the earth. Andy literally toted his wall out into the exercise yard, one handful at a time. His story is my favorite allegory in all of film. It reminds us that there is always a way out. It may be a slow, long and incremental journey, but there is always a way out. If, each day, we take a small step toward change. If, each day we progress shovelful by shovelful with each practice. If, each day, we figure out how to do something so small and gradual, that it almost looks like we are doing nothing. If, each day, we keep chipping away at even a little bit of the mass in front of us, then the promised land awaits. Because despite our greatest ambitions, we can't always take a leap. We can only advance by short and slow steps. And that's okay. Patience is the most underrated strategy for achieving almost anything in this life. If we can train ourselves to be satisfied with each bite of the carrot, chewing just a bit more than we had before, then not only will we reach our destination, but we will enjoy the hell out of the journey. Just know this. The best way to do really big things is to start with deceptively small things. If your frustration is ballooning beyond containment, then grab a handful of rocks out of that wall. And trust it will lead to the way out.

*Will you reach the promised land through a crescendo of slow successes?*

June 4

## **Give them your best, not what they want.**

The great innovators in history have an uncanny ability to ship products people didn't know they needed, but now can't imagine live without. Jobs explained it in his biography. People don't know what they want until you show it to them. That's why we never relied on market research or focus groups. Apple's task was to read things that were not yet on the page. Is our job not similar? After all, our customers might not know what they want until it has been suggested that it might be available. Why not give them something they didn't know they were missing? And why not give it to them in a way they didn't know was possible? Everybody is basically writing the same book anyway, so why not take the extra time to create a remarkable combination that nobody has ever seen before? It reminds me of a striking interview with an internationally touring comedian. Peters and his concert promoter had battle about which material would be the most fitting for the different countries, considering language and cultural barriers and all. But he told the promoter, look, I don't really care what you think you like, this is what I do. In fact, his advice to all creators was, honor your audience by giving them your best, not what they want. And like all things, it's a balance. We don't want to be so weird that nobody knows what to do with us. And we don't want to be so far outside of the box that there's nothing to lean against. But hell, in a world where the same old lame old is pretty much expected, it just seems wrong not to try. Besides, originality is not as hard as it people make it out to be. It's more intention than it is invention.

*What innovation will you be kicking yourself about in five years?*

June 5

## **Give yourself two feet to stand on.**

A force multiplier is a tool that helps us amplify our effort. In the department of defense's official dictionary of military terms, it's defined as a capability that, when added to and employed by a combat force, significantly increases the potential of that force, and thus enhances the probability of successful mission accomplishment. In civilian terms, then, the force multiplier is what moves you forward and makes all the other things you have to deal with either unimportant, irrelevant or easier. It's what gives you two feet to stand on. Best part is, it doesn't have to be complicated weaponry. Sleep, exercise, good nutrition, optimism, all of these things are force multipliers. And so, here's a thought experiment. If the law of polarity holds up, and if it's true that everything in this world has its own opposite, then there must also be something called a force divider. Something that makes all the other things more difficult than they would otherwise be. In my own experience, the most insidious force divider has been loneliness. Disconnection. Lack of belonging. As someone who struggled to find true community for the first three decades of his life, it's quite remarkable to see just how much of a force divider loneliness really is. It reminds me of a powerful interview with my favorite pastor about his view on marriage equality. Loneliness is one of the oldest aches in the bones of humanity. We want someone to share the journey with, someone to witness to our life, someone who will be there for us. And we should not deny anyone the joy of sharing their life with a partner simply because they want to be with someone of the same gender. Of course, this has nothing to do with marriage and everything to do with connection. It's a reminder that when we choose to isolate and disconnect and be antisocial, it's a force divider. That loneliness makes everything else in our life harder. Ask anyone who's ever been unemployed. The only thing lonelier than pounding the pavement all day, hopping from interview to interview, getting rejection after rejection; is having to come home to an empty apartment with nobody to hug you and tell you that you're doing the best you can and everything is going to be okay. If you want to give yourself two feet to stand on, start by giving up your choice for loneliness and making contact with those around you. Seek out deep and meaningful connections with people whom you can weave your story of life with. Tap into the great force multiplier that the universe has to offer.

***What are the spine, pillar, buttress and architecture that supports the rest of your life?***



June 6

## **Grateful for every chunk of progress as a rung on your ladder.**

Newton's first law is about inertia. He found that the tendency of an object was to resist any change in motion, and that object at rest would stay at rest, unless acted on by some external force. This property of physics explains why motivation can be so frustrating for certain people. Especially if being at rest has become someone's default state for too long. Breaking the chain will feel impossible. Without the aid of an unbalanced force, their rest will continue. In my first two years of college, I felt like the poster child for social inertia. That time of my life was intensely lonely. In fact, the degree to which I isolated myself is downright embarrassing. Why get involved on campus, meet new people and have enriching experiences, when you can just order food, watch sitcoms and wait for your girlfriend back home to call you? Not my proudest or healthiest years. By the time my twentieth birthday came around, it had become much easier to stay at rest than break the chain of inertia. My object, so to speak, couldn't resist any change in motion. Thankfully, one of the few friends that I had at the time invited me to some campus event. I can't tell you what the program was that evening, probably a guest speaker or something, but what I do remember was that all the participants were required to wear nametags. And everybody was so friendly. There were no awkward introductions or barriers to starting conversation. We greeted each other like old friends. Even if it were fake, even if it was forced, it was still soothing to feel seen, connect with new people and break the chain of social inertia. Which brings us back to the law of inertia. The key phrase in the definition is, unless acted on by some external force. That's what wearing a nametag did for me. It snapped me out of my neurotic loop, hurled me into the present moment with other human beings and forced me to build even the tiniest scrap of social momentum. Behold, the beauty of physics. You take action; you get results. And whether those results are good or bad doesn't matter, because it's still an outcome, and any time you take action to influence the outcome of your progress, that empowers you to stay in motion. If you're struggling with inertia right now, figure out which external force might act upon you. And trusting that momentum happens in a piecemeal manner, see if you can find some grounding in small, manageable increments. Because as long as you're grateful for every chunk of progress as a rung on your ladder, the climb will continue.

*What decision empowers you a tiny bit more each time you make it?*

June 7

## **Guarding the sanctity of the self.**

There are no good or bad feelings, only healthy and unhealthy ways of expressing them. Jealousy, for example, is not a disease, a pathological syndrome, a lack of confidence or a projection of our worst fears. It's just a feeling. And it can be used however we choose. Nolan, in the captivating critical study of his films, jokes that when you're an artist, you're always looking to see if your scripts pass the jealousy test. Meaning, damn, I wish I were working on that project. Isn't that a perfect example of how difficult feelings like jealousy don't have to be a useless flight of irrationality and anger? Seems to me, jealousy can be a useful emotional signal that, when learned to interpret correctly, can be channeled in the service of our creative goals. In my songwriting career, many of my favorite tunes were composed solely out of jealousy. Some singer wrote a song that was so touching and emotive to me, that I had no choice but to write my own version of it. And not a cover version of their song, but my own creation. A piece of art that pays tribute to another piece of art that inspired me, through the lens of my own experience and talent. Do you have a test like that for your own creative projects? Keep in mind, jealousy doesn't have to be the core emotion. You can start anywhere. The goal is to get yourself into a position where you feel like you can't take it anymore. Where your creative spirit needs to answer the call to this dance. You have to make something, anything, even if it's not as good as the original, otherwise you will lose your goddamn mind. There's even a playlist on my phone for this very purpose. Two hundred songs that make me want to write songs. It's like a jealousy dispenser. Anytime inspiration is running low, I simply cue up one song after enough, until my hands start making things. And again, not good or bad feelings, just feelings. They don't even last, either. Just emotional weather patterns that have a beginning, a middle and an end.

*How do you stay inspired when it's your job to inspire others?*

June 8

## **Hamster wheel of achievement and approval.**

Criticism is part and parcel of the creative process. For every person who tries to make something, there will be a hundred people out there who try to condemn it. It's in the job description. There is a universal voice of anonymity waiting to shit on your dream. Your work will be met regularly by silence on one hand and indifference on the other. And in many cases, the accrual of all those little cuts can open the door to problems like addiction, depression and eating two boxes of oatmeal cookies in one sitting. But harsh criticism doesn't have to wilt and deaden our desire to create. Even though we can't avoid rejection, we can train ourselves to become vigilant about setting boundaries and not allowing such noise to pollute our precious minds. One filter that's been helpful for me is treating criticism like junk food for my emotional diet. For example, one of my coworkers recently asked me which of my books had the most online reviews. I had no answer for him. I've never even looked. That number has zero importance in my life. Because my goal has always been to write, not to obsess over what strangers are saying about my writing. I'm already hard on myself as it is. Reading reviews, then, is the equivalent to eating junk food. As an abstainer rather than a moderator, it's just easier for me to put an embargo on the whole process. Oneal, the late great comedian and actor, perfectly described this kind of creative risk that's involved with the performing arts. Let's say there are six monkey bars. If you reach for a seventh, and it's not there, and you fall on your face, then that action is your fault. But you cannot be criticized for reaching in the dark. Because when you do find that extra bar, then the audience will applaud. Which means, if you miss it and fall, then nobody can tell you that you're no good, since you're the only one with the balls to go for it. In any creative endeavor, wanting approval is perfectly normal and not unhealthy. There's nothing wrong with receiving validation in exchange for talent. But needing those things in order to proceed with our work, that's dangerous. Allowing criticism to amplify and exacerbate your negative appraisal of yourself, that's not helping to move your story forward. In my experience, it's healthier to set a boundary and treat criticism like the junk food that it is, and then get back to making things. Anything else is a distraction.

*How many critics do you remember from the last century?*

June 9

## **He who builds the best experiment, wins.**

A musician friend of mine says that he doesn't trust an art studio that isn't a little bit messy. He believes that all innovation requires some measure of untidiness. If we make everything too clean, there is no room left to experiment. If we structure and ritualize too much, the bubbling laboratory for our brain becomes too antiseptic. Kotecki, the renowned cartoonist and my dear friend, coined the brilliant phrase tinker project, which is any playful endeavor of any size or scope that gives you permission to experiment with something that's been tugging at your soul, without regard to any particular outcome. This is more than a tool for certain painters; it's a philosophy for all people. Especially those who choose to play the infinite game, in which the goal is not to win, but to keep the game going. Where the goal is not to get anywhere, the goal is to keep the gift in motion. The sad part is, too many of us curtail our natural desire to experiment. Maisel's research on rethinking depression explains that during our formative years, we are instructed in school, at home, and by our peers to get things right and not make mistakes. Often, we are literally punished for experimenting, and we lose our taste for it. So how can we regain this sense? Tinkering is a fine answer. This year, choose experimentation as one of your new meaning opportunities. Instead of carefully crafting a theory based on years of research, just build stuff, push it off the side of a mountain and see if it flies. And trust that there are no success or failures, only the consequences of experiments. Perhaps you will be like the lifelong smoker whose taste buds come back full force after finally quitting. Perhaps more subtle tastes will grow more appealing to you, and you will begin experimenting with different kinds of foods. Foods you never thought you would like. Foods that make you sick with longing. Foods that are so good, you have to stop eating for a minute just to catch your breath.

*Will you trust your heart's reasons, even if your head doesn't understand yet?*

June 10

## **Here I am, largely unmolested by obligations.**

Laziness isn't real. It's just a word for making myself feel guilty about self-care. A way to feel superior to the aspects of myself that I judge, reinforcing my high standards and notions of supremacy. And so, when I throw my morning plans out the window in favor of more sleep, when I ditch my ambitious social agenda in favor of much needed solitude, when I meet half of my writing quota in favor of finishing a book I can't put down, when I clock out of work early in favor of cooking a romantic dinner for my beloved, and when I take a snow day because the powder on the big hill is just too good to pass up, I try not to lambaste myself over what I should or shouldn't be doing. I trust the choice to relax, believing that this is exactly what my body and mind and spirit need, right now. Since when did that become an indulgence? Since when did we become slackers simply because we know what we like and let ourselves have all of it? Kreider's piece on the laziness trap points out that most people are addicted to busyness because they dream what they might have to face in its absence. They feel anxious and guilty when they aren't either working or doing something to promote their work. And so, overcoming laziness serves as a kind of existential reassurance, a hedge against emptiness. Obviously your life cannot possibly be silly or trivial or meaningless if you are so busy, completely booked, in demand every hour of the day. But what if this wasn't laziness? What if loving yourself wasn't an indulgence? And what if this moment wasn't a symptom of depression or lethargic avoidance or a declining career trajectory or a lack of motivation and ambition, but simply the holy practice being kind to ourselves in small, concrete ways? Enough. We must stop making ourselves guilty about self-care. Compassion can no longer be viewed as not trying hard enough.

*Are you looking for a reason to continue working even though your immediate needs have been satisfied?*

June 11

## **How can we channel the fear of not knowing?**

Entrepreneurs, those of us who undertake the risky pursuit of opportunity beyond our controlled resources, exist on something known as the experimentation execution continuum. We achieve our success by seamlessly moving from one project to another, creating of a unique portfolio of trials, errors, iterations and successes, ideally with little or no loss of enthusiasm along the way. This continuum can be profoundly scary and lonely and disorienting. It can drain your soul, not to mention your entire life savings. Make no mistake, entrepreneurship not for the faint of heart, the barren of spirit or the shallow of mind. The good news is, there is a valuable weapon acquired along this rocky path. One that we can use in every area of life, forever, until we die. The capability for faithful instigation. The ability to take action without conventional luxuries like certainty, clarity, control and closure. Ah, the four horsemen of the entrepreneurial apocalypse. May they come riding on the scorching earth with cloven heels and shaggy coats. However, those of us risk misfits, those of us opportunity junkies, we move forward anyway. We trust that when we wade into this project with little or no support, we will not drown. We trust that in this unfolding creative process, all moments are valuable. We trust that our destination may be unknown until we finally find ourselves there. Certainty, clarity, control and closure. These are the folly of fools. Not knowing is the form of torture humans have no choice but to become comfortable with. Maybe even learn to love. And so, if you have been receiving the warning flares of instinctual ripples of dreaded uncertainty, take a breath and tell yourself that you're okay. Because while it that energy may be unsettling, it's still energy. Which means it can be channeled. May you reach into the darkness, uncertain of what will be received, and cast your faith forward as light on your path. Whitley said it best in his most hopeful song. There's a dirt floor underneath here, to receive us when changes fail, may this shovel loosen your troubles, let them fall away.

***How strong is your capacity for faithful instigation?***

June 12

## **How can we create abundance where there appears to be scarcity?**

By telling ourselves a story. By believing that story. And by rearranging the arc of that story, so we are nearly always safely on the best possible side. Here are a few from my greatest hits catalogue. Temporal abundance is the story that we are the source of time, that we can make as much of it as we want to, and that we have exactly the right amount of time to enjoy everything we want to do. Creative abundance is the story that we are plugged in to an imaginative energy that is present in all things, that every season in our lives contains generative potential, and that whatever we entrust into it will multiply exponentially. Monetary abundance is the story that we are the arbiters of our own prosperity, that nobody is standing in the way of our ability to create value, and that money is flowing into our lives from all directions. Talent abundance is the story that we have sufficient resources to achieve our hopes and dreams, that they are readily available to us, and that they will equip us to live the life we want to live. Social abundance is the story that we belong everywhere, that our relationships are the chief transforming aspects of our lives, and that we are richly supported by a diverse community of beautiful people who want nothing more than to be there for us in our time of need. When we tell ourselves these kinds of stories, over and over again, we will leave insufficiency behind and move toward a world of prosperity.

*Are you choosing to become the source of abundance, or waiting for the events of life to inspire you to find it?*

June 13

## How can you give yourself more strength than you naturally have?

Here's a simple trivia question. How do you open the lid of a paint can? Simple. Grab a screwdriver. Place the flat edge between the lip of the lid and the lip of the can. Once the screwdriver is in its place, carefully push down the handle, and the force you exert will eliminate the airtight seal. Next, move to another part of the lid and wedge the edge of the tool again, gently applying force in nudging the can. Repeat the process until the lid is completely disconnected. Start painting. Now, why does this process work every time? It's simple. The screwdriver allows you to have leverage. It gives you more strength than you naturally have. It enables you to lift things much heavier than yourself. Which you can take literally, like using a pulley to raise up a piano over your head, although that's probably not the safest activity. Psychologically, though, the idea of tapping into sources of strength that you otherwise wouldn't have is a powerful one. Harvard psychologists researched something called power poses, which is when you adopt the stances associated with confidence and achievement. Chest lifted, head held high, arms up or propped on the hips. The study reported that leaders holding more powerful positions exhibited lower cortisol levels and less anxiety than leaders holding less powerful positions. Even if that's just the placebo effect in action, it still creates a perception in people that they have more strength than they naturally would, which often leads to higher results. How could you change your body language to elevate your power? Here's another illustration of this particularly type of leverage. During hot yoga classes, the combo of heat, humidity and breath work allows me to stretch a little further and achieve a greater range of motion than I normally would. One neuromuscular study showed that hot yoga participants had greater flexibility in their low back, shoulders, and hamstrings after eight weeks than the control group who didn't practice. How could you enlist the support of your surroundings to expand your strength? Lesson learned: there are as many sources of leverage as there are people to use them. Almost anything can become a lever with the right mindset. It almost becomes a game to see how many different ways you can increase your return on experience. Whether you use a screwdriver, your own body, or your immediate environment and the people in it, elementary physics is at your disposal. Use it well.

*What helps you lift things much larger than yourself?*



June 14

## How can you leverage the combination of absurdity, tedium and longevity?

There's something in comedy called the long joke. According to social psychologists, when you take a situation that's kind of normal and create a benign violation, it starts to make the situation uncomfortably awkward. With each repetition, it creates a progressive incremental shift in meaning. And after a certain amount of time, the combination of absurdity plus tedium raised to the power of longevity leads to comedy. Humorists have named this the funny, then not funny, then funny again joke. Kauffman built his entire career as a performance artist on it. The guy would stand on stage with a small turntable, play a famous television theme song, look completely confused until the chorus came along, and then lip sync the words with cheesy, choreographed dance moves. Audiences howled. Not because it was inherently comedic, but because it was absurd, tedious and most of all, long. This is a rare source of leverage that can have a powerful effect on the world, when harnessed properly. What you have to do is unpack it from a strategic standpoint. Reverse engineering the generic approach of the gambit. Here's the way to think about it. How could you aggressively lean into something that's deeply inappropriate, but to the point where its usefulness ultimately offsets the wrongness? Kauffman's usefulness, in the above example, was comedy. His act was so uniquely entertaining, that audiences didn't mind the uncomfortable silences. Because the payoff was so good. And the good news is, any creative person can execute their work in this same way. It's all about powering through the spectrum of human emotion long enough for it to be worthwhile when people come out on the other side. Allow me to share two examples from a few of my favorite novelty products that have recently come onto the market. Here's the first one. Since our government won't acknowledge climate change, we as responsible citizens of this planet must do our part to combat, and ultimately end this global threat. Mudslide is a private surveillance firm that investigates, tracks and sabotages the family vacations of climate denying government officials. Experts will stage mass scale weather events in any location to traumatize these global warming skeptics into changing their vote. Let's all go to the lobbyist, and have ourselves a smack. Mudslide, we're raining on the skeptic's parade. Yes, that idea is absurd, expensive, dangerous and violent. But isn't all of that worth enduring to save our dying planet? Okay, here's another cool service that leverages the tension of inappropriateness. Back to school anxiety is no joke. Especially for freshmen. How are fourteen-year-olds supposed to be cool, make friends and avoid getting their asses kicked? Fooligan is the answer, a reverse bully for hire service. Our overweight child actors meet wimpy students in the parking lot on the first day of school and lose a fight to them front of the entire class. Now kids can send a message to their classmates on the first day of school, and enjoy four years of being untouchable. Fooligan finally gives kids a fighting chance. Yes, that idea is technically a mass scale lie that promotes violence, but the child actors get paid to do work they love, and the wimpy kids build their confidence and reputation. Isn't that worth a few knocked out teeth? Look, this world isn't going to change on its own. We

need innovation solutions. If you can figure out how to leverage the combination of absurdity, tedium and longevity, there's no telling what kind of impact you can have.

***How could you aggressively lean into something that's deeply inappropriate, but to the point where its usefulness ultimately offsets the wrongness?***

June 15

## How can you optimize for joy?

James tells us in the scriptures, we are merely a vapor like a puff of smoke a wisp of steam from a cooking pot, which is visible for a little while and then vanishes into thin air. As such, why squander what time we do have being miserable? Life is about optimizing for joy, not climbing a ladder. Our goal is to take full advantage of, rearrange our life for, and modify our experience around, that which makes us feel more alive. Without justification, without shame, without permission and without regret. Allow me to list a few of my personal favorites. Laughing out loud at cheesy jokes until my face hurts. Taking pictures of reflective puddles on the street that most people ignore. Singing karaoke at the top of my lungs on the commute to work. Watching a movie and taking furious notes on the best lines in the script. Keeping a running list of ridiculous names of rock bands that will never exist. Ordering anything on the menu that has the word *diablo* in the title. Making whimsical purposeless art that gets trashed immediately. Stopping my workday to watch a music video that makes me weep. Indeed, true happiness often comes in small grains. Keep pulling your triggers for joy, as my therapist would say. Keep building a fulfilling life on the foundation of our true nature. Engage in the activities that are uniquely appealing to you. What if you stopped living life out of a sense of obligation and start optimizing for joy instead? It may sound overly mathematical, but approaching fulfillment quantitatively is quite helpful. It's a formula. We can literally train ourselves to spend as little time as possible on things we didn't care about, that way we no longer have to feel guilty about spending time on the things that we do care about. The hard part is the permission. Being able to announce to ourselves, fuck it, it brings me joy. Not to mention the trust. Knowing that our happiness is the best gift we can give the world. But once we solve that equation, define joy for ourselves and seek it in our own way, life becomes a whole lot lighter. In weight and in spirit.

*Are you the kind of person who always seems to wrest joy out of the most unfortunate circumstances?*

June 16

## **How can you reframe the story you're telling about your priorities?**

At the risk of simplifying something as complicated as human motivation, my belief is that the reason people don't take action is, it's simply not a priority. Whatever the item, it's just one more thing to add to their never-ending list. Bottom line, people don't do things that are not important to them. But the challenge with that perfectly acceptable explanation is, it kind of leaves people nowhere to go. Because it's not like someone's coworkers, friends or family members can refute their reasoning. Nobody can make something a priority for someone else. And so, my question is, how does a person make something into a priority for themselves? How do they move a task or habit or project to the top of their list, and keep it there? There are ton of tactical suggestions for this, like decluttering your life, rearranging your schedule, letting go to make space for new projects, and making priority something small that doesn't feel overwhelming. All effective moves in the short term. But in my experience, the motivating force that always helped me to rearrange my priorities was much more conceptual, strategic and abstract. That's how life tends to get through to me, through all that high level stuff. Weiss, the patron saint of business consultants, has written extensively about this prioritization process. He writes that a priority is a result we seek that is far more important than other results that we might seek. And when something is extremely valuable and its immediate acquisition will cause dramatic improvements, then it becomes a priority. And so, whatever isn't our current priority right now, but needs to be, we have to frame as the number one thing that will resolve all our other issues and therefore, merits immediate investment. Proof positive that motivation, like most good things, is an inside job. We have to start telling ourselves a newer, stronger, more persuasive story about our priorities. Even if the narrative is somewhat fictionalized. Even if there's no proof that prioritizing a certain thing will be the panacea that we are looking for, it's a hell of a lot better than paralysis. Remember, if you really wanted it, you would have made it a priority to get it by now. Use that reality as fuel to strengthen the story you tell yourself about what is most important. Give grandiose weight to the results you might seek, and the tension between where you are and where you want to be will propel you forward.

***What extremely valuable activity merits immediate investment?***

June 17

## **How can you reuse, resurrect or reposition something people threw away or quit on?**

My wife used to work for a prominent vertical farm. They built an aeroponic technology known as a closed loop system, where recycled water and nutrients grew leafy greens with virtually zero waste. It was an immaculate operation, to say the least. One of her tasks as sales director was to leverage plant stems and roots that littered the factory floor. For example, developing additional applications in added value food products and composing opportunities. Turns out, those stems and roots, which were originally going to be thrown in the trash, could be sold as healthy, affordable ingredients for companies that sold pesto, juice, rope, paper and cloth. Can you imagine the potential revenue, partnership and growth potential of those assets? Most restaurant consultants use a similar filter. Their first order of business is typically scouring the trash. Because it's almost guaranteed to be a sanctuary of defective, unwanted, overlooked and undervalued things that can be leveraged into meaningful assets. Personally, this resonates with me on a deep level. My entire career was born out of a trashcan full of ripped up, used nametags. That was my moment of leverage, and it changed the vector of my life for better and for always. Had the nametags not been in the trash in that moment, the trajectory of my life would have been vastly different. How can you reuse, resurrect or reposition something people threw away or quit on? Remember, everything is fair game. There is nothing that's unusable. It all depends on what you see when you see things. One of the vocabulary words that has become a central part of my thinking is called an *opportunity agenda*. This is a form of second order imagination. It's the inherent enterprise to notice creative opportunities, apply force and propel them into interesting directions. It's based on the idea of perceptual democracy, which is where leverage comes from. When you're exposed to virgin territories, unoccupied channels, unincorporated land, terra incognita, you think to yourself, wow, imagine what kinds of things could grow here. This principle goes for devastated ground as well. When life is coming apart at the seams, and you start to believe that it's utterly foolish to try to stop the descent into chaos, look to the ashes. Treat it as salted earth from which new life will blossom. Push on the scale of opportunity by resurrecting the dead back to life. Fall in love with that which the rest of the world has given up on. Hell, go buy other people's mistakes and remarket them as opportunities if you have. The suppliers will be relieved, the customers will be thrilled, and you will be profitable.

***What trash could you rescue?***

June 18

## How could forgetting make you lighter?

My graphic novelist friend once told me that writing down the moments of our history lets us take ownership over them. Doing this assures the events belong to us rather than us belonging to them. Isn't that powerful? It's one of the most compelling reasons to spend time each day blackening pages with our thoughts and feelings. Because when we write, we always get the last word. There's no need to dwell on such matters forever. We can free our mind and heart from the burden of holding on to the details of our past, and from the stress of whatever future challenges are ahead. As someone who writes every single day of his life, let me say, this ritual is profoundly cleansing, lightening and liberating. Once I write what happened to me the day before, I can totally forget it. It just goes away. I am no longer stuck in time. This is not an insignificant feeling, considering most people spend their days remembering things a way that does not allow them to forget. My goal is to seek out places where forgetting is more useful than memory, and let things expel out of my system. It's like a bowel movement for the soul. Hyde, in his profound book that explores the healing effect forgetting can have on the human psyche, says that to forget is to stop holding on, to open the hand of thought. Whereas the continuation of psychological time and the survival of the ego are really the same thing. He asks, why drag about this corpse of your memory? Slough off the memories that no longer have present relevance. Forget what yesterday had in store for us, good, bad or indifferent, and then refocus on our goal for today. Wow, talk about pure presence. Who knew forgetting was such a powerful form of leverage? It's funny, most people just use alcohol to do this, not writing. It's the oldest cliché in the book. Some drink to remember, some drink to forget. But scientists have recently found that drinking actually strengthens bad memories instead of diminishing them. Austin researchers found getting drunk primes certain areas of our brain to learn and remember things more clearly. Alcohol alters the brain's chemistry, which makes the overwriting of memories difficult. Like where you parked your car, for example. All kidding aside, the words of my mentor come to mind. He once told me, writing is the basis of all wealth. Perhaps we could extend that mantra to, writing is the basis of all health. If you're struggling right now and looking for a magical, glowing doorway to a warm and fuzzy world, find a way to take greater ownership over your story. Blacken some pages and lighten your spirit.

*Do you write to remember, or write to forget?*

June 19

## How could the elapse of time reframe this failure?

Failure isn't death. It's not the end of anything. Whatever happens to us doesn't have to be the final word in our story. Our failures do not in any way limit who we are today, or what is possible for us tomorrow. Quite the opposite, in fact. My yoga teacher has a lovely mantra for this. Anytime your body can't do something, that's just information. You're not failing, you're becoming. Isn't that a wonderful way to frame disappointment? It's a way of telling ourselves a nourishing story when we miss the mark. Entrepreneurs excel at this habit. They often say that failure isn't the end; it's actually the beginning. In the grand scheme of things, it's a necessary step in the right direction. It's just information. Something didn't work out? Fine. Where does that point? How could this move us along a path toward something wonderful? The more answers we can come up with, the less likely the event will feel like a failure. I'm reminded of the documentary about a tech startup built by the brightest minds of the eighties, and how the brand became a complete failure when launched. This company shipped the first handheld personal communicator, over ten years before anyone even knew what a smartphone was. Which meant consumers didn't know why they needed it, or what to do if they had it. The market ultimately wasn't ready for the technology, and almost nobody bought it. But here's the punchline. While the device and the company ultimately failed, the team behind went on to change the lives of billions. Every single person in the film went on to make something extraordinary. And so, it wasn't really a failure. Not when you take the long view. Like a musician who plays the wrong note in the chorus once, but then erases that failure by playing the wrong note in every chorus thereafter, the elapse of time can actually change the past. Proving, that our future is wide open, as long as we use failure to keep moving the story forward. Getting rejected isn't the end; it's the beginning. It's just information. An opportunity to learn what to do next time.

*Would you take more risks if you knew that failure wasn't final?*

June 20

## **How could you build incremental power for yourself?**

Whether you're excited about a big interview, big article, big promotion, big client, big sale, or big launch, here's some perspective to keep in mind. This one big thing isn't going to be the game changer for your career. That's not how big things work. Not anymore. We no longer live in a world where one isolated achievement changes everything for anyone. There are too many channels, too much noise and not enough eyeballs for any one threshold moment to suddenly and rapidly change the state of the system. Carson, many say the best late night host of all time, had a rare but long standing tradition of offering comedians a seat on his couch after their performance. This one moment instantly changed those people's lives. Seinfeld joked that it was like the pope blessing you. Overnight, those artists would go from a lowly feature acts to taking real meetings with networks and agencies and managers. Getting invited onto that couch was the inflection point of their professional lives. But today it's quite different. Appearing on a show is still a momentous occasion for any artist, but it's not guaranteed to create the tsunami effect for their brand like it used to. It's certainly possible that the artist can leverage a single moment into next level results for their career, but the more common experience with these big things is that they serve as milestones to commemorate all the little things someone has already been doing every day. That's what becomes the game changer for your career. Being an incrementalist. Progressing shovelful by shovelful each time you do your work. Trusting that there are no big breaks, only the accumulation of small breaks. Reminds me of projects from my career as a corporate trainer. At the top of my dream client list were several organizations that, according to many of my peers, were game changers. Brass rings. Gateway drugs to a career high. All you had to do was get in good with them, and you were set for life. Can you imagine how my workaholic brain internalized that line of bullshit? Count me in. And so, I spent years nurturing those relationships, doing great work for these companies that were apparently going sing my praises and pave the streets of my career with gold. As you might guess, that didn't happen. Those companies did become clients of mine, but they weren't game changers. They were milestones that signaled to me how I had already changed the game myself.

***Do you need one big thing, or a thousand little things?***



June 21

## How could you build tension by living in two places?

Version one is supposed to be embarrassing. Creators should be facepalming when they look back at the first thing they executed all those months, years or decades ago. Because painful as it may be to confront your own prototype, it's a reminder of growth. Look how far you've come since version one. Matter of fact, it's artifact of courage. Do you know how hard it is to create something from nothing, overcome your procrastinatory urges and ship it out into the world, even when it's not fully ripe yet? It's like hanging your balls out of the window on the highway. In winter. Most people never make even it that far. They either get discouraged and quit, or don't give themselves permission to start in the first place. Simpsons characters are exemplary examples. They didn't start off as iconic cartoons that defined a generation. In the late eighties, everyone's favorite squabbling family first appeared as a crude animation on variety program. They were primitive, bite-sized sketches still trying to find their creative footing. If you watch those first animated shorts, the voices were unpolished, the production was low quality and the script was simplistic. Groening had no idea that his artwork would become a billion dollar empire, the most influential cartoon of all time, and the longest running television series in history. Now you can buy the original animation art cells at auctions for thousands of dollars apiece. Folklore like this inspires and soothes me along my own creative journey. Especially when the first iteration of my newest project isn't up to my unreasonably high standards, and I feel disappointed and insecure about my work. One mantra worth remembering is this. When you're a beginner, version one is supposed to be embarrassing. If it's not, then you waited too long. What about you? Are you waiting or creating? If you're trying to find your creative footing, sooner is better than later. Getting something out into the world that's crude and unripe is a form of leverage. Once you announce, even to yourself, that you have made this thing and intend to make more, you build tension. Because now your art lives in two places. Where it is, and where you want it to be. At the same time. Part of your brain is in the future, and part of your brain is in the present. And that gap does not go away by itself. If sunlight is the best disinfectant, then maybe it's time to get your work out of the house and into the world.

*It may be primitive, but it's still yours. Are you looking forward to looking back?*

June 22

## **How could you execute the anti or polar opposite of an existing idea?**

Osborn, the legendary advertising executive who coined the term brainstorming, taught a bottom up creativity technique called reversing. It's when you change or invert the sequence, direction or orientation of your idea. You engage in the exact opposite of what you originally intended. Uber is the obvious example, as they were the first transportation company to create a business model where the taxi hailed you. This reversing method is a powerful form of leverage because it gives you a completely new perspective, allowing you to identify and solve problems for your customers that you may never have considered before. As an inventor myself, many of my innovations follow this very line of thinking. Here are the commercials for two of my best, or worst ideas, depending on who you ask. Number one. Celebrating every erection is important for sexual health, but often times, the last thing you want is blood rushing to your penis. Introducing my new pill. Flacido is an erection suppressant that helps men avoid unsightly tumescence when sexual stimulation would be inappropriate. Next time you have a big job interview, presentation or dinner with your new boss, pop one of these pills thirty minutes to one hour before non-sexual activity. You'll never need framed a picture of your mother in law again. Flacido, make no bones about it. Viagra has got nothing on me. Number two. Cars are a lot like women. The better looking ones require more maintenance. They break down on you at the worst times, and if you get a really nice one, you always have to worry about someone stealing it. Thankfully, we have a new product to solve this problem. Shyeild is a relationships security and sexual assault prevention technology. When you're apart from your sweetie, simply press the button on your key fob, and that woman will be armed. If another male tries to hit on her, a voice will come out of her cell phone saying, step away from the girl, you are standing too close. And if he touches her, the alarm goes off and notifies you and the police instantly. Shyeild, now you really can keep a good woman down. As you might guess, patents are still pending. Getting some pushback from their legal team. But don't let that distract you from the genius of both ideas, which is their ability to pull a reversal. How could you execute the anti or polar opposite of an existing idea? It's a powerful exercise in innovation, but it's also a lot of fun. Matter fact, my entire career came from a moment of reversal. After the campus seminar was over, hundreds of students ripped of their nametags and threw them in the trash. My nametag stayed on my shirt. And it hasn't come off in twenty years. It's funny where the biggest moments of leverage come from.

***What could you do in this moment that would be the exact opposite of everybody else?***

June 23

## How could you go happen to things?

Crowe, the music journalist turned filmmaker, once commented that life is the best writer, and all we have to do is listen and take notes. This is helpful advice anytime we're experiencing creatively blocks. Rather than staring at the blank page, waiting around for inspiration to grace us with its presence, we tune into our feelings instead. We reflect on what's been happening in our lives, and how those events have impacted us physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. Or, if there hasn't been much going on from which to draw, then we go out and happen to things. We operate against the pull of inertia and give ourselves permission to get out there and do more rather than less, trusting that action will refill our reservoir. Because most of us aren't actually blocked, we're just empty. One of my mentors comes to mind. He was giving a presentation about creativity in business. Somebody in the audience asked him, when your company's sales are in the toilet, what should you do? His answer was, go for a motorcycle ride. Tom's philosophy was, staring harder isn't going to get the money from their pocket into yours, so you may as well displace yourself, feel the wind in your face and get some perspective. Even if you're terrified of motorcycles like me, that's still good advice. Life is subordinate to work, not the other way around. When things get overwhelming or despairing, taking a triple shot of espresso and doubling down on our grit isn't going to help. It might actually hurt. Ignoring the warning signs and plowing through might reward us externally, but it's also going to hurt us internally. Harvard published an article including several studies that showed when the going gets tough, having too much perseverance can actually be costly. Creative people can gang their resilience to a fault and waste time and effort, ignore better alternatives, and negatively impact their mental and physical health. Spicer, the lead researcher and professor of organization behavior, wrote that when you ask yourself whether to stick with a task or goal, or to let it go, weigh the potential to continue learning and developing incrementally against the costs, dangers, and myopia which can come with stubborn perseverance. Indeed, sometimes you need to power through, but sometimes you just need to go for a motorcycle ride and let life make you happen. This strategy will feel counterintuitive and. And it will be difficult, as any kind of surrender will always feel like dying. But it's actually quite the opposite. When you break away and go perpendicular to the task at hand, you're very much alive. And that's precisely the fuel you need to refill the reservoir and get back to work.

*Where are you ineffectually staring harder?*

June 24

## How could you have no choice?

Everyone has their own theory about what qualifies as the best decision. Some say the best decision is the one you will regret the least, while others say it's the one you fear the most. Some say the best decision is the one with the greatest expected utility, while others say it's the one that whispers to you from the pit of your gut. Some say the best decision is the one that brings you the most joy, while others say it's the one that pisses the most people off. Some say the best decision is the one you make with trusted council, while others say it's the one you make by yourself. Personally, my belief is that the best decision is the one you never have to make in the first place. It's the one that liberates you from having to make a thousand other decisions down the road. Obama comes to mind. During his second term, there was a popular lifestyle magazine that featured his many productivity tips. Barack told the journalist that he only wore gray or blue suits. He said he was trying to pare down decisions, since he had so many other important decisions to make. As leader, the act of making a decision erodes your ability to make later decisions. Whether or not your offices are oval, he said, you need to find ways to reduce friction in your days. You need to focus your decision making energy, rather than going through the day distracted by trivia. Irrespective of your politics, you have to appreciate his approach. Because it goes well beyond wardrobe. This isn't about clothes, this is about eliminating decision fatigue so you're not making careless choices or worse yet, paralyzing yourself into doing nothing. Here's the leverage question you might think about asking in your own life. How could you give yourself no choice? Notice it doesn't say anything about the best choice, but no choice at all. That's a paradigm shifter. You burn the ships, so to speak, in all those micro moments, trusting that the excess energy you save from not having to think about chickenshit can be redirected to meaningful pursuits. See how it feels to give yourself no choice. Optimize your life so you paint yourself in a simple, life giving, stress avoiding, streamlined corners. That way, everything else will follow in proper order, like a magnetic field ordering iron filings.

*What decision could you give yourself permission to never make again?*

June 25

## How could you reverse temptation for your own positive gain?

A key tenet of recovering from addiction is resisting temptation. Avoiding situations that involve opportunities for alcohol, drugs, gambling, sex, or whatever your thing might be. It doesn't matter how important or attractive the given experience might be, it's insignificant when compared to job number one, which is maintaining sobriety. There's a lovely scripture that gets passed around in recovery circles, and regardless of your spiritual preferences, it still has a lot of value. When the unclean spirit is gone out of man, he walks through dry places, seeking rest, and finds none. To me, it's a fancy way of saying, the best way to block a punch is to not be there. And so, if you know there's an open bar at the event, simply decline the invitation. If you know a certain person will trigger your compulsions, keep your distance. Walk in dry places. Ultimately, by keeping your sobriety at the top of your list, all other decisions follow in proper order. Now, what about the opposite? Could this ancient temptation maxim get reversed for positive gain? Absolutely. Because it's not enough to avoid putting yourself in the way of temptation by not walking in the wrong places. Not hanging around unhealthy companions helps. That's good reactive work. But you also have to put yourself in the way of finding what you seek. Being proactive with your growth. Because waiting for things to happen doesn't work. You have to go out and happen to things. That's the only way to change the pattern. Taking contrary action. This is one of the fundamental truths you learn as a small business owner. To quote my mentor, the door must be opened from the inside. We have to manufacture the opportunities that allow us to be as creative as we are. As a case study from my own career, busking in my neighborhood park was a transformative practice in my work as a musician and songwriter. Showing up, in public, every weekend, with nothing but my instrument and a story to tell, this became my consistent routine of healthy, proactive creative activity that put me in the way of my goal. It forced me to keep writing new songs, keep expanding my vocal range, and keep iterating on those tunes until they found their center of gravity and became ready for studio recording. Nobody could have given that to me. But then again, it's not who's going to let you, but who's going to stop you. That, my friends, is how you put yourself in the way of what you seek. It's a reminder that chasing your dreams is work, but creating the opportunity to chase your dreams is work too.

*How would your life be different if you believed that opportunity was subordinate to wherewithal?*

June 26

## **How could you scale your business sustainably by moving into a productized model?**

Here is a cool business brain teaser for you. What if your company received a thousand orders tomorrow? Would you be able to deliver the same results to every customer, or would that sudden spike in volume wipe you out? That all depends. If you've built your brand on the traditional client services model, then it will be impossible. Nobody can service that quantity of orders without the quality of the work degrading, and without going crazy. It's not a scalable offering. On the other hand, if your brand operates out of a more productized model, then a thousand orders is just another day at the office. Not only can your system cope with the dramatic uptick in new business, but it can also generate the highest possible leverage out of it. Reminds me of my cartoonist friend, who recently took on a licensing agent. As an intellectual property owner, he wanted to get out of the art gallery game and start monetizing his body of work in a more sustainable and scalable way. Because despite loving the art-making process, the whole point was removing himself from the central hub of providing products and services personally. He loved to draw, but he had no desire to physically deliver the whole publishing and distribution process from start to finish. Nor did he want to. That's not his gift. And so, when my friend hooked up with the licensing agent, manufacturers of consumer products like as home furnishings, gifts, and textiles could now leverage his work. Now, this was a much different world than e-commerce, art fairs or other in person sales channels he was used to. Licensing is a much different way of approaching business than the more traditional avenues of selling. But from an entrepreneurial standpoint, it's a growth strategy that more brands should consider. Think about your own enterprise. How could you systemize your business in such a way that it could be replicated a thousand times, and that thousandth unit would run as smoothly as the first? Fifty, thirty or even twenty years ago, that question was much harder to answer. But today, with the invention of innovative technology to help brands build digital businesses, it's not only possible, but probable. Another friend of mine built a tech startup from scratch that offers a text messaging and email solution for salespeople. He has three employees, minimal overhead, runs fast and lean, and has hundreds of customers. The best part is, those people sing his brand's praises because the value added vastly outweighs the measly monthly subscription fee. This is what's possible when you fundamentally rethink your business processes in the digital age. You may have to change what you're used to delivering and how you're used to delivering it. But once you discover that your thousandth unit will run as smoothly as your first, and without any additional time, energy and money, there's no going back. It's the only way to compete in today's world.

*What modern engine can you put in your car to get you where you want to go?*

June 27

## **How could you selfishly take advantage of your circumstances?**

My mentor argues in his book on productivity that our culture's entire thinking around dreams and goal setting is misguided. Jeffrey explains that he makes very few plans, and yet, he achieves tons of goals. In fact, his most formative life experiences were not dreams, they were opportunities that popped up, and he took advantage of them. No dream, no plan. Just desire and action. His philosophy deeply resonates with my own understanding of goals and dreams. I've always believed that opportunity is something we give to ourselves. And if we are willing to deepen and widen our vision of what's possible for our lives, then when those precious gifts arrive, we can recognize and claim them as our own. To me, that path of execution is more interesting than being right, staying on course or avoiding obstacles and problems. But again, that's just me. There are many who insist on evaluating every repercussion of every choice before making a move toward what they want. People for whom creating their to do lists take longer than completing the tasks themselves. Individuals who spend as much time getting in the mood to do things as they do executing their ideas. That's a very different way of experiencing the world than me. And it's hard for me to make that empathetic leap. Because my myopia bias says, hey wait, isn't everyone else out there just like me? Don't all people feel the same way about dreams and goals and fulfillment as I do? Guess not. Here's my theory. Complexity is attractive because it feels like progress, but frankly, it's only stressing us out. We are not showing up for our lives. Being an opportunist, aka, the intentional policy and practice of taking selfish advantage of our circumstances, that's not morally reprehensible. It's not a sin to strive to maximize what's important to us. It's not wrong to make the most gains for ourselves at the least cost. It's not shameful to do whatever is best for our future in the current situation, unbound by the past. Maybe we need fewer dreams and plans and more desire and action. Otherwise we hesitate. A moment of hesitation magnifies our doubts and gives way to procrastination.

*What if opportunity was something you could give yourself?*

June 28

## How could you view yourself through an infinite prism?

Whyte, the poet master general, explained that his work is only a career looking back. Looking forward, it's a frontier. He just tries to keep an integrity and groundedness while keeping his eyes on his voice dedicated toward the horizon. This sounds eerily familiar to me. My professional life resembles that trajectory as well. It's like, one day you look around and realize that your current mix of work involves spending time doing things you never envisioned doing ten or even five years ago. But that's a good thing. It doesn't matter what you thought you believed about your career when you were younger. To quote the poet again, our identity depends more on how much our attention we're paying to things and people other than ourselves. Our true wealth is not in the coin of time; its cash value is in the currency of attention. Our life becomes the substance of our moment-to-moment experience. Because there is no single path. There's no finalized self that is ever completely known. Our identity only continues to unfold. We evaluate new opportunities as they present themselves, taking into account how we have evolved, and how the world has changed. What if you viewed yourself through that infinite prism? What if you didn't have a career, but a frontier? Think about that word for a moment, frontier. It's a borderland. It's the area of a different nature near the edge of settled land, beyond which lies wilderness. Sounds pretty damn exciting to me. Like reading one of those lists of all the jobs that didn't exist five, ten and twenty years ago. What a privilege to live in such a time. Then again, my tolerance for uncertainty is very high. And despite my greatest wishes, not everyone is like me. And so, it's understandable why frontiers are intimidating. For some people, confronting the freedom to go in any direction is a terrifying prospect. Knowing that what occupies our days in the future might have no resemblance to our current vision, that's heavy stuff. Not everyone is interested in coming to the existential cusp of their future. But for me, thinking in terms frontiers, not careers, is soothing to my restless soul. It makes me feel free to do as much creating as discovering. Linklater, to quote another legendary poet, says the frontiers are where you find them. That sounds like work worth doing.

*How are you continually expanding your frontiers in every direction?*



June 29

## How is this action an investment in my future self?

Repetition can hit an absurdist note. When you find yourself pushing the same boulder up the same mountain, day after day, it can suck the life out of your soul. Is this laborious and futile task is even worth doing? Camus says it depends on your mindset. That people who can live with full awareness of the absurdity of their position can accept their fate without horror. Laborious and futile as the task might be, the boulder is not going to destroy them. The question is, can we train ourselves to get the most possible juice from the action we're doing? One strategy that keeps my fulfillment out of the gutter is framing my actions as investments in my future self. Approaching tasks, projects, experiences and projects as contributions to my identity capital account. Like the consumer focus groups my ad agency used to do on behalf of the department of health. We'd drive across town to a stuffy government office and spend hours listening to people who were paid fifty bucks and a pack of cookies to give feedback about which font colors were the most impactful. Which sounds about as close to pushing a boulder up the hill as you can get. But the thing about the focus groups is, we would learn a wealth of higher-level insight about the many stories human beings tell themselves. Like the unvaccinated pregnant woman we interviewed who wasn't afraid to travel internationally to a mosquito infested country, even though she was at high risk for contracting a viral infection that would lead to birth defects. Her exact words were as follows. Jesus would never let my baby get sick. Those words will never leave my memory. The woman's comments touched me deeply. And not because my spiritual opinions agree with her, but because her worldview was so fundamentally different than mine. That moment of perspective was priceless. It's truly made me a more empathetic and understanding person. And for that experience, I am grateful. What started out as a boulder rolling up the hill turned into a transformative moment. An investment in my future self. Nepo writes about this in his inspiring book about philosophy. All practice is preparation for the integrated act of unrehearsed living. All practice yearns for a chance to apply itself in real time. No matter how laborious and futile any experience may seem, if we can learn enter into it with this kind of frame, we should have no trouble making contributions to our own account. Next time you're about to do something like that, challenge yourself to layer so much meaning on top of it, that the aptitude, perspective, insight and usefulness for your future self starts to accumulate.

*If you had no expectations, would the gods have nothing to punish you with?*

June 30

## **How is this thing you're showing me going to improve my life?**

It's easy to be a genius inside your head. Because you're still winking in the dark. You're still the tree that falls in the forest. But as you approach the publication or release or launch date of your work, you start to notice the tiny ways in which real life deviates from the narrative inside your head. And it's terrifying. As the audio engineer at my recording studio once told me, your songs always sound like hits inside your head and in your dreams, but in the cold light of the playback room, shit gets real. The speakers teach you who you really you are. It's the hostile nature of the creative journey. Everything has two births. First as an idea, aka, creativity, and then as the real and tangible output of that idea in the world, aka, innovation. And the gap between those two events is where people get tripped up. Myself included. With each step we take closer to launch, the stronger the resistance grows. Here's a case study from my own career. After spending three months researching, brainstorming and strategizing for my revolutionary new software as a service platform, the time had come to move into phase two. Design and development. Now, this transition scared me for two reasons. First, because it required me to move beyond the perimeter of my circle of competence. And that made me feel confused and vulnerable. Tasks like visual thinking, computer programming and user experience aren't part of my talent stack, so there was a steep learning curve. Not to mention, that meant surrendering some control over the work to third party vendors. Blech. However, the strongest fear came from the fact that my supposedly brilliant idea was about to become a tangible product that other people could interact with. And maybe the users would see it as mediocre. Or completely pointless and unhelpful. Maybe they would shrug it off and say, yeah, that's kind of cool to play with, but it's not worth paying for. Then again, this is assuming anybody would actually care enough to take time out of their busy schedule to check out my new product. Dude, how is this thing you're showing me going to improve my life? I got things to see and people to do. Chop chop. Have you ever struggled with that brand of fear before? When real life deviates from your perfect narrative? It's not pleasant. Hell, anybody can win an argument about their product inside their head, but when you face a real audience, you have to be truly convincing. Nothing happens until a sale is made, and nobody knows how good your product is until they give you money. Guess the only way to know what happens next is to do it. And to adjust course to accommodate new forces we encounter along the way.

*Are you willing to let go of the reassuring lie and face the cold reality?*

**JULY**

July 1

## How is this turbulence an opportunity to use my creativity?

Imagination is freedom. It's not only the force we use to transcend reality, but it's also the indispensable tool for combatting the demolition of it. Anytime the natural order of our universe gets disturbed, we can use our creativity to ease ourselves back into to a state of calm. Despite our disorientation, we can use imagination as our faithful force to restore ourselves. Doesn't that sound like a useful skill for surviving times of turbulence and transition? It's been a lifesaver for me. When major changes occur in my life, I've found that framing my new situation as an opportunity to use my creativity, is precisely what allows me to bounce back quickly and reorient myself to a place of sanity. It almost turns it into a game. Which parts of myself can be engaged to solve this interesting problem? Rollo, the humanistic psychologist who wrote extensively about the creative process, frames this idea most poetically in his book. Imagination is the outreaching of mind. It is the individual's capacity to accept the bombardment of the conscious mind with ideas, impulses, images, and every other sort of psychic phenomena welling up from the preconscious. Here's an example of this outreaching of the mind. Let's say your workout routine is thrown out of whack by things out of your control like inclement weather, mass transit closures, travel constraints, injury, or a global pandemic in which millions of people are trapped in their homes for months at a time. That totally sucks, and would personally make me mad at the world. But if you allow it to, that event will trigger the creative part of your brain. Okay, what modifications can you make to this workout? What resources are available that would allow you to get a similar result? That might mean taking an online class from your home, heading out for a run instead of going to the pool, or my personal favorite, doing hot yoga in the sauna if there are no studios nearby. It may sound excessive, obsessive and extreme, but to me, it's all just a game. Figuring out how to hack your own routine within the constraints of your situation can be as fulfilling as the activity itself. Listen, the human brain does some strange things during times of change. When the status quo goes to shit, that disruption activates the same threat and reward responses in our brains that we rely on for physical survival. Cortisol starts firing into our blood stream. We start scrambling for fundamental human needs like certainty and simplicity and autonomy. There's a popular study by a group of researchers who coined the term *neuroleadership*, which is a clinical way of saying, leading the brain in a friendly way. Their work talks about the importance of generating feelings of autonomy during times of change. Because our sense of autonomy enables well-being and stronger cognitive functions. In contrast, if we experience a lack of autonomy, it causes a strong threat response. All the more reason to treat turbulence as an opportunity to use our creativity. It makes us feel like ourselves again. Like a real human being who has sovereignty over their choices. If we learn to use our imaginations prolifically, we can

not only transcend reality, but combat the demolition of it. Remember, every moment is a chance to be creative, to reinvent ourselves.

*How are you making embracing constant change into a regular practice?*

July 2

## How is your inner life an emotional training ground?

Have you ever felt shamed for being a highly intuitive, introspective person? Do people give you weird looks for being in touch with the hidden depths of human nature? Been there. It's a shitty feeling. Because there's nothing inherently offensive about that kind of behavior. You're just being your normal, sensitive self. And some people don't know what to do with that. There was this bully at my elementary school who made fun of me all the time for having an inner life. During lunch or recess, I'd be doing something as simple as pondering, writing or making art, and he would take it as a personal affront to his identity. Reflecting on those memories as an adult breaks my heart. Not only for my nine-year-old self, but for the bully too. Maybe what he needed were some crayons and a big blank canvas. If you can relate to that experience, let me say something that might give you peace. People who are intuitive and introspective are more typically more resilient than others. If you have the natural ability to tune in to your inner states, subconscious feelings and impulses, and to seek to understand yourself deeply, then you will probably bounce back from rejection, failure and suffering better and faster. Frankl famously found in his research that sensitive people who were used to a rich intellectual life may suffer much pain, but despite their delicate constitution, the damage to their inner selves ended up being ultimately less. Only in this way, he wrote, could one explain the apparent paradox that concentration camp prisoners of a less hardy makeup often seemed to survive life better than did those of a robust nature. The key is to think of your inner life as an emotional training ground. Let me share another example from my young life. Songwriting is my favorite creative activity, bar none. Because since the ripe age of twelve, it's always been the dependable exercise to process my thoughts and feelings. Even the dozens and dozens of terrible songs I wrote are still good, since they were containers for a specific family of human feelings. There is no song of mine that didn't metabolize my experience in some way and deepen my relationship to my inner life. That muscle memory pays dividends today. In ways that have nothing to do with songwriting. My ability to discover what is authentic in myself, my skill of understanding and expressing the truth of the moment, that helps me recover from the inevitable piles of shit life throws at me. I'm proud of these talents. They're wildly useful to me. And one cool benefit of employing those talents is, they inspire others to do the same. When you express your ability to be sincere and authentic about who you, it gives others permission to do the same. Even if they're not naturally an intuitive or introspective person, there's something compelling about treating your life as an emotional training ground that goes beyond personality type. Debotton, the modern philosopher general, writes that introspection means using oneself as the central instrument of detection, focused on one's sources of private joy and unhappiness. Maybe that bully from fourth grade should give it a try. It's never too late to get leverage out our emotional history.

*Are you in tune with the peaks and valleys of your inner world?*

July 3

## **How quickly we return to the music.**

Because I perform my concerts outdoors, under a tunnel, without amplification, mostly for strangers, solely for tips and amidst tons of ambient distractions, I'm forced to strum my guitar louder and harder and faster than I would if I were standing on a stage in a bar plugged into the house speakers. That's the nature of busking. Every moment, you're fighting for your life. I wouldn't have it any other way. The only problem is, my guitar strings break fairly often. Which comes with the territory, but still, in the middle of a song, it's quite a jarring and frustrating moment. Most guitars withhold around two hundred pounds of pressure on their bridge. That's a lot of tension. But as I learned from my guitar teacher, being a musician means breaks strings, but being an artist is about how quickly you return to the music. If a string breaks and you suddenly lose your balance and scream out loud and smash your guitar to the ground and cut the concert short by twenty minutes, you lost. Because you allowed the moment to be bigger than you. But if a string breaks and you suddenly start laughing, calmly walk over to your case, pull out a spare, restring and retune the instrument and pick up exactly where you left off, you won. Because it only took you five minutes to return to the music. Of course, this lesson isn't just about playing music; it's about playing the song of life. Everyday, disappointments accrue faster than you can find external forces to blame them on. And they can make you feel disgusted with your- self. Your sense of competency can feel completely undone by a single mistake. But if you learn to reserve a portion of your stamina to recover rapidly from disappointment, to return to the music quickly, nobody in the audience will even notice your broken strings.

*How easily and quickly do you calm down after becoming anxious?*

July 4

## **Humility is the greatest safeguard you have.**

Did you know it was physically impossible to tickle yourself? This is not an urban legend. Cognitive neuroscientists have researched the cerebellum, the part of the brain that's involved in monitoring movements. Turns out, this area can predict sensations when your own movements cause them, but not when someone else's movement does. And so, if you try to tickle yourself, your cerebellum will predict the sensation, and that prediction will cancel out the response of the other brain areas to the tickling. Isn't the human mind fascinating? It kind of makes you wonder if there are any other things you can't do to yourself. Like licking your elbow. Anyone who can do that really should be given their own reality show. Truly impressive. But all stupid human tricks aside, what about bigger, more meaningful activities? Like when you go on a mission to fix yourself? Perhaps you have fallen down this rabbit hole before. Circling all your imperfections like a plastic surgeon with a marker during a patient consultation. Okay so we'll get rid of this here, and cut out this piece, and remove this one section over here, change this part here, and so on. But unlike tickling, this behavior is highly addictive. And the worst part is, because your change isn't instantaneous, you get disgusted with your lack of progress, thinking you should be better by now, and that makes you feel even shittier, which starts the shame loop all over again. Good times. No wonder recovery programs center around humility. Step one is always surrendering to the fact that you can't control everything. You can't get sober unless you die to your ego and start accepting help from someone who is not you. There's power to that. Even if you're not an addict. Because regardless of what you're struggling with, if you were smart enough to fix yourself, wouldn't you have done it by now? If you were so aware of your problem, isn't there a good chance that problem would be solved already? Hurff, the renowned product designer and author, writes about this paradox from the perspective of tech startups, which is a helpful way to think about the process of personal growth. He says people have problems, and they want other people to make those problems go away. But nobody walks around looking for solutions to their problems. People walk around trying to tune out their problems, because they don't expect that they can solve them. And the purpose of the product designer is to tap them on the shoulder and say, excuse me, but you seem to struggle with this problem every day. Imagine if it was actually a positive interaction instead? Hurff's words remind us that if we plant right seed in the right spot, and it will grow without further coaxing. And that's the first step toward change. Accepting that we can't always lean on our own power. Instead of relying on ourselves to be reliable, we humble ourselves to this job that has to be done, and hire the best product or service or individual to help us do it. Could be a therapist, could be a software app, could be a group exercise program, could be a weekly support group meeting. Whatever it takes to stop us from trying to tickle ourselves. Humility is the greatest safeguard we have.

***If you were so aware of your problem, isn't there a good chance that problem would be solved already?***



July 5

## **I only got tired because I was trying to hide.**

It's morally incumbent upon us to live up to our uniqueness. To make meaningful use of everything we are. To humbly and proudly return the product that we've been given. In fact, we don't have a lot of a choice in the matter. If there's something special we have a gift for, something that we can do better than anybody else, it's going to suck us along into it no matter what. And so, we may as well strap in and enjoy the ride. Trying to fight that existential undertow is exhausting. Not to mention, dishonest. The only stipulation is, we have to leverage our uniqueness in the service of making the world a better place. Otherwise we're just falling down the rabbit hole of our own mythology, trapped in a patchwork of pointless eccentricities. Handy once coined a helpful concept called idiosyncrasy credits, which was an organizational approach to earning the right to be different. It's the delicate balance between individualism and impact. The intersection of uniqueness and usefulness. He suggested that only when our team members recognize that we are making a real contribution, can we safely stretch things a bit. Because nobody gets a free pass on the first day. We have to earn it. It's one thing for coworkers to accept oddball behavior from someone with an amazing creative vision, but if we're the new guy and our greatest talent lies in being exhausting and hard to be around, everybody loses. Now, this doesn't suggest we keep an actual ledger, marking debits and credits every time we choose to do something as an expression of our identity. But it's an interesting filter for our behavior. The concept of idiosyncrasy credits implores us to use our uniqueness as a means to an end, not just for the sake of being unique.

*Are you good enough to justify your eccentricities?*

July 6

## **Nobody is going to pat you on the back for delaying gratification.**

If the artist doesn't raise their ability to defer gratification, being prolific is a mathematical impossibility. This type of patience is a cornerstone to personal creativity management. Go behind the scenes of any successful creator, and you'll find somebody who doesn't demand immediate payoffs from their actions. And yet, the absurd challenge with our species is that human beings have been primed for instant gratification. If we have the audacity to defer instant results, we're battling millions of years of physiological impulses. Our hormones, egos and reptilian brains will be on high alert, telling us that we should want what we want, when we want. To make matters worse, we also live in a world that celebrates impulse. Everybody wants everything for nothing yesterday. Think about it. Have you ever seen a reality show about a healthy, patient person putting a moral chain on their own appetites? Worst episode ever. Nielson ratings would plummet faster than a broken cable car. But that's our world. It used to be you could get things good, fast and cheap; but now everything is perfect, now and free. Point being, any time we defer immediate payoffs, we are also battling thousands of years sociological impulses. No wonder it's so hard to be patient. The good news is, there are tools to help you raise your ability to defer gratification. For example, say you don't want to do a certain boring task now, or ever, as part of your creative work. Fair enough. We've all been there before. My recommendation is a tool called future self, which is when you treat things you do as a compassionate investment in yourself that you recoup later on. Say you're reading a book for work that's boring but necessary. Future self can help. You can tell yourself a story that this information, mundane as it may be in the moment, is repowering your source current, and will pay off somewhere down the road, you might decide not to papercut your wrists. You have to trust that whatever is unsexy gives you leverage. Okay, here's another tool for raising your ability to defer gratification. Have you ever executed consistent creative work that made you proud, and yet, it still got ignored or shelved? Story of my life. It fucking sucks. Makes you question why you even bother making art in the first place. Another tool that can buoy your spirits is called long gaming, aka, the willing to initiate risky projects and be misunderstood for extended periods of time. Similar to our previous tool, there is absolutely nothing sexy about this mindset. Nobody is going to pat you on the back for delaying gratification. And there is no guarantee that down the road all your hard work will be worth it when you finally sell out for millions of dollars. But one thing is for sure; your journey will be less depressing. The mindset of long gaming will help you overcome those day-to-day feelings of foolishness and apathy in your creative projects. Soon you will learn to find fulfillment with the process even when the finish line isn't in sight. And that's worth its weight in gold. Look, being human is at odds with being a creative professional. Deferring gratification is basically improbable. It's not impossible though. Amazon didn't turn a profit until nine years after being founded and seven years after going

public. Now they're the first trillion-dollar company in history. Talk about putting patience into the storybooks.

***What unsexy work today will give you leverage tomorrow?***

July 7

## **I quantify almost nothing in my life.**

Every time I give a presentation to a group of businesspeople, somebody inevitably asks me how many books have been sold. And of course, I have no idea. Inventory management isn't my thing. Besides, since so many thousands of copies have been given away, stolen and downloaded over the past twenty years, it's literally impossible to quantify. But that's not my concern. I am in the business of making art, not measuring it. Doctorow, a favorite writer of my generation, published a captivating essay about this very issue. His theory is, creators should think like dandelions. The dandelion doesn't follow all its seeds to make sure they get steered in the right direction and have their mittens and a packed lunch with them. Almost every seed a dandelion tosses into the wind is going to die without taking root, but that's not what matters to the dandelion. They don't care that every seed survives, they care that every opportunity to take root is exploited. A successful dandelion is one that colonizes every crack in the sidewalk, not one that successfully plants all its seeds. And so, our job as creators isn't to worry about having a single, central repository for our works so we can easily count copies and figure out where they're going. Because dandelions don't keep track of their seeds. But once we learn to get past the vanity of knowing exactly how many copies have been made and sold and shared and find the zen of knowing that the reproduction will take care of itself, we'll attain dandelionesque contentment. Proving, that the best way to have a great idea is to have a lot of ideas. Aim for volume, not victory. And trust the process to take care of itself.

*Are you in the business of making art or measuring it?*

July 8

## **I want to make trying look cool.**

There's no shame in being meticulous. Being organized doesn't kill our creative urge and destroy our street cred and ruin our chances of making it as artists. Being apathetic, cynical, disaffected and too cool to care, does. If we want success to have a real chance at us, we have to puncture some our own pretensions. We have to shatter the myths that we've developed from watching television. And we have to embrace the fact that engaged, passion-ate, diligent and conscientious people do get ahead. Carlin was a hero of mine for many reasons, not the least of which was, his work ethic. I not only admired him because he was funny and edgy and provocative and legendary, but also because he wrote twenty pages a day, every day, for fifty years. Nobody did that. Nobody. Because most people were too busy trying to look cool. George was busy making trying look cool. That's why he was the greatest of all time. He cared. He tried. He was organized and meticulous and structured. That was his secret weapon. I'll never forget watching one of his last interviews before his death. Carlin told the audience, I've been blessed with some pretty deep files. And they couldn't stop laughing. Not because he was doing material, but because he was meticulous about organizing it.

*Which of your artistic pretensions do you need to puncture?*

July 9

## **If everybody did exactly what you said, what would the world look like?**

Jobs revolutionized six industries, including personal computers, animated movies, music, phones, tablet computing, digital publishing and retailing. Thousands of articles and interviews, numerous books and several movies have done a brilliant job explaining why, however the one insight that stands out in my mind comes from the innovator himself. Steve claimed that the definition of a visionary is someone with an inner vision not supported by external facts. There may not be anything quantifiable to back up that vision, other than their belief in it themselves. Nevertheless, they persist and turn that inner vision into an outer reality. What's inspiring about this philosophy is, you don't have to be a billionaire to enact it. You don't have to revolutionize entire industries. That only happens to one percent of the one percent. For the rest of us civilians, being a visionary has more to do with our mindset. Having studied and written about this topic extensively, and having worked with and for a few visionaries myself, something that's helpful is to think about it as a checklist. Not for the purposes of ticking every box, but because it can be inspiring to view the entire spectrum of behaviors that define this archetype. Think about the degree to which your mindset parallels these traits. Are you utterly indifferent to the opinions of anyone else? Are you willing to, at least for a while, do everything yourself? Do you avoid relying on the feedback of others to define your own views? Will you refuse to accept automatically received truths? Will you work for your own rewards and satisfaction in your own unbending terms? Do you refuse to subjugate your rebellious spirit to the whims of institutional and culture gravity? Are you willing to make meaning from within the sphere of your own individual existence? Do you make a complete effort anyway, even when the odds are stacked against you and most people won't even notice anyway? Will you courageously stick with your crazy idea, even if you look like an idiot and risk alienating those who don't understand? Now, these attributes aren't the exclusive pieces to building a visionary mindset. If none of them resonated with you, it doesn't mean you lack vision. Just know that as a visionary, you should be able to see, smell, taste and feel what the world will look like when you bring that vision to life. My mentor's favorite question comes to mind, which has been critical to my own vision throughout my life. If everybody did exactly what you said, what would the world look like? This question is profound not only because it forces you to envision the future, but it also because it's an apparatus of accountability in the present. Whatever it is that you're trying to create, this question reminds you to keep giving yourself and others the tools you need to build that world.

***If selling a small vision and selling a big one take the same amount of energy, why not go big?***

July 10

## **If everything you've done up until now is just the beginning, what's next?**

Swingers, the classic nineties comedy that captured a generation of people down on their luck, has a monologue that still resonates with me today. Mike struggles to recover from his failed relationship, and his best friend lectures him about moving on. Sometimes it still hurts. Each day you think about it less and less. And then one day you wake up and you don't think of it at all, and you almost miss that feeling. It's kind of weird. You miss the pain because it was part of your life for so long. And then, boom, something reminds you of it, and you just smile that bittersweet smile. You miss the pain just like you miss the girl, because you lived with it so long. These words are a reminder that we have a choice. We can view the past as a crutch to lean back on, or a fulcrum to propel us forward. It all depends on the story we tell ourselves. Here's the leverage question that's been useful to me. If everything you've done up until now is just the beginning, what's next? The sense of possibility here is palpable. This question is pure mythology, suggesting that there might be a narrative pattern that gives significance to our existence. The best part is, when we frame our experiences as, oh, we're just getting started, it doesn't dishonor the past, rather, expresses gratitude that it brought us here, and uses it as a jumping off point. Shakespeare's mantra comes to mind. What's past is prologue. It means that what happened before has led us to our current opportunity. History sets the context for the present. The stage is set, the next act is queued up and ready go, and our destinies are of our own making. It's a comforting and encouraging narrative about failure and rejection. Because the past can only continue to hurt us if we allow it to. But through the sheer power of leverage, we can surge into the present opportunity with a buoyant sense of liberation. Trusting that the person we've become along the way is exactly what we need to move our story forward. Sound too grandiose and dramatic for your liking? That's fair. Not everyone is comfortable being the hero of their own story, or even thinking of their life as a story in the first place. But what you'll find is, the process of establishing the myth of your life as a major creative act, can take you from down your luck to a step in the right direction.

***How will you convince yourself that a new and glorious future is stretching out before you?***

July 11

## **If it's going to be painful either way, then why delay?**

Conscientiousness is boring. There's nothing compelling about people who are healthy, organized, disciplined and committed. Can you imagine watching a network television show about a super disciplined guy who expertly controls, regulates, and directs his impulses? Tune in next week for a groundbreaking new episode. Kevin will resist doing what feels good now, and instead, do what is less fun but will pay off in the future. Don't miss it. Not a single advertiser would buy airtime. The ratings would be in the toilet before the first show even aired. Because conscientiousness, despite the fact that it's been clinically proven to be a positive trait that increases happiness and longevity, is not something our culture actually values. We claim to admire it, but we certainly don't require it. More often we encourage, celebrate and reward toxic traits like drama, antagonism and dysfunction. We live in a world where everyone is competing to become the most interesting person they know. As the old saying in the newspaper industry goes, if it bleeds, it leads. Sadly, being the arbiter of moral rectitude is rarely welcomed. That's way too confronting for most people. Try telling your fifty new coworkers on your first day at work that you don't drink alcohol or coffee. You'll see how cool healthy people are. There's a brilliant philosophy book about why manners matter, and the author writes about this very idea. We like our celebrities mixed up, romantically troubled, creatively wacky, drugged out, in rehab, in litigation, betrayed and pursued like wild creatures through the streets. We don't look to celebrities for guidance, we look to them to learn how not to live. Assuming that's true, then, let's pretend that conscientiousness is not only a positive trait and highly predictive for success in life, but also a trait that people can learn. Yes, there will always be constitutional factors and socialization experiences during childhood that impact a given person's level of this trait. But humor me for a moment. What if conscientiousness was largely depended on behavioral economics? What if there were things people could say to themselves to make discipline, motivation and decision-making easier? Imagine you're struggling to make progress on a task that is uncomfortable for you. We've all been there before. But what most people fail to realize is that the alternatives, including doing nothing, are equally if not more uncomfortable than the current option. And so, here's a mantra that's fun and memorable. It sounds like a nursery rhyme. It's going to be painful either way, so why delay? Maybe that playfulness is the push you need. Another approach, if you're more of an analytical person, is to run a split second cost benefit analysis of the challenge before you. Imagine you are lying in bed, thinking about going for a run, but you're demotivated by how cold it is outside. We've all been there before too. My recommendation is, don't lose perspective so quickly. Compare that bad feeling of being cold, probably only for the first ten minutes, with the benefits you'll get from going for the run, which will last for the next ten hours. Outweigh yourself by trusting that going on a run will cause your thoughts, feelings and energy level to take a different, more productive, healthier path than if you stayed in bed. Maybe that will work for you. Look, option anxiety is really hard. The paradox of choice affects us all. But in a world where both options



require work, the sooner we know which way to go, the better. Conscientiousness is wonderful because it can help us bridge the intention behavior gap. If you're sick of a world that only rewards sickness, see if you can become one of the people who is so happy and healthy, they're easy to miss.

*If it's going to be painful either way, then why delay?*

July 12

## **If we didn't do what we loved, we wouldn't exist.**

Most boxing movies have the same plot. Fighter wants revenge against an unbeatable opponent. Fighter's wife tells him that it's suicide and not worth ruining their lives for. Fighter passionately explains to his wife that boxing is his whole life, it's all he knows, he can't change and he has no choice. Wife sulks during most of act two, but slowly caves to support the fighter in his macho quest for vindication as the training montage comes to a climax and the final bout draws near. The big night comes, and the match begins. Unbeatable opponent is surprised at the fighter's newfound strength, speed and strategy. Fighter persists and prevails in final moments and everyone weeps tears of joy. This story makes for one hell of a cinematic experience. No wonder most boxing movies always make me cry. But lest we forget, it's just a movie. Filmmakers are preserving something called character continuity, in which the actors are striving to be consistent in their behavior. Like the fighter, for example, who doesn't necessarily want to enter the ring and risk his life, but it's just his nature and he can't help it and he doesn't have a choice. As audience members, we cannot allow this narrative to convince us that real life works the same way. It doesn't. We have far more options that we realize. Just because one particular career has been our whole life and all we know up until this point, it doesn't mean we're stuck doing that job until we die trying. We don't have to risk everything. We can pivot and do something else. Creed says in the climax of his film that he would be no good to anybody if he didn't do what he loved. Which is true, but since when is there only one way to do what we love? Isn't that mindset operating with a constricted view of the choices available to us? Pretty sure boxing is a hundred million dollar industry with multiple career paths available, especially for a champ. If you can't get in the ring anymore because of medical reasons, you can still open your own gym, become a sports broadcaster, hang up your shingle as the boxing trainer to the stars, teach underprivileged youth how to fight their way out of the ghetto, become a consultant for film and television, build a media empire of instructional videos and books, the sky is the limit. Hell, most people will recreate their careers in significant ways multiple times in their lives. That's what smart and adaptable people learn how to do. They maneuver their way to something that works. My mentor once told me that our option for how to create fulfilling work is only limited by our imagination's ability to create scenarios that excite us. The definition of work, of career, of what is and is not a business, are forever altered and can be molded to fit anything that excites and feeds our soul, as long as we choose to explore it intentionally. Remember, if we have a plan, then we're limited to today's options. But if we're willing to evolve, then we can always find another way to do what we love. Don't follow your passion; bring it with you. Focus less on choosing the path of passion, and more on channeling your passion in whatever path chooses you.

*Are you trapped between the backward pull of history and the forward drive of ambition?*

July 13

## **Instrumental activities of daily living.**

Some people have difficulty keeping track of all the new pastimes they are pursuing, tearing through one activity after another, never quite satisfied. Some people throw themselves into a new hobby and go whole hog for a few months, but then get bored and quit. Some people are perfectionists and don't pursue any new hobbies because they won't be the best at it immediately. Some people have no discernible interests and just kind of wander aimless hoping something will spark their enthusiasm. Some people simply aren't curious, don't try things and are fundamentally content with long stretches of gross inactivity. Some people are depressed and feel apathetic and unmotivated, but modern technology has fooled them into thinking their life is fulfilling. Well, to each their own. Because there is no right or wrong way to diversify one's life. There are as many hobbies, interests and pursuits as there are people to engage with them. The secret is being intentional about our effort. Otherwise fulfillment will continue to elude us. One psychological study aimed to clarify the relationship between having interests and mortality. Their research studied a community of seniors and suggested that having hobbies, or what they referred to as instrumental activities of daily living, not only extended people's longevity, but also created a healthier life expectancy. Proving, that whether you call them hobbies, passions, interests, pursuits, side hustles or random activities doesn't matter. This is not about spending money, it's about doing things that cultivate the self and personify our values. It's not about being obsessed; it's about serving our meaning-making needs. It's not about creating a second job for ourselves, it's about relaxing and setting our own rules for enjoyment. It's not about being the best or even being good at something, it's about the joy of discovering something worth doing. Here's my personal strategy for approaching instrumental activities of daily living. On my desktop, there is a sticky note titled, meaning-making mission. This is a living document that maps out the larger repertoire of activities that are guaranteed to provide me with the experience of meaning. The list includes projects and pursuits to do before work, on the way to work, during work, on the way home from work, and at nights and on weekends. It's my existential day planner. My micro blue print for fulfillment. And it not only helps me fill my time, it also inoculates me against depression. Should the inevitable feelings of listlessness or loneliness well up inside of me, instead of monitoring my moods, I can just start doing things that are likely to fulfill my meaning making mission. Does that mean my life is full of hobbies? Does that mean every hour of the day is jam packed with activities? Does that mean my house is littered with unfinished projects and possibility clutter? Not at all. My meaning making mission may be intentional, but it's not stressful. Quite the opposite, in fact. Its function is to manage, alleviate and metabolize my stress, not add more layers to it. There's no way to tell if it's extending my life expectancy over time, but it's certainly making my life more fulfilling in the moment. And that's good enough for me.

*What instrumental activities of daily living serve your meaning making needs?*

July 14

## **Is everything you know written down somewhere?**

Information overload occurs when the amount of input to a system exceeds its processing capacity. Toffler first popularized this concept on a cultural level in the sixties and seventies, although various religious mystics and philosophers have been chiming that information bell for warning for centuries. But now that we're well into the digital age, the curve shows that human knowledge doubles about every thirteen months. That's terrifying. Our cavemen brains were simply not constructed to acquire information as fast as they can get it. Where this concept really hits home is on an organization level. Because contrary to popular conditioning, knowledge can't really be managed, only enabled. The best we can hope for is to install rituals, systems and other tools to make it easier for people to use that knowledge as leverage. Kazuo, the godfather of knowledge management, found that the secret is, knowledge enablement has to happen in a caring environment. That's what lubricates the flow of information within an organization. The intention with which it's disseminated and the context and relationships that allow it to be unleashed. At my last job, one of the projects that became my baby was the company wiki. It wasn't the prettiest of tools, nor was it something that our team depended on as a lifeline on a daily basis. But when it came to onboarding new employees, boy were those people glad it existed. Because instead of having to figure out all this information on their own, they could simply consult this internal tool on an as needed basis. It wasn't some lumbering, overwhelming one hundred page employee manual they had to memorize and then sign off on. Our wiki was an easy to navigate web application that was available at their leisure, speed and convenience. In fact, here would be my standard line during the onboarding process. People don't want to drink from a firehose; they want a glass of water when they're thirsty. My mentor famously gave me that advice years ago in reference to giving speeches and writing books, and the principle has profound applications at a company level. Ask anyone who's ever worked at a startup before. Information organization tends not to be their bread and butter. Small businesses prioritize speed and flexibility, often at the cost of structure. Which is totally acceptable for the purposes of company growth, as long as you have a process to mitigate information overload from the beginning. To me, it's a form of generosity and caring. You're signaling to these new team members, look, you're going to have a lot of stuff thrown at you at once, so rest easy knowing that it's all documented and easy to reference in one place, forever. Bottom line is, wherever you work, information is likely stacking up fast and your team is not processing it well, if at all. That's not good. Think water glass, not firehose.

*Is everything you know written down somewhere?*

July 15

## **Is this a real thing, or just your response to anxiety?**

Is this a real thing, or just your response to anxiety? My friend recently bought a new couch. He seemed disproportionately excited about the purchase, so I asked him why this particular piece of furniture was such a big deal to him. You don't understand, he told me with wide-eyed intensity, it took me five years to find this couch. Huh. Five years. Now that seems like an excessive amount of time for a single item. But according to him, there was a highly specific consideration set, which narrowed his options significantly. First, the couch had to be seven feet wide, so his tall frame had ample room to lay flat. Second, the couch had to be made with organic nontoxic materials, so the off gassing didn't give him headaches. Third, the couch had to fall within his low price range, so the purchase didn't set him back too much. Fourth, the couch had to fit into the bed of his brother's truck, so he could go pick it up himself and avoid paying the eighty-dollar delivery charge. This list went on and on. He regaled me with neurotic tales from five years of obsessing over this project, from calling stores to reading customer reviews to sampling swatches, all for one goddamn purchase. The whole interaction made me feel sad and anxious. Because the only thought running through my head was, wow, my friend must be in pain. Spending five years trying to find the perfect couch, that isn't him being an informed, savvy consumer. This is a compulsive pursuit of a distraction to soothe himself. This is a constant obsession in the service of paranoia. His unhealthy mix of procrastination and perfection and indecisiveness, that wasn't the problem. This was the symptom. Hope he's doing okay in there. Have you ever found yourself trapped in the briars of obsession like this? You rarely realize it when you're in the thick of it, but sometimes you look back and wonder, what the hell was I thinking? Grayling writes about this in his inspiring book of humanist meditations. He says that all instruments of excess are distractions. The most they teach us is the value of their absence. People aspire to possess things of value, and yearn for superlatives in experience, and enough intoxicants give the illusion of both. But illusions carry one in a direction exactly opposite to the desires reality. Sounds like my twenties during the height of my workaholism. Every day my mind was whirring and unproductively obsessing about the equivalent to finding the perfect couch. The question that would have been helpful for me to ask myself was, is this a real thing, or just my response to anxiety? Because most of the time, it's the latter. We're soothing our pain. If this project or endeavor we're obsessing over is making us grow more agitated, manic and upset, then it's time to divest meaning and find a healthier, more productive use of our time.

July 16

## **Is this experience worth classifying, or simply enjoying?**

As the world record holder of wearing nametags, I've conducted a significant amount of field research around the experience of labeling. And what I've discovered is that it's a doubled edged sword. Depending on the context, labeling can either be helpful or harmful. Affect labeling, for example, is the process of attaching words to feelings. It helps us manage our emotions, empowers us to classify and understand what's going on around us and, if need be, change our unhealthy behaviors and choices. Ask anyone who has experience with the panicking spread of anxiety; labeling is one of the few vehicles through which we exert some measure of comfort over the course of our own lives. In fact, reflecting on my own mental health history, my healthiest way out of panic has always been through the ability to identify and put a comprehensible label upon my feelings. That's the power of emotional labeling. Freedom begins with naming things. Once you've put a word to it, you've separated yourself from it. And that means it can't control you. Creative labeling, on the other hand, is a very different animal. Because in the process of bringing new projects to life, words can obstruct understanding. When there is naming, the name is often mistaken for what has been named. The secret to building something real and lasting is not being so damn focused on defining it. When we spend an extraordinary amount of time naming and labeling and understanding and crisply articulating something, that can actually steal energy from the joy of making it. And the act of labeling can diminish the capacity of an idea to fulfill their potential. Ultimately, the goal is to be careful not to dismiss labeling as either a panacea or blanket mistake. It all depends on context. Some things require a nametag, some don't.

*Are you enjoying the bird's song, or trying to classify the kind of bird that is singing?*

July 17

## **Is this worth a multiple of the energy put into it?**

Leveraging means using something to our maximum advantage. Increasing the rate of return of an investment. Exponentially improving our odds with minimal effort and friction. If that sounds cold and clinical and corporate, you're absolutely right. But that doesn't mean we can't use the phenomenon of leverage to dramatically improve our lives. The secret most of us miss is, our highest leverage comes from anticipating rather than reacting. Otherwise, by the time we take action, it will be too late. You gotta get while the getting's good. The question we have to ask is, if we could only do one thing on our list all day long, which item would add the most value to others and ourselves? Because in that case, it's kind of a no-brainer. The results of that activity will be always worth a multiple of the energy put into it. Of course, not everyone has the luxury of delegating, downsizing or deleting every underleveraged item in their list. For most of us, most of our days contain boring and pointless tasks that simply need to be done. Which is perfectly fine. But that's where the anticipation comes into play. If we have a crystal clear understanding of our own worthiness, of our own time value of money, and of our own unique ability to contribute to other people's and our lives, then we will always ready to optimize on a moment's notice. And not in a stressful way, either. We can train ourselves to transition from low leverage to high leverage activities fluidly and seamlessly. Reading and writing, for example, are two of my highest leverage activities. Any time spent doing those two things will almost always send ripples that lap onto the shore of my consciousness. The process is joyful, creative, relaxing, inspiring and engaging for me in the moment, and the product is useful for others in the long term. That's why standing in lines and waiting for trains doesn't bother me much. It's simply an invitation to use leverage to improve my life. Bemoaning the imperfections of public transportation isn't useful for me or anyone standing near me. But leveraging my unexpected commute time to dig into my new philosophy book or codify my thoughts and feelings, that puts me in a position of power and value. Anticipation, not reaction. That's how use our time and energy to our maximum advantage. By looking for the multiples.

***What high leverage activity can you do to exploit your new reality?***

July 18

## **It doesn't matter what we call it, only that we call on it.**

Creativity is notoriously complex, deeply nuanced, highly personal and mostly subjective. Despite the growing body of academic research on the subject, it's still difficult to define and measure. Personally, this never occurred to me until my travels took me around the world. Not only visiting different countries in my work as an entrepreneur, but also working as an employee with various coworkers from different cultures. At the travel startup that hired me as brand manager, our team had thirty countries represented. All of whom had unique approaches to creativity. I will never forget our first company retreat, where one of the engineers came up to me after our brainstorming session. Americans, he smiled, you're so optimistic with your big, strong ideas. Russians don't have that luxury. Wow, that's the kind of perspective you can't get making art in your studio apartment. Turns out, most of the world has their own definition of creativity, each of which is in alignment with their unique value system. Chinese culture understands creativity as an external social attribute, focusing on what a person can contribute to society. Makes sense in their communist society. Westerners tend to see creativity more as an internal, individual attribute. Perfect for selfish capitalists like us. Germans approach creating as a process to solve problems. Which is nicely aligned with their history of precision and orderliness. Scandinavians view creativity as an individual attitude that helps people cope with the challenges of life. Like the fact that it's fifty below zero and dark around the clock for months at a time. You have no choice but to create your own warmth and light. Polish culture divides creativity into the high level, distinguished artistic or scientific achievements, and the low level, every day, personal creative work. Once again, this seems appropriate considering their history of resilience. Pueblo tribe members use the term *powaha*, which means water, wind and breath. To them, creativity is connecting to natural flow. It's not an activity separate from any other in life. It's breathing. What a beautiful expression of their culture's holistic spirituality. Greek culture had no official word for creativity, believing that ideas came from the daemons, muses and other external godlike forces. Sounds about right for four thousand years ago. Point being, there is no right answer, there is no best definition. It doesn't matter what we call it, only that we call on it. Making things is at the heart of what it means to be a human being. Why we make it, how we make it and whom we make it for, it's all a matter of degree.

***What's your personal definition of creativity?***



July 19

## **It is never too late for the seed to sprout and grow in infinite abundance.**

Sivers, the founder of the first music distributor for independent artists, recommends that we get great at executing other people's ideas as well as our own. This is not easy or common. Most people barely have the time and energy to ship their own work, much less help someone else get theirs to the finish line. They're too cagey to share the love. Who cares about making the pie bigger when all they want to do is eat their piece? Shawn, the supervisor at my old advertising agency, was the rare exception. Anytime a copy assignment tripped me up, he would take twenty minutes out of his day to work on a few executions of my ideas. And then he'd just give them to me. Never once did he ask for credit. He would just smile and say, what's mine is yours, and then go back to working on his own stuff. This is precisely why helping other people execute their ideas is such an anomaly. It requires profound humility, faith and generosity, not to mention, a deep abundance mentality. Because unless you trust that the forest will always provide, unless you believe that the more creativity you use, the more you have, it won't work. And this process is not just about ideas, either. It's about the relationships we have with the people who belong to those ideas. Look, everyone needs someone to tell them they have value. Everyone needs the satisfaction of knowing their talents contributed to a larger effort. And helping them execute their ideas accomplishes both. In a world where millions of people are trying to make their ideas more popular than yours, setting aside the attachment to credit and enlisting yourself in another person's dreams is always welcome. Remember, there is great comfort in knowing that one's ideas have been witnessed, shared and loved by another. We can talk a big game about being open to other people's ideas, or we can simply go to work and start helping them execute those ideas.

***Whose dream has become a reality because of you?***

July 20

## **It only needs to happen once to be a disaster.**

Do you remember the most boring class you ever took? Mine was world geography. Monday morning, freshman year. Just dreadful. One time after falling asleep during class, the professor slammed down a seven hundred page textbook next to my head to wake me up. Guess that's one way to engage bored students. And if you research productivity issues like this, experts give useful suggestions. Have an energy drink before class, sit next to an enthusiastic person, doodle in your notebook, make up little games, finish homework for other classes, do breathing exercises, massage the pressure points in your hand, eat a snack during class, sit in the front so you're too scared to fall asleep, and so on. But like most recommendations, they treat the symptom, not the source. And the issue here is not that someone's class or instructor or textbook is boring. The issue is that of intention and attention. How we choose to experience the world. Because if we're disengaged with subjects because they don't seem relevant to us, who's fault is that? Curiosity is the ability to relate anything to our own needs. It's the constant challenge to find something interesting in an otherwise boring experience. Leff's obscure but groundbreaking book on playful perception comes to mind. He wrote that the key to avoiding boredom was to expand our repertoire of awareness. To increase the choice about the quality of our inner experience. That's how we would improve the flavor and value of our life. His term for this practice was called an awareness plan, which is a procedure or mental recipe for perceiving and thinking about the world around us. Turns out, if we concentrate our energy on thinking up original ways of experiencing things, then we can solve our chosen problems and move toward our goals. Here are three examples. Envision what's going on mechanically inside each thing you notice. Make predictions about what is going to happen around you in the next few seconds or minutes. Think of people's words, phrases and comments as the title of a book and imagine what the book might include. That last one is my personal favorite. It's especially useful during weekly meetings with clients and coworkers, as the topics of discussion can often be highly repetitive and analytical. Listening to people's words as if there was a mental highlighter inside my brain and combing the conversation for pithy titles and sentences, that awareness plan makes me a much more engaged listener. For example, our company president made the following observation during a recent staff meeting. It only needs to happen once to be a disaster. Tell me that's not a great book title. I can't even recall what that was in reference to, but it doesn't matter. It's insightful, pithy, foreboding, and that kind of language is enthralling to my brain. It's the reason meetings are rarely boring to me. My awareness plan is always looking for content like that. Look, some subjects, some conversations, some people, really are boring. That's the reality. But instead of trying to change that situation, start thinking of new ways to experience it that would make a positive difference in how you feel. Boredom, like most things in this life, is an inside job. We can't blame somebody else for it. All we can do is

regard every moment as a new positive opportunity to exercise our choice about how to experience life.

*If you're disengaged with something because it doesn't seem relevant to you, who's fault is that?*

July 21

## **It wouldn't have been given to you if you weren't supposed to use it.**

If there is a secret talent for which we have no name, some gift that we have not employed to any useful purpose, do we have a moral obligation to use it? Is it an insult to our inheritance to let that talent lay idle? Maybe. There certainly is no ethics committee to check up on us. There is no law that says that we have to regift whatever we have inside of us. And there is no doubt that life is a blind and purposeless effect of billions of mundane and absurd events. But setting all nihilism aside, why else would we have the damn thing? We may as well put it to work. Koontz wrote a series of bestselling books about this very question. Thomas is a young medium who with an insistent desire of his to use his talents for others. He puts himself at the service of others through the obedience to his gift. And early in the story, his girlfriend accuses him of having a messiah complex. He taps his head and replies, it's a gift, and I've still got the box it came in. It wouldn't have been given to me if I weren't supposed to use it. Now, some might label this kind of attitude pretentious. And maybe it is. But when did we decide that pretention was such a crime? When did the world become a place where we have this conflicted relationship with our most earnest aspirations? Fox, the magazine editor who wrote a book about the virtue of pretentiousness, makes the point that pretention is always someone else's crime. It's never a felony in the first person. Pretentiousness happens over there. But being pretentious is rarely harmful to anyone. Accusing others of it is. We can use the word pretentious as a weapon with which to bludgeon other people's creative efforts, but in shutting them down the accusation will shatter in our hand and out will bleed our own insecurities, prejudices and unquestioned assumptions. And that is why pretentiousness matters. It is a false note of objective judgment, and when it rings we can hear what society values in culture, hear how we perceive our individual selves. Ain't nothing shameful about having big dreams and believing in our gifts. Ain't nothing wrong with being heartfelt and loving big words and making art that makes no sense. As long as we can laugh at ourselves along the way.

***Have you given yourself permission to express each of your gifts to make a difference in all parts of your life?***

July 22

## **It wouldn't have the same motivational firepower.**

The merits of failure are vastly overstated in our culture. We are obsessed with bragging about how badly we screwed up, just to earn another precious shred of street credibility from people we don't even know. But in most cases, that's just false humility. It's a performance in the art of failure porn. Certainly, we all screw up and hopefully grow from that experience. But the more life-giving question is, what's your relationship to victory? Because there is no reason to be guilty about relishing the small daily victories. There is no shame in taking the victory wherever we can. That's all part of the long term process of growth. Every day, one of my favorite rituals is chalking up my many victories. From writing a chapter in a new book to having a deep conversation with a coworker to getting a paycheck deposited into my bank account, they're all victories. They all go on the list. Because in my experience, small victories are critical to creating the momentum for support that will lead to the major ones. The best part is at the end of the week when my list is reviewed, celebrated, breathed in, and then deleted. That clean slate ushers me into the next week with optimism. Can you imagine doing the same thing for your failures? Keeping a tally of every mistake you made? It wouldn't have the same motivational firepower. Nor would sitting around with people, commiserating about all your many fuckups and how those failures made you better. Only by saturating our consciousness with our own victories, plus surrounding ourselves with people who are having victories and making progress themselves, does momentum build. The other point to remember is, to be victorious doesn't mean we have to win. Bowman, the coach of the greatest Olympic swimmer in history, writes in his book about habit how the actual race is just another step in a pattern that started earlier that date and has been nothing but victories. Winning is a natural extension. That's how each of us can build our own relationship with success. By seeing it as a continuum. Recognizing that there are many sources of victory and that they're all worth counting. And trusting that we are lovable and worthy no matter how many times we cross the finish line.

*What kind of story do you tell yourself about success and failure?*

July 23

## **Dude, you need to do something completely different.**

Temporal abundance is when you build a narrative around time that supports and enhances your overall experience of fulfillment and calm. This tool is a must have in any personal creativity management system. Because once you learn how to take yourself out of the victim position in regards to time, you can make as much of it as you want. Feeling less stressed and pressured and rushed in your daily routine, now you can finally have some space to start an exciting new intellectual endeavor. Doesn't that sound blissful? Well, maybe not at first. As my therapist once said, the only thing worse than not having enough time is having too much of it. This is the paradox of the creative life. Once you arrive at that place of temporal abundance, you might not know what to do with yourself. When you're a creative and ambitious person who is suddenly blessed with undirected kilowatts of energy to redirect into new meaningful pursuits, there's a whole new layer of anxiety that accompanies that gift. Wow, you wonder to yourself, now I actually have breathing room in my daily routine, how the hell will I fill that space? Years ago, my company went through a particularly slow period. My entrepreneurial schedule was barren empty with no contracts, meetings, accountabilities or clients requiring my attention. It sucked. Every single day was a battle against inertia, just trying to find activities to pass the time. But then, while having coffee one afternoon with a colleague of mine, I had a revelation. Apparently my friend could tell from my energy, body language and tone of voice that something was off. After patiently listening to me whine about having no exiting projects on the horizon, he flat out said, dude, you need to do something completely different. Best eight words anybody ever said to me. And he was right. It was time to change lanes and engage with something new, not just better. No more of these lateral moves marginally improving things I was already doing. The move was getting out of my comfort zone and moving into work that actually gave me equity and allowed me to elevate, not just execute. Talk about a schedule filler. The next few months of my life were rife with momentum and transformation and fear and confusion. Precisely the kind of fuel a creative person needs to take themselves to the next level. If you've recently found yourself with a surplus of time and energy, consider doing something completely different. Something you've never done before. Your boredom will disappear like a fart in the wind.

***What if your sudden influx of discretionary time was the invitation to transformation that you've been waiting for?***

July 24

## What wants to be written?

A friend of mine who teaches a painting class always tells his students, when you love it, stop. Don't keep adding extra strokes to the canvas after you've reached that point, or you'll drive yourself crazy. It's a simple but powerful piece of advice. But it got me thinking. What about the reverse? What happens when an artist's emotional response to the work goes in the opposite direction? Because sometimes you hate the damn thing. Sometimes the piece you're creating bothers the hell out of you and you just want to scrap it and move on to something else. In this situation, my advice would be the opposite of my painter friend. When you hate it, persist. Channel your hostility in service of making the work better. See if you can push through the resistance, come out clean on the other side and turn the hate into love. It won't work every time, but occasionally it's worth following the executional path in spite of your feelings, trusting that it might be worthwhile in the end. One of the songs on my new record was like this. It was a warm and jazzy tune with a catchy melody and upbeat rhythm. Singing the first sixty seconds of the song filled my soul with joy. But for some reason, whenever it came time to play the chorus, my energy plummeted. The song lost momentum and spark. The chord progression felt uninspiring and flat. And I just wanted it to be over. That's not the inner experience an artist should have while performing their work. It was time to take my own advice. When you hate it, persist, right? And so, after humming the song to myself all day, I came home from work, marched right into my studio with vigor and purpose, and announced to myself, alright song, we can do better than this, so show me what you want to become, and together we can pivot toward something we both love. Let's go. For the next hour, I played around with my underwhelming chorus. Experimented with numerous rhythms, melodies, chord variations and vocal intonations. Eventually, I found this highly emotive major seventh suspended chord, one of my favorite sounds in the world, by the way, and it changed the entire posture of the song. Suddenly the chorus shifted from mundane to memorable. There was an immediate sensation of excitement that wasn't there before. The song had found its true home. It told me what it needed, I listened, and now it's one of my favorite tracks on the album. This is the kind of moment that's available to you when you persist. Next time you find yourself hating what you're making, don't give up on yourself. Even though it's negative energy, it's still energy. Which means it can be channeled into something beautiful. Wonder what wants to be written, and watch what happens.

*Are you willing to stand in the fire of difficult feelings?*

July 25

## **If you're deluded enough to bring your ideas to form.**

Every great idea is born twice. First, as a seed inside our head. Where it's conceptual, nascent and one-dimensional. And second, as a real output in the world. Where it's tangible, living and multifaceted. Now, not every creator makes it through both stages. Many people's ideas stay in idea form forever. Which is unfortunate. Because if you have the opportunity to actually execute your creative vision, wow, there's nothing quite like it. Watching an idea take shape, piece by piece, a little more with each passing day, it's profoundly satisfying. After a few weeks or months of seeing the idea coming to life, you step back and think to yourself, holy crap, this is like, a thing now. This is real. There might actually be a valid vision here, not just a hallucination. Allow me to share case study from my own career. Prolific, my software as a service platform, took about six months to build. The idea itself had been stewing in my brain for a good five years, but the hard-core design and development process was much more compressed. The idea quickly moved from a series of epiphanies to a simple spreadsheet to a sticky note brainstorm to an official creative brief to some rough sketches to a set of wireframes to a working prototype to a minimum viable product, all in about six months. And during that process, to say that my emotions were fluctuating would be an understatement. That's the thing nobody tells you about that second birth of your idea. One day you feel like you're running for high office and poised to change the world, the next day you feel like you might be completely insane and everyone knows it but you. One day you're testing your product thinking it's the greatest thing since sliced beer, the next day you're certain that not a single goddamn user is ever going to pay money for your piece of shit. One day you're fantasizing about the ten-year vision for your product, the next day you remember that nobody cares, everybody's busy, and somebody should probably pull you down off your high horse before you crack a rib. It's quite the emotional and existential roller coaster. Launching a product is basically legalized schizophrenia. And yet, isn't that better than being numb? Isn't feeling both the joys and sorrows, both the hopes and fears, at the heart of what it means to be alive and human? What hell else are you going to do all day? Sure beats not wanting to get out of bed in the morning. Listen, if you're willing have and hold big ideas, and if you're deluded enough to bring them to form, the journey will reward you from every angle. There ain't no guarantee of fame, wealth, or fulfillment, but you'll certainly increase your chances.

*Kind of gives new meaning to the term, born again, doesn't it?*



July 26

## **It's all just window dressing.**

Carlin's widower once said that when the comedian finally learned to enjoy not being liked by half the population, his career took off. It was like a light bulb moment, she said, because most people never reach that point. They don't fully accept and love themselves enough to make up for the people that don't. This is a picture of modern liberation. It's the kind of freedom that enables the finest creative expression. And although it's rarified air, it is available to all of us to breathe. The hard part is accepting that it's an inside job. That whatever salvation we hope to find through our work, nobody is going to give it to us. It lies within. Everything we are striving for, we already have. And so, this concept of a career, all these creations and achievements and milestones, it's all just window dressing around the real work, which is the victory over the self. It's less about what we make and more about developing a positive ego that is always on our side no matter how our work is received. It's less about what to produce and more about creating a valuable image of ourselves that doesn't rise and fall according to our success. It's less about who we reach and more about finding joy, make meaning and experiencing true satisfaction from the process, without having any stake in the result. As my mentor used to remind me, it's not the book, it's the person you become by writing it. Nobody can take that away from us. That is a self that is ours, that belongs to us. Even if half the population doesn't like us, and the other half doesn't know about us, we are still victorious. This is the infinite game, where the only way to win is to keep playing.

*What keeps your little flickers of hope burning in the face of degradation and despair?*

July 27

## **It's merely inhaling and exhaling.**

Stravinsky was not only considered one of the most important and influential composers of the twentieth century, but also one of the most prolific. He ranged in subject and emotional temper, and restlessly diversified his style throughout his career. But the volume of his musical output wasn't just an urge, a task, a project, an occupation, a compulsion or even an addiction. It was simply who he was. In his biography he explained that composition was this daily function he felt compelled to discharge, and he made things because he was made for that, and could not do otherwise. This is where prolific people live. The abundance of their creative expression, inspiring and even intimidating to some, is merely inhaling and exhaling to them. Making things is the most natural way for them to engage with the world. Creating is the activity that is the biological extension of their personality. It's something they make part of normal life, rather than something special and separate from it. It's like my mentor used to say. First you write the book, then the book writes you. Because in the creative process, we don't just make things, we make ourselves. We metabolize our lives and the world. Discovering what is going on inside of us through the process. Without any goals out ahead other than that the place our creating is taking us. But it's not the kind of thing you can bottle and sell. Reading books on the habits and daily routines of highly creative people and applying those techniques to our own process won't suddenly make us prolific. Because for some people, it's not even creative, it's constitutional. For some people, all they've ever known is just to keep making the next thing. And the best thing we can do is step back and let them go.

***What are you so good at that you make look easy?***

July 28

## **It's all bullshit until the check clears.**

Until something is real, don't say a goddamn word. Unless you want to build unnecessary expectation, invite annoying questions, activate nonstop rumination and trigger your superstitious urges, keep your project contained. Even if you have a signed contract in your hand, even if it sounds like the opportunity of a lifetime that is going to change everything for you, mum is the word until there is money in the bank. As they say in show business, it's all bullshit until the check clears. This is not senseless superstition; it's productive paranoia. And this is not some strategy you use to trick the world into giving you what you want; it's protecting yourself. Take it from an entrepreneur who has had his share of cancelled engagements, defaulted contracts and even clients who outright refused to pay even after successful completion of the event. The chickens do not need to be counted. Not yet. Maybe not ever. Look, so many things in this life just go away. And the longer we believe they will last, the more ephemeral they will prove to be. Cameron named this practice containment. It means being shrewd about using your creative energy to actually do the work, not boast about its potential. Zip the lip, button up, keep a lid on it, and don't give away the gold. You must hold your intention within yourself, stoking it with power. Only then will you be able to manifest what you desire. Once it's real, you can shout it from the rooftops. But while it's still incubating, nobody needs to know.

*Are you talking about the work you are going to do, or quietly executing while nobody notices?*

July 29

## **It's not a workout if there's no work.**

Saunas are helpful for relieving stress, relaxing muscles, circulating blood, flushing toxins, cleansing the skin, boosting the immune system, moisturizing our hair, and if we're lucky, finding a date for the weekend. But make no mistake. Going to the sauna is not a workout. Our brain may think it is because we're at the gym and getting sweaty and feeling invigorated at the end. But if we're not moving our body and elevating our heart rate, we're not exercising. Period. Not to take anything away from the schvitzers of the world who relish the sauna experience. But let's not shit ourselves and the world about our efforts. Let's not sit in a hot room for twenty minutes, hit the showers, grab a smoothie and spend the rest of the day bragging to our coworkers about our intense exercise regimen. My mother has spent the past thirty years as a fitness instructor and personal trainer. And as she tells her clients, it's not a workout if there's no work. We must learn to discern between the principal and the peripheral. Interestingly enough, we make this mistake in our professional lives every day. Confusing activity with progress, movement for achievement and effort for results. Spending two hours catching up on email might make us feel productive and effective and accomplished. But the question is, did we create any real value in the world? Did we make the world a better place? Did we do something worth writing in our victory log? Doubtful. Maisel's provocative book about the anxieties of creativity addresses this issue in a way that nobody else ever has. For a creator, he says, discipline means creating regularly. It can have no other meaning. Being disciplined in some other way, like doing yoga every morning or doing superb work at your day job, is not only not an artist's discipline, but it may even be a person's avoidance of his artist's nature. Our challenge, then, is to discover which excuses we use to justify our procrastination. To honestly ask ourselves if the tasks we're engaged are genuine workouts, or just taking another sauna. Both have their place in life. But if we're not able to tell the difference, we're only hurting ourselves.

***Are you highly skilled at convincing yourself that you're more productive than you really are?***

July 30

## **It's not fair whose dream gets attention.**

Success doesn't have a line. There's no democracy, there's no rational system of advancement and there's no standard set of rules that determines when it's our time to shine. That's why it can be so infuriating to watch somebody else having their moment. We see their dream getting more attention than ours, and we feel diminished. Like our chances for success are being all used up. Like our work is going unsung, unseen and unsupported. And so, instead of responding with wonder, we react with bitterness and resentment. Instead of asking ourselves what we can learn from their success, we get trapped in our own personal soap operas, preoccupied with the drama of winning and losing. Instead treating their moment as a glowing source of inspiration for our own ideas, we get hostile and territorial and envious. A healthier approach is to ask ourselves the following question. How can I find a way to translate all these feelings that are exploding inside of me into something else? I have a cartoonist friend who invented a fabulous exercise for this very issue. Anytime we get together for a brain-storming session, we spend ten minutes apiece complaining about other people in our industry that we irrationally hate. No judgments. No justifications. No interruptions. Just an all out bitch fest. It's not only hilarious, but it's also profoundly cleansing. Releasing those feelings in safe space of mutual trust is a cathartic, connected experience. What's more, irrationally hating people never fails to inspire us to reflect on our work and how we can execute it more effectively.

*How do you cope with other people's dreams getting more attention than yours?*

July 31

## **Learn to find satisfaction in small compensations.**

Eminem's song asks the listener: If you had one shot, one opportunity to seize everything you ever wanted, one moment, would you capture it? Or just let it slip? It's one of the most inspiring, empowering and energizing rap songs of all time. But it's also a major reality check. Because contrary to what popular culture tells us, there are no big breaks in life. Very few people are given the proverbial one shot to change everything. And so, part of the journey is learning to find satisfaction in small compensations. Macleod's theory on small art says it beautifully: Small art is a lot less hassle to make. And you can make more of it. More often. Without bankrupting yourself or putting your life on hold for months on end. And perhaps more importantly, there's the personal sovereignty angle. With small art, there's no need to wait for someone else to deem it worthy beforehand, no need to wait nervously for the rich patron, the movie studio exec, or the illustrious museum director to give it the green light. No need for the politics or the schmoozing or the bureaucracy. With small art, you just go ahead and make it, and then it exists, and the rest is in the hands of the gods. Your work is already done, and you can get to bed at a decent hour. And not lose any sleep over it, either. Hugh's approach to the creative process finds satisfaction in small compensations. It trains us not to think about how big we want our dream to be, but about how much love we want to give out while we're following it. Because as cinematic and dramatic as we'd like our journey to be, the reality is, life rarely rewards us with a blast of trumpets and cornets making a joyful noise. Let go of seizing everything you ever wanted in one glorious shot. Learn to salute the satisfaction of small breaks instead.

*How many entries did you write on your victory log this week?*

**AUGUST**

August 1

## Learn to work modular.

In the initial stages of the creative process, we owe it to ourselves to temporarily suspend the need to categorize. To be incrementalists. Otherwise, our work falls victim to premature cognitive commitment. This is a term social psychologists use for people become emotionally or intellectually bound to a course of action. It's the mindlessness that results after a single exposure. For example, if we assign labels to our ideas too early perhaps that this new piece of writing needs to become a chapter in our next book—we've just prejudged that idea's quality and value. We've forced premature cognitive commitment. And since we've already decided exactly what we're making, and our work can only be as good as that. On the other hand, if we want our creativity to expand into unexpected territory, to be truly prolific in the things that we made, we have to keep the process objective for as long as possible. We have to work modular. And here's why: Working modular detaches from outcomes. Which keeps us focused on the creative process, not what the creating produces. It helps us maintain a casual, relaxed attitude toward our material. Working modular objectifies our creative process. Which creates a sense of detachment and ensures we don't fall in love with our ideas. Which opens us to criticism and feedback and possibility. Working modular keeps the creative process open ended. Which allows material to be created within an unfinished, open loop. Which means we can always go back to add another piece to make it richer. Because good art is never finished. Working modular makes it easy to work on multiple projects simultaneously. Which creates thought bridges, subconscious connections and integrations between seemingly unrelated ideas. Which helps us notice natural relationships and structures in our writings. Working modular breeds consistency. Which helps us execute themes, so we're less random and our work is more a representation of our feelings and ideas. By taking a long view approach to the creative process, we're less derailed by rejection and more confident in our work. Working modular allows our work to mature. Which allows us to remake our work as we grow and as the world changes, keeping our creative output in permanent beta, aligning ourselves with the flow of process and allowing the work to adapt and evolve. When I consider my body of work, I've written songs, albums, sermons, cartoons, stories, books, speeches, articles, blogs, case studies, manifestos, training modules, thinkmaps, creative briefs, business strategies, affirmations, meditations, mission statements, personal constitutions, consulting programs, educational curricula and most recently, a documentary. But they all started as modules. That's why the granular process of adding, organizing, updating, tweaking and fortifying our creative inventories is so exciting. With every new sentence or note or moment that we write down, we're multiplying our intellectual reservoir and creating a constant surplus position. And that's where prolificacy lives.



August 2

## **Let there be light, and let it be free!**

Con Edison, one of the largest energy companies in the country, recently launched a sustainability initiative that's quite the turn on. Residents in family households within eligible neighborhoods can schedule to receive a free lightbulb installation that reduces lighting related energy costs by up to ninety percent. Customers simply schedule their installation, and then a representative contacts them to confirm the date and time of their appointment. Within days, they'll replace those pesky old power guzzling halogens with new light bulbs that lower energy bills. As the company's press release so eloquently states, let there be light, and let it be free! The city was lit up, both physically and emotionally. Our landlord even signed up all the units in our brownstone for the program. What could possibly go wrong? This story set off my skepticism alarm. Because why all this sudden random kindness from a giant energy corporation? The capital and labor outlay alone must be costing them millions. Makes me wonder what they're really up to. Because in my twisted brain, the part of me that secretly hopes everything goes to shit, here's how this story could play out. The utility company installs millions of light bulbs around the city and garners praise from media, citizens and politicians alike. Congratulations, guys. Truly an innovative organization. But about six months later, the corporate executives begin phase two, which is using the free light bulbs as a cover for a top-secret government funded mind control and population planning program. With the flip of a switch, every light bulb in the city sends out an electronic signal that hypnotizes citizens into cannibalistic zombies who mobilize into the streets start murdering on command, while retaining no memory of their killings. Meanwhile, corporate executives, politicians and other prominent citizens gather together to watch the entire event on a private streaming channel while making proposition bets on everything from body count to blood splatter patterns to which borough kills the fastest. Ultimately, allowing natural selection to work its course, this program thins out the population of those who cannot survive on their own. And in time, the powers that be will have free rein to enforce their ideas of a thriving society and return the city to its rightful owners. Edison himself never could have thought of this shit. This summer, let there be light with. The flickering.

*Isn't there a part of you that secretly hopes everything goes to shit?*

August 3

## Using encoding to convert information into motivational energy.

Most people don't read, period. Lots of people do read, but don't learn. Some people do read and learn, but don't integrate the information. And a small percentage of people read, learn, and leverage their knowledge for something more meaningful. Which one describes you? Which one do you wish described you? If you want to become prolific your chosen endeavor, then the last camp is where you belong. And the good news is, there are many tools in the personal creativity management system to help you do so. One tool that's been transformative in my own work is called encoding, aka, the practice of processing experiences into insights and insights into habits. Encoding is what allows you to convert new information into motivational energy and take action on those learnings immediately, as opposed to letting them just sit there. Here's a recent example of how this tool played out in my creative life. During the development phase of my software as a service platform, there was a very steep learning curve. My brain voraciously consumed books and research and insights on subjects like information architecture, user experience design, knowledge management, marketing category creation, recurring revenue generation, artificial intelligence, entrepreneurial growth, and so on. Now, because this stuff was mostly new to me, it was important to integrate and synthesize that information into my body, mind, and spirit. Not just read a few books, take some notes and then forget about them forever. But truly embrace the wisdom into the fabric of my own being like an enzyme, that way they could grow the project. This encoding process would multiply my learning and give me leverage as this new creation came to life. And so, I did one of my favorite rituals, which buying a leather three ring binder. It's amazing how spending twenty bucks on a simple piece of office equipment becomes such a motivator for me during a new creative endeavor. Anyway, I printed out a copy of the notes from each of the hundred or so resources I had been studying, kept the binder on my desk and treated it as my own personal reference guide. A bible of sorts for this chapter of growth in my life. Now, there was no need to reread my notes every day, or even every week. But by spending a dedicated chunk of time to revisit those ideas on a consistent basis, it helped reinforce the encoding process. It allowed me to connect the new information to other ideas in my head. Ultimately enabling my knowledge to quickly compound over time and produce a better product. What's your encoding ritual? How do you convert information into motivational energy? Just know there's no right or wrong way to do it. There are as many ways to encode as there are people to do the encoding. It all depends on your personality, learning style, objectives and schedule. My recommendation is, figure out how to take action on your new learnings immediately, rather than just letting them sit there. Learning by osmosis is a nice idea in theory, but in practice, you have to be much more proactive with your curiosity. There may be some gradual unconscious assimilation of ideas, but in general, it takes

work. You have to encode. You have to interact with the material. You have to create space in your mind for great ideas to collide.

*How do you devour information and emerge from that meditative inhaling process with real insight?*

August 4

## **Let yourself fall backward into your own arms.**

Pressfield writes in his book about the artist's journey that panic strikes at the point in a project when a creative breakthrough is imminent. That panic is the resistance pulling out the stops to keep us from ascending to the next level. The artist, like the test pilot, learns to stay cool and keep flying the plane. This recently happened to me with a project that finally came to fruition after six months of work. My client, an insurance organization, hired me to write and deliver a training video for their members on the topic of goal setting. Building the curriculum was challenging and enjoyable. Delivering the program at their production studio was intense and exhausting. But the biggest challenge was when they streamed my video live to their community. Because that meant I had to watch it live. Blech. Is there anything worse than having to watch yourself speak on camera? Part of me had been dreading this moment for months. In fact, the critical voice inside my head, which has been highly vocal over the years while watching hundreds of my own speeches, films, interviews and other recorded projects, started chiming in. You're going to look fat and ugly. Your words are going to sound flimsy and made up. And nobody in the audience is going to take you seriously. In fact, I thought about not watching the video at all. Best way to block a punch is to not be there, right? The resistance, arriving in the form of panic, was coming on strong. But my client insisted that I watch it, and since they were paying me well, it made sense to suck it up and look at myself on the screen. What happened next was delightfully surprising. The video looked good. Really good. Not only the production value of the training module itself, but me, as the host of this program, looked good. And that's when that other voice in my head chimed in. Look at you. Look at you. You are handsome, intelligent, articulate, funny, inspiring and credible. All those years of sitting in your office, talking to a camera for hours with nobody around, actually paid off. This is extremely well executed, you earned every dollar they paid you, and this client is going to hire you again in the future because of this. Go celebrate! I immediately went and bragged about it to a colleague of mind, and he reflected something back to me. The pride coursing through my veins wasn't about the video itself. That was just the artifact of something bigger. The fact that I love myself. The fact that I trust myself. The fact that I know who I am and know how to use my gifts to deliver value to anyone, anywhere. Don't you just love it when life gifts you a moment as a reminder of how far you've come? Don't you just love it when you suddenly realize how much you've grown? Hall, the innovation educator, reminds us that change comes very slowly, but then happens all at once. The future, as it always does, sets its own schedule. Sure helps put the panic in perspective.

***What will happen when you let yourself fall backward into your own arms?***

August 5

## **Like trying to explain how water tastes.**

Our productivity issues often go back to our misguided sense of proportion. The reason everything bothers us and nothing gets done is because our eyes are bigger than our stomachs. We underestimate how long tasks will take to accomplish, and we overestimate the impact that work will have on our bodies and minds. To quote my dad's favorite business mantra, you can't eat like an elephant and shit like a bird. What we need is a deeper awareness of our own limitations. Which is sadly something we can only learn through time and experience. If you've ever worked in an office where everyone was just out of college, you can relate. Humility is not a standard issue emotion for recent graduates, and so, productivity is almost always an issue for them. Dalio writes in his bestselling book about principles that humility typically comes from an experience of crashing, which leads to an enlightened focus on know what we don't know. Have you ever been so unproductive that you crashed? Bet that changed the way you approached work going forward, right? I've had coworkers who would complain on a daily basis about their inability to focus at work, and every time my answer was split. Part of me wanted to fix their obvious problem with simple solutions. Distracted by your phone? Disable all notifications. Noisy office and coworkers? Put on your headphones or ask to move desks. Too much social media? Block those websites from your browser. Excessive meetings? Start declining invites and see if anyone even notices. Too many communication platforms? Embrace the joy of missing out and keep your head down. That alone will save ten hours a week, minimum. And that doesn't even include all the time you'll save by not bitching anymore. The other part of me always wants to respond to people's complaining with compassion and confirmation, as any good mentor would do. That sounds hard. Being distracted sucks. You'll figure it out in time. Keep me posted on your progress. When it comes to individual people's productivity, this type of response is about the best you can hope for. Trying to teach someone how to be more productive is like trying to explain how water tastes. Your company can call the meetings, and put up signs, and even attend workshops on time management, but the bottom line is, this is a deeply personal issue that takes years if not decades to resolve. If you work with someone whose eyes are bigger than their stomach, the only way they're going to learn how to stop eating like an elephant and shitting like a bird is to crash into the wall. The pain is brutal, but it's funny how a good concussion can make you rethink your priorities.

***What helped you overcome your misguided sense of proportion?***

August 6

## What arena have you never played in before?

If you read the press coverage from the last consumer electronics show before the turn of the millennium, journalists claimed the event had moved far beyond its roots in television and into high fidelity equipment. It was a big moment in product innovation history. This was the dawn of the digital information age as we knew it. Internet's mainstream popularity was undeniable, and the dotcom bubble was about to burst. One journalist wrote that at the electronic show, home networking, one of those perennial technologies that never quite made it out of the realm of futurist imaginings, looked like it was going to be reborn. Particularly with the help of a little brand few people had heard of, that would go on to revolutionize the way people consume media forever. Here's the original press release from that very trade show. See if you can figure out which company this is referring to. Millions of people worldwide miss their favorite television shows because they can't record with their VCRs. The technology is two decades old, and still flashes twelve o'clock, confirming that more than ninety percent of VCR owners aren't able to use the record feature. Our revolutionary product makes recording easy for everyone. Simply highlight the show you want to record on the onscreen menu, then hit record. We do the rest. Initial testing has shown nearly one hundred percent of users find our product is ten times easier to record than with a VCR. The answer should be quite obvious at this point. What brand was the commercial for? Tivo, of course. The world's first digital video recorder. It's funny, decades later, it's almost quaint to imagine what the world was like before DVR. This new device shifted the media landscape for better and for always. It literally changed millions of people's daily behavior. And it wasn't just price that helped their brand win big. Tivo did everything correctly from an innovation standpoint. They defined the problem, named the category, established the brand, and sold the solution. To the point that their product has long since become the generic name for the entire industry of digital video recording. Yes, the other competitors have come and gone, some of who have stolen market and mind share from the originator. Tivo is almost certainly not the best option anymore. But they still own something that no other brand can take away from them. They were first. They were the pioneers that started it all. Even if their back is covered in arrows. To quote the aforementioned journalist from that fateful tradeshow, real fireworks happen when companies announce products in arenas they've never played in before. Lesson learned, whatever innovation you're building, follow the critical path. Don't go to the market, condition it. Rearrange the synapses in people's brains. Help the world reject the old way of doing things. Take them on a tour of hell, and then evangelize the path to heaven. And they will become believers. Hopefully without changing the channel.

***Will you spend your career competing in a game you can't win, or having the guts to create your own game?***

August 7

## Using moments strategically to gain force and power.

One of my mentors, who jokes that he's a recovering pastor, writes in his book about a spiritual discipline called *momentology*. It's the practice of making a big deal out of the moments one experiences in life. He says when we develop the art of noticing, and learn not to let those moments slip past unnoticed, we milk them for all they're worth. His discipline has profound implications in the creative process. In fact, many of the tools in the personal creativity management system hinge upon moments. And necessarily transformative experiences so golden that they take my breath away. Simply important and influencing instances. A simple one is the victory dance, which is the act of loving ourselves by acknowledging moments when we feel proud of our completed work. If you want to bolster your artistic confidence, celebrating small wins is essential. Even if you don't think bragging about your work is appropriate, do it anyway. Do a fist pump. Give yourself a high five. Do a little shimmy around your room. Come up with a corny catch phrase and say it aloud. This little moment goes a long way in building momentum as you create. Now, some moments, on the other hand, will be more dramatic. Like when you get laid off from your awesome job and it makes you feel like you just got kicked in the nuts by life. Or when a friend or family member suddenly passes away. Or when you have to get surgery and lay bedridden for two weeks. This tool is what's called a good low. It's when life hands you a pile of shit, you strategically convert that experience into creative resources of energy, fertility and happiness. Initially, you feel depressed and immobile and worthless. But eventually, you get so low that you uncover efficient fuel sources to energize your work and generate something remarkable. You actually grow profitable new ideas in the fertilizer of your own failure. It all depends on how you notice and leverage the moment. Okay, here's one last example of how an important and influencing instance can become a galvanizer for the creative process. Have you ever had a small role in a project, but still wanted to make a lasting impression on the team? There is a way to do this without annoying people or exhausting yourself. The tool is called scrapping, or, creating an intentional point of over delivery and generosity. You deliver your work in a way that creates an imbalance of effort and care, where the people around you have no choice but to remedy that disparity with some kind of reward. Like when you attend your first meeting as the newest member of a team. Don't say a word, just take notes. Like, amazing notes. The best notes anyone has ever seen. Notes that make people feel seen and heard and energized by all the brilliant insights and ideas they have. Then send those notes out to everyone on the team sixty seconds after the meeting is over. That's scrapping, and it's a moment your team will never forget. Don't underestimate the power of this type of tool. Remember, momentum is a word that originates in the field of mechanics, aka, momentum. It means a product of the mass and velocity of a body. Aka, your body of work. If you want to become more prolific, use moments strategically to gain force and power. If that's not a spiritual discipline, I don't know what is.

*How good are you at noticing and leveraging the moments of your life?*

August 8

## **Lock yourself in a room until something cracks open.**

While buying strings at the guitar store, the woman next to me asked the salesman what gift to buy for her teenage son. She showed him a picture of this fancy learning tool that included a digital chord assisting device and finger muscle memory trainer. The salesman scoffed and said, that's just a toy; it's not going to make you a better player. Your son is better off just listening to a great album over and over. This is the perfect advice. Unsatisfying as it may be to hear for the customer, and unprofitable as it may be for the salesman, its purity and simplicity is precisely what paves the way to creative greatness. The challenge is, artists often want something black and white to hang their hats onto. Because we live in a world where complexity is attractive because it feels like progress. Everyone is searching for the proven system or the simple shortcut or the surefire tool to raise their creative game in sixty days or less. But sometimes you just have to lock yourself in a room and blast a record on repeat until something inside of you cracks open. Tweedy, one of my songwriting inspirations, once said that the thing that pushed him to start writing songs as a teenager is the same thing that still compels him to keep writing songs today. He listens to music, new records, old favorites, the radio, anything, until he feels like he can't take it anymore, and he has to make something, or he'll lose his mind. Even when he believes he'll never be able to make something even remotely as perfect or beautiful as what he's hearing, he can't just sit there and let that challenge go unanswered. This approach is applicable to any creative pursuit. Anytime you find you're having trouble exhaling, you can usually trace it to not inhaling enough. After all, there are only three steps in any creative process. Input, throughput and output. When in doubt, flood your senses so you know what great art feels like. Overwhelm yourself until you get emotional enough to make something happen.

*Are you still trying to buy yourself a lower score?*



August 9

## **Lost in the scramble of our own gratification.**

Search engines and artificial intelligence have accustomed us to an unprecedented level of instant gratification. With one touch of a button or one word spoken, we can learn, see and buy anything we want, instantly. It's perhaps the greatest miracle of modern technology. But with every advance in technology comes a relative loss in resourcefulness. It certainly feels rewarding and exciting in the moment, but over time, there is a downside. Particularly in the interpersonal realm. Because now we are starting to demand that simple, incontrovertible answers magically appear from each other. We expect people to deliver unto us a single sentence that miraculously sheds light upon all the mysteries of existence. And when they fail to do so, when we discover that most people don't actually have a little white box that fixes all of our woes, we grow quite impatient and disappointed. How dare you not provide us with the instant gratification we crave! But that's not where it ends. There is also a cognitive and emotional price we pay for this luxury. Because our uncontrolled compulsion to overindulge in these many conveniences of technology means we miss valuable opportunities for growth. Our devices rob us of the chance to develop a robust and healthy ego that does not require constant gratification. That's why there are entire generations of people who can't handle rejection. Since they are digital natives who spent their whole lives trying to milk more and more gratification from their environment, their skin has become wafer thin. And so, when they can get anything they want, right now, rejection becomes harder to handle. Like the very computers they have over depended on, their brains experience rejection and think, does not compute. Turkel had the right idea in her book about being alone together. We need to expect less from technology and more from each other. Perhaps there is a more primitive social network that's worth logging onto. One that doesn't have any promotions, just people.

***How would your life be different if you were demanding fewer and fewer doses of instant gratification?***

August 10

## **Love and fame can't live in the same place.**

My psychologist friend says the most dangerous part about being a gambling addict is that you have hope. You always maintain the obsessive belief that you're just one bet away from turning it all around, solving all your problems and getting back on your feet. That's right man, after this last big score, it's smooth sailing from here on out. No more hemorrhaging cash, dragging my family into debt just barely outrunning insanity each day. Back to my peaceful, honest and sober life. But as with any addiction, just when you get there, there disappears. The hope never cashes out the way you want it to. The dragon is perpetually one step ahead. De Niro's warning in the best gambling movie of all time comes to mind. In the casino, the cardinal rule is to keep people playing, and keep them coming back. The longer they play, the more they lose, and in the end, we get it all. This is how running a business made me feel. Like any obsession, it started out feeling euphoric. All this attention and approval and money and love, yo, pass that shit, man. But after a decade of making that daily entrepreneurial gamble, it occurred to me that I was no longer chasing the high, but simply trying to evade catastrophe. It was no longer about seeking pleasure, but avoiding pain. That wasn't enjoyable, that was sad. Sitting in my apartment all day, desperately waiting for that one email that would change everything, it just felt pathetic. My hope had stopped paying out. The story I told myself about being one gig away from turning it all around wasn't working anymore. That's when the idea of retirement started to cross my mind. What if I could leave behind all the gambling, all the risk, all the unhealthy and obsessive parts of this thing, and move forward in a way that felt more pure and sustainable? What if I could find a day job that underwrote my ability to work on my own creative projects, but without the bottomless need for hope as fuel? It had to be possible. There had to be a way to shrink the size of my business to fit my reality and keep only the parts that I loved the most. Sure enough, there was. It took longer than I expected to make that transition. Maybe four years. But dual citizenship, as I'm fond of calling it today, is a better fit for where my life is now. What I cherish about it is, there's no more casino. There's no more being one bet away from turning it all around. Because fuck gambling. Fuck risking it all. Fuck betting on yourself in the name of getting famous and growing rich and leaving a legacy. It's not worth it. If it's true that love and fame can't live in the same place, then it's crystal clear which path is best for me. Now I can save my hope for when I need it most.

***What dangerous situation are you trying to convince yourself is just a phase that will improve?***

August 11

## **Love letters to ourselves about things we ought to be doing.**

List making is a simple, direct and efficient method of focusing our conceptual energy. The more we collect things somewhere other than our head, the less stress we experience. Who among us doesn't love writing a good list? But as with most things in life, extremes in anything accomplish nothing. Like the friend of mine who has a list with literally three hundred items on it. Three hundred items. And yet he is always complaining that just thinking about that list haunts him. No wonder his life is a complete anxiety machine. All those looming unfinished tasks and open loops create unnecessary stress. Whether he realizes it or not. Zeigarnik, the experiential psychologist and psychiatrist, first found out the danger in this kind of list making. Her research showed people remember uncompleted or interrupted tasks better than completed tasks. And as such, experience intrusive thoughts about those objectives that were once pursued and left unfinished. It's happened to all of us. Seeing on paper what we didn't get done only makes us feel like we're not doing enough. And feeling like we're not doing enough is the kills our motivation to keep going. It's an infinite regression of unproductivity. Look, lists can be beautiful things. But when they become these obsessive love letters to ourselves about things we ought to be doing, they create as much stress as they relieve. If you're getting overwhelmed just by looking at all the things you need to do, throw the damn thing away. Or at the very least, don't add to it, only reduce it. Fried explained perfectly in his bestselling book about reworking. Long lists are guilt trips. The longer the list of unfinished items, the worse you feel about it. And at a certain point, you just stop looking at it because it makes you feel bad. Remember, the best way to get things done is to eliminate the need to do them in the first place. Making that list might help you feel consciously safe, but it's also causing you to feel unconsciously anxious.

***What are you still doing that doesn't need to be done by anyone?***

August 12

## **Making space for the natural order to emerge.**

Think about the most creative, productive, organized and prolific person you know. Odds are, they're not working any harder than you; they simply have more space. Computer geeks use the term bandwidth, aka, channel capacity, aka, the maximum throughput of a communication path in a digital system. And for the user interface of our lives, the same term applies. Let's explore several variations, along with some discussion questions about your own system. When people chose to customize their surroundings to suit their unique needs, they free up space in their environmental bandwidth so momentum can flow abundantly. Do you have both permanent and portable sanctuaries where you can lock into flow state quickly and easily? When people choose not to waste energy on superficial annoyances, they free up space in their mental bandwidth so life can seep in and inspire them deeply. Do you have a system for filtering out unproductive distractions? When people choose not to contend with their inner skeptic, they free up space in their emotional bandwidth so imaginative sparks can blossom into roaring fires. Do you talk to yourself with positive language to support your ideas and abilities? When people choose to set firm boundaries around other people's toxic energies, they free up space in their social bandwidth so healthy connection multiplies their enthusiasm. Do you have relationships that strengthen your belief in your own talents? When people choose to reduce the number of mediocre programs running in the background of their lives, they free up space in their operational bandwidth to say yes to amazing opportunities. Do you keep enough slack in the system so you have room to breathe into new projects? These examples of creating maximum throughput can make space for your natural order to emerge and transform the way that you work. It all starts with permission. Allowing yourself to be more intentional about your many systems.

*If you had to put a price on one piece of your personal bandwidth, what would it be?*

August 13

## **Mediocrity will be rewarded, while excellence will be punished.**

We spend all this time building our habits, honing our talents, achieving peak performance, doing remarkable work, taking calculated risks and positioning ourselves into visionary leaders who will take people into the promised land. And then we show up and realize it's actually not safe to shine. We live in a world where mediocrity is not only rewarded, it's demanded. And unless we melt ourselves down into the collectivist pot of conformity, turning down the volume on our brilliance so that others don't feel threatened by it, we will be cast out from the tribe and left to die alone in a blizzard. Excellence will be punished. All those who shine will be judged as heretic and disloyal. Please continue blindly marching in lockstep until further notice. It's the mythology of the tall poppy. Thrasybulus kept cutting off all the tallest ears of wheat that he could see, and throwing them away, until he had destroyed the best and richest part of the crop. Meaning, if you stand out for your high abilities, enviable qualities and visible success, prepare to be resented, attacked, cut down and criticized. How dare you rise above the pack? That's antisocial and countercultural. Please go identify something mundane that presents no resistance whatsoever and go with that. Otherwise we have no use for you. The point is, the joke is on us. Every culture is a conspiracy to convince its members to conform their desires to what is considered right and good. And unless we want to feel like a voice in the wilderness shouting away with nobody listening, it's better if we just go easy on the awesomeness.

*Will you ever feel relief from the relentless and unrealistic pressure to conform?*

August 14

## **My nervousness has started to find a place of rest.**

If we're going to stick around for the long haul, we have to find new reasons to do old things. We have to rewire our mind's motivational priorities. Otherwise it just feels like living the same goddamn day over and over again. Phelps, the most decorated Olympian in history, comes to mind. After twenty-five years of work, he earned all the medals, shattered all the records, won all the awards and secured his spot in history as one of the most elite athletes of our time. Mission accomplished. But he wasn't finished with the water. Far from it. Even in his retirement, he still shows up to the pool. Every day. The only difference is, now the pool holds a different meaning. Phelps swims because he loves it, not because he desperately needs the world to love him for it. And that's the most inspiring part about his journey. He proves that once we've done enough to be okay with ourselves, we don't necessarily have to stop doing the thing we do. We simply make the choice to shift the way we do it. That's the unexpected reward of success. Our brain chemistry changes. After a certain number of years, the motivational priorities of our mind permanently alter. The reasons that once drove us to win grow old and lose their power. And suddenly, we're free to do things from a newer and cleaner and richer place. We can show up at the pool not because we have to, not because we need to, not because we're expected to and not because it's our job. But because we want to. Because we love it. Because it's who we are in our bones. My motivation for wearing this nametag has change significantly over the past twenty years. It started as the fast track out of social isolation during a lonely period in college. Several years into the experiment, as my business launched, the nametag grew into an effective tool for earning attention and approval. Later, it became my brand that solidified my career as a writer and entrepreneur. And yet, while all of those motivations served me well, they weren't always the healthiest expressions of my heart. Wearing a nametag was, for years, an artifact of my insecurity, codependence and workaholism. And while those attributes are inside of me somewhere, I'm proud to say they're under better control than they used to be. My nametag no longer comes from a place that's in any way unwholesome. As my nervousness has started to find a place of rest, there is nametag on my chest because I love it, not because I desperately need the world to love me for it. The sticker comes from a place of joy and abundance, not from a place of proving and striving. How have your reasons for doing things changed as you've grown? Are you willing to shift the way that you do what you love in order to gain new layers of meaning from it? Remember, we all have to find new reasons to do old things. Life is long, and if we're going to stick around, we have to rewire our mind's motivational priorities.

*When will you have done enough to be happy with who you are?*

August 15

## **No longer in the urgent grip of lust.**

It takes time to build valuable things. Fruitful growth is slow. Even if we are driven by the ecstatic urgency to give rise to that which is new, whatever it is we want, it's guaranteed to take longer than we'd like. In my twenty years of experience recording albums, publishing books and producing films, there's no doubt in my mind. Having patience is frustrating, depressing and most notably, expensive. But the paradox is, once we accept that anything worthwhile takes forever, once we realize that we need to be profoundly patient to realize the rewards of almost everything in this life, then we can actually relax and enjoy the scenery. As opposed to obsessing over our boiling pot thinking, man, it's been months, this isn't working, let's try something else. Not so fast. Castaneda, the legendary author and anthropologist, wrote a beautiful mantra about this issue. All paths lead nowhere. Sounds like nihilism, but it's actually quite the liberating notion. His words remind us to delight in the moment, embed as much bliss into the pavement as possible and forget all about where we might end up. Because this journey is going to take a long ass time. Much longer than we want it to. And how silly would we feel if months or years or decades down the road, we looked back and realized that all we did was piss and moan the whole time about how long everything was taking? What a colossal waste. Therefore, joy is the ultimate insurance policy. It's the only return with no investment. The only bet with zero downside risk. And once are willing to be aware of all the good that already inside and around us, then nobody can spin this into us losing or failing. Take a good look at the dashboard folks. Because the meter isn't running. This trip is a flat rate. And everybody pays the exact same price. Nothing. All roads lead to nowhere.

*Are you at peace with the time it takes to do something right?*

August 16

## **No one to say we're only dreaming.**

Manning's retirement speech stated that the end of his football career was just the beginning of something he hadn't even discovered yet. Life was not shrinking for him; it was morphing into a whole new world of possibilities. Peyton said that football was a mighty platform that had given him a voice that would echo well beyond the game. My favorite part about the speech is, his mindset requires tremendous faith. Because when a person is in that liminal space, when the ground beneath them suddenly disappears, they feel deeply disoriented. The future seems like a shapeless place. Kind of like getting sacked by a three hundred pound linebacker. In this situation, we have no choice but to renegotiate our place in the world. And to do so, we need to have the existential courage to stand on our own and bring forth the future from nothing. Piece of cake, right? Not so much. Reinventing ourselves is about as easy as outrunning that linebacker. You'd be surprised how fast one of those guys can run. Point being, the process of changing ourselves into something entirely new is mostly a mindset change. Certainly, we can update our wardrobe, move cities and revamp our resume. But all of those things are just cosmetic tweaks that happen as an extension of that inner work. Tracey writes in her inspiring book about reinvention that our job is to engage with the phenomenon of context. Context, she says, is the human environment that determines the limitations of our actions and the scope of the results our actions can produce. And when we reinvent ourselves, we are essentially creating a new context from which to relate to reality. From there, we create a new realm of possibility, one that did not previously exist. This may sound like spiritual, life coaching management gibberish to you, but it really did work for my own reinvention. Specifically the lever of language. That's what really helped me change my context from a mindset perspective. After more than a decade of identifying solely as an entrepreneur, I started taking jobs that let me continue to expand my professional journey by day, while holding onto my own unique brand by night. Into my thirties, instead of referring to myself as an entrepreneur, I started using the term dual citizen. Which meant someone who was his own patron. Somebody who worked a regular nine to five job, but also bankrolled his own projects in his spare time. My younger self never could have predicted this change, but the becoming a dual citizen turned out to be deeply fulfilling in a way that belonging to a pirate nation never could be. And as that context began to shift, over time, the rest of my life followed suit. It wasn't perfect. There was still fear and loneliness and doubt. But coming out of that liminal space and into the new clearing that my mindset had created, it felt different. Better. Healthier. Truer. To quote the aforementioned quarterback, my life was morphing into a whole new world of possibilities. Aladdin sang it best on the fabled magic carpet ride. A whole new world, a new fantastic point of view, no one to tell us no, or where to go, or to say we're only dreaming. Do you believe in yourself, in the process, in the



universe enough to make the leap? Even if the future feels like a shapeless and scary place, stepping out is worth it. Those linebackers can't keep chasing you forever.

*What context are you dismissing from your mind because you've convinced yourself it's not possible?*

August 17

## **No other means of distraction from the essence of me.**

Garage sales are great opportunities on both sides of the table. Buyers can find clothes, sports equipment, musical instruments, books, furniture and other useful items at a remarkably low price. It's all about the hunt. Meanwhile, sellers can purge, clean house, free up space, organize their life, and even make a few bucks. Plus it's fun for the whole neighborhood to turn the street into a hotbed of haggling like a Middle Eastern bazaar. On the other hand, have you ever actually delved into the psychology of garage sales? Have you ever found yourself standing in a stranger's carport, flipping through a smelly box of yellowing comic books from the seventies, and felt suddenly overwhelmed by sadness? That's happened to me on multiple occasions. And here's my theory. Garage sales are essentially public collages of the many phases of people trying to distract themselves from their pain. Once this realization occurred to me, it's become impossible for me to see anything else. Looking at a hot room filled with broken trinkets, permanently locked file cabinets, hopelessly obsolete computers, barely used musical equipment and other abandoned hobbies, it just breaks my heart. Makes me want to hug people and whisper in their ear, hey man, it's really hard to be in so much pain, but you're not alone, and it's going to be okay. Because there's nothing more humiliating than the last phase you went through. I think about this anytime I'm scouring through my closet or garage, looking at all my failed attempts to run from my pain. It's so embarrassing. What part of me thought that leather cowboy hat looked good on me? But it's a distinctly human habit. Distraction is how our brains deal with suffering. Our species has an infinite penchant to fool, trick and divert ourselves from our real feelings. It's emotional escapism, and we do it better than anyone. We use the distraction of excitement so we can forget our problems. Frantically searching for something, anything, to engross us away from our immediate, complex and awful reality. It's no wonder the modern business model of journalism changed from presenting the information to manipulating our brains. Why else would people read headlines? And yet, we can still stand up for ourselves here. We can still be vigilant about where we invest the precious resource of our attention. And we can ignore the immediate reward of distraction in favor of longer-term benefits like meaning and fulfillment. Gillette highlighted this issue in his hilarious and inspiring book about intermittent fasting as a strategy for losing weight, but also gaining happiness. Eating on an airplane is supposed to be a distraction. It's an activity. It doesn't matter that the food is shitty; it's something to do. Except it does matter. And there are much better distractions that aren't really distractions but life. There are things you can do on a plane that you really want to do. Without food, flying is just an excuse to read and write and have time to yourself. All the bugs are actually features. Not eating at airports and on planes is the greatest. What's your favorite way to distract yourself from your pain? And for the record, distraction isn't always a bad thing. Sometimes it has significant survival value. Sometimes it's evolutionarily advantageous and spiritually indispensable to amuse and distract ourselves to forget our own emptiness.

However, what is seductive in its irrationality can actually keep us from confronting our more fundamental issues. Distractions can estrange us from our heart. On the other hand, if we can become the kind of people who are willing to face everything with no distractions or avoidance mechanisms, it's amazing how vital and alive we can feel. If we can learn to care more about our effort than we do about all that digital chickenshit vying for our attention, there's no stopping us. If we can build a mental stronghold that no interruption can breach, then there's no telling what kind of positive impact we can have on the world. We may have fewer trinkets for our garage sale, but we'll have a bigger inventory of memories of a life well lived.

***How well are you coping with ceaseless inflow of distractions and distresses bidding for your time, attention, and emotional involvement?***

August 18

## **Nobody does it just to do it anymore; everything's just a vehicle.**

The difference between a good idea and a great idea is the overwhelming sense of fertility and momentum and electricity that catalyzes inside of us when we have it. If this new thing we want to do doesn't immediately make us think of five other exhilarating things that we want to do as a result, then it's probably a good idea, but not a great one. But if this new thing inspires us to ask the leverage question, okay, now that we have this, what else does this make possible? Years ago, we launched an innovation lab at our startup. The goal was to foster an experimental attitude within the company, promote futuristic thinking and to give team members a chance to compete for some cool prizes. But the executive team was concerned that all employees might not know the difference between a good idea and a great one. And so, we created a filter. Every submission required a detailed answer to the following question. How is this a truly innovative idea that moves the whole company to the next level, and not merely an interesting improvement that helps one department? For example, one employee suggested that because we had so many attractive men and women at our company, we should create an annual swimsuit calendar. Not exactly innovative. It was a different kind of fertility than we were hoping for. But good thinking nonetheless. On the other hand, one of our developers wrote an algorithm to help our customer service teams process claims twice as fast, which dramatically increased our monthly number of successful tickets. That was a great idea. Because it allowed our company to up the ante. Her few dozen lines of code gave hundreds of people this new wave of energy that carried us forward into the future. The point is, all great ideas assert themselves but their own invisible momentum, like a tide. It's a mysterious force that we may never fully understand. Debono famously called this movement value, which is the potential of one idea to breed others. Reminding us that everything we do should leave to something else we do.

*Are you making an interesting improvement, or a truly innovative idea that moves you to the next level?*

August 19

## **Creating an unreplicable inspiration pool.**

It's true that our greatest currency in this world is our originality, but the pressure to constantly generate out original material, day after day, without plagiarizing, can overwhelm even the most prolific creator. Finding, expressing and becoming known for your authentic voice is no easy task. Henri, the great realism painter and teacher, addresses this issues his book on the artist's spirit. Don't bother about your originality, he encourages his students, set yourself just as free as you can, and your originality will take care of you. Easier said than done. It's not like you can just flip the switch of freedom and suddenly create remarkable, game changing work. Like any other part of the creative process, you need a system. Originality doesn't materialize sporadically, but systematically. A tool to try here is uniqueness filtering, which is focusing on and differentiating your work through the little worlds you investigate to a great, high level. Taking something that fascinates and ignites you and using that to drive your originality. Yoga accomplished that for me. It started out as rehabilitation for my collapsed lung. But after falling in love with this practice, it soon grew into a fixture in my creative work. Yoga started to become a metaphor for different areas of my life, from the physical to the emotional to the spiritual to the sexual to the social. Practicing every day flooded my palette with all these unique experiences to mine, through which exciting material filtered. Find your version of that, and not only will you never run out of original ideas, but also you will create an unreplicable inspiration pool. Linklater, the philosopher disguised as a filmmaker, once said that he chooses his film projects based around his own formula. If anyone can do it, then he shouldn't. That's a uniqueness filter as well. Each of us can apply this kind of filter to our own lives. We simply need a mantra, question or ritual superimposed over our work that paints us into an original corner. One you might ask yourself is, how could you become so identified with your work that nobody could steal it, and if they did, people would notice? Tools like these can help relieve the pressure to constantly generate original material. It's all about the way you frame and filter your experiences. You don't even have to do things differently; you just need to approach them with a different mindset.

***How will you find your authentic voice and say something original?***

August 20

## What talents and skills have you not tapped into yet to add value?

There are more than three hundred tools in the personal creativity management system, and each one of them has an objective. There is some way your condition will be improved when you implement that particular solution. One of the more common objectives is around talent. Which is a polarizing word that can be misused, overused and abused with any organization. But not if you have the right intention as a leader. Because if you think about human potential as the critical path to fulfillment, then you inspire your team members to become prolific innovators. Imagine you have someone in your organization with a clear talent for user interface design, but unfortunately they're working at a role where they're essentially making the same thing over and over again. If that's the case, they're almost certainly frustrated creatively. And so, see if there are opportunities within the team for them to do something they've never done before. Teach them the creative tool of surprising, aka, the system for calling on themselves a little more with each project. Here are a few questions you might ask them over coffee. How can we leverage your natural talents more consistently? What talents that you might not exercise anywhere would you like to contribute to the team? You'll find that challenging people to change in the relative size of what they think is their creative territory will give them a chance to elevate, not just execute. It's hard not to become more prolific, and more fulfilled, when someone does work like that. Speaking of work, here's a different strategy for leveraging people's talent. Next time you walk by somebody in their element, doing their thing, wielding their talent like a pro, take a picture. And don't just share it with the team once, memorialize it for all eternity. The name of this creative tool is called *artifacting*, in which you capture, organize, merchandise and share moments that signal the collective spirit of your culture. It not only makes people feel seen for their gifts, but it reinforces the spirit of innovation, both of which can contribute to higher levels of employee engagement. Look, talent may be a loaded term from an organizational standpoint, but from a personal perspective, few things are more important to fulfillment. Show me a person who uses their gifts to make a difference in every area of their life, and I'll show you someone who is happy, productive and always brings positive energy to the team.

*Whom do you work with that is talented in ways they never dared to dream?*

August 21

## **Not everything has a finish line.**

Our culture is preoccupied with the drama of succeeding and failing. People are constantly setting up binary worlds that allow each other to think in purely win and lose terms. That's why we're told over and over that failure isn't an option. That if we fail when nobody's looking, it's not really a failure. That if there isn't an opportunity for failure, it's not innovative. And that if we fail and life goes back to normal, our story wasn't worth telling. But not everything has a finish line. That's what first attracted me to yoga. It has no ideal. It's just wherever you are right now. The cute girl on the mat next to you might be stronger and thinner and more experienced and has those really cool yoga pants that make her butt look like a roasted chicken, but that doesn't make her better and you worse. She's not winning and you're not losing. No dance is out of step. That's why they call it a practice. Krishnamurti once did an interview for a famous yoga journal and said that if you are on the right path for you, you will not think in terms of succeeding or failing. It's only when people don't really love what they're doing that they think in those terms. Another endeavor that pressures people to preoccupy themselves with success or failure is the creative process. But similar to yoga, in which the only bad class is the one you don't take; the only failure in creativity is when you stop doing it. There's no succeeding or failing, there's just where you are and where you want to go. Besides, since when did it become possible to fail at self-expression? That's the whole point. You can do whatever the hell you want. Once you've created something, there is no failure because you now own something that nobody can take away from you, which is the person you became by making it. Fuck the finish line. Just enjoy practicing.

***How does your preoccupation with the drama of succeeding and failing affect your performance?***

August 22

## **Now somebody give this young man a box of nametags.**

Most universities offer some form of independent study. The official definition of this term is, an educational activity undertaken by an individual with little to no supervision. As long as the student is motivated, they can pursue any topic of interest that doesn't fit into the traditional curriculum. Doesn't that sound exciting? It's certainly more engaging than studying, say, world geography, the single most boring and difficult and awful course in my college career. But that's another story. Now, if you read some of the application forms for independent study programs, most of them indicate similar requirements. If the student plans to undertake research and study beyond the normal offerings, they have to answer several questions. What is the purpose of your study? What are your learning objectives? What are your expected outcomes? How will you evaluate your research? I appreciate the spirit of these requirements from an academic standpoint, since most colleges have an approval committee for their programs. But allow me to make an argument against them. During my last two years at college, my independent study was wearing a nametag every day as a social experiment. This project wasn't university approved; it was just something I decided to do on a whim. And yet, it fundamentally changed my life in myriad ways. It went viral on campus, even before the advent of social media, made me one of the most well known people on campus, and ultimately laid the groundwork for what has now become a successful twenty-year career as a writer. And that was with absolutely zero planning, intention or guidance. Completely organic. Now, if an academic advisor had asked the twenty year old version of me any of those independent study application questions, here's how it would have gone down. What is the purpose of your study? I'm lonely, I need friends and I want to meet girls. What are your learning objectives? I want to see just how uncomfortable I can make others and myself in public. What are your expected outcomes? I haven't thought that far in advance. How will you evaluate your research? I quantify almost nothing in my life, so maybe we'll just leave that whole evaluation part out of this. Okay then, independent study approved! Now somebody give this young man a box of nametags. No, it never would have happened. No university their right mind would have sponsored such an absurd, quirky and mundane project like mine. And that's a powerful lesson in not waiting permission. A reminder to lifelong learners of all ages following their curiosity instead of waiting for approval. Grazer, perhaps most successful film and television producer of all time, writes in his book about curiosity, that nobody knows that a good idea is before a movie hits the screens. You only know a good idea after it's done. But the certainty that something is a worthwhile idea is fragile. It requires energy, determination and optimism to keep it going. Just keep asking questions until something interesting happens. And if you only get the answers you anticipate, you're not being very curious. Remember, many of our richest learning opportunities have no objective, curriculum, syllabus or grades. But that's no reason not to stick with them. My independent study of wearing



a nametag everyday probably taught me more about life than all of my college courses combined. Imagine what education might be waiting for you at the end of our curiosity.

***What topic of interest that doesn't fit into the traditional curriculum would be worth pursuing?***

August 23

## **Gaining an emotional anchor during difficult times.**

Gaining an emotional anchor during difficult times. Here's an interesting thought experiment. What do all of the following words have in common? Satisfaction, meaning, wonder, motivation, inspiration, attitude, purpose, fulfillment, permission, security, creativity, belonging. Did you figure it out yet? The answer is, they all come from within. None of these things can be found anywhere outside of us. They only manifest when we connect to that which comes from self. It's the love we can never lose, the love that nobody can take hostage. Psychologists have a term for this called internal locus of control. It's the belief that we are the prime influencers of our own state of being. What we seek, it's not out there somewhere in the vast reaches of darkness. There is no pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. We already have everything we need to create the life we want. And once we learn to tap into that source, we gain an emotional anchor that helps us remain firm and stable and focused, even during adverse or hopeless conditions. The hard part is the trust. That's the drop off point for the vast majority of people. They haven't honed their internal locus of control yet. If you find yourself in that camp, here are several suggestions for recovering a sense of reliance on your core self. When you achieve a victory of any size, immediately recite mantras to yourself that reaffirm your own efficacy. Celebrate the fact that you won and let the joy wash over you. And tell yourself how you believe the success was in part due to your efforts, experience and hard work. Applaud yourself for being responsible for what was made of challenging circumstances. Another strategy is, when you experience failure or rejection, combine compassion with commitment. Acknowledge your disappointment and frustration without beating yourself up. Then use that tension as springboard to move your story forward. Think about three immediate actions you can take to make yourself better positioned for success for next time. Both of these exercises involve the realization and acknowledgement that you always have a choice, even if those choices aren't ideal. They will remind you that your actions have a direct effect on your life and that outcomes depend on nobody but you. And in fact, there's a widely cited study from a psychology journal that shows those with an internal locus of control, that is, they feel that they control their own destiny, rather than their fate being largely determined by external forces, tend to be happier, less depressed, and less stressed. Doesn't mean they're completely free of physical sufferings, illnesses or disabilities; doesn't mean they always getting along well everybody; doesn't mean they're totally free of worries and hardships; and doesn't mean they're always of sound, healthy mental states. But the probability is lower. And that's about the best you can hope for in this life. Promoting the conditions by which happiness is most likely to flourish. Where's your locus of control right now? Are you someone who believes they can move obstacles, implement a plan and direct your future outcomes? If so, congrats. Because the more aware you are of the times that you are exerting your own control over a situation, the better your life gets.

It happens more than you think. Your ability to improve your own condition isn't as out of reach as your mind tells you it is.

*How will you develop an improved sense of discerning reality?*

August 24

## **Now we are going to do something we have never done before.**

Constantly mixing up my vehicles helps me stay innovative. That's why my projects alternate between books, speeches, music, software, films, gameshows, consulting, educational programs, marketing campaigns, and so on. By creating value through multiple mediums and platforms and channels, my curiosities stay engaged, my thinking stays fresh, my gifts stay challenged and my audience stays interested. Whereas locking my work into a single path would cause the creative muscle to atrophy. Projects would be about as exciting as my toothbrush. But contrary to popular conditioning, this approach to work doesn't indicate a lack of focus. Nor does it make me a good candidate for hyperactivity medication. Quite the opposite. Mixing up our vehicles means we are deeply focused. Not on activity, but on identity. Not on hammering one nail all of our lives, but hammering lots of nails one way, all our lives. The medium is merely the delivery mechanism. What matters most is the mission that drives it. Because, in the words of the most successful novelist of all time, we take ourselves with us wherever we go. Listen, every innovative endeavor begins by announcing the same thing to ourselves. Now we are going to do something we have never done before. This act of faith, making something new where something did not exist before, is at the heart of what it means to be human. Are you trapped in the void between projects? Are you teetering on the edge of some astounding creative epiphany? Good. This liminal space is a tremendous gift. Just know that regardless of what vehicle your next project assumes, your gifts will show up in full force. May as well try something new.

*When was the last time you did something for the first time?*

August 25

## **Identify what's already true for you.**

The great thing about opportunity is, you don't always have to invent it; you just have to recognize it while it's already there. The secret is asking yourself strategic questions. Let's explore a list of these questions, along with a mini case study for each one. First, how can I feed those who are already paying attention so that they will spread the word? When I launched my independent music documentary, I wasn't starting from zero. My brand had already accumulated a substantial following. And so, instead of wasting my marketing budget on useless advertising and promotion, I leveraged my permission assets to spread the word. Instead of shouting to strangers, I whispered to the people who already decided to trust me. Second, how can I achieve my goals with the network I already have? When I moved to a new city, I physically made a list of every single person I already knew that might have a professional interest in my goals, and every single person who was already attracted to me and saw me as a resource. Then I personally reached out to them and asked what they needed help with. Not what they could do for me, but how I could create value for them. Third, how could I creatively combine what I already have to make new things? Anytime my well of inspiration runs dry, instead of surfing the web, I open my folder of notes from every book I've read in the past ten years, and reacquaint myself with their wisdom. It's like reconnecting with old friends. And it never fails to spark a new idea for my next project. Fourth, how could I sell where the door is already open? Instead of looking for new clients, I follow the path of permission. I greet the people who invited me in once before and deliver a value forward campaign with exciting new ways that I might be able to help them in the future. Remember, if you can't create new opportunity, identify and exploit what's already around you.

***What if who you already were was enough to get what you want?***

August 26

## **Oh crap, somebody might actually see my work.**

When you're a young creator, there's nothing scarier than the prospect of nobody seeing your work. Obscurity is the enemy. That is, until you start getting some distribution. At which point the scariest thing suddenly inverts into, oh crap, somebody might actually see my work. What a deeply vulnerable place to be. You just feel so exposed. Especially if your work is personal and honest, as the best art is. Foolish enough to put your whole heart on show and reveal your feelings to the crowd below? Welcome to creativity. This is the price of admission. You must come face to face with your fear of being seen for who you really are. Campbell says everyone's hero's journey includes this threshold. Our innermost cave where we face the doubts and fears that first surfaced upon our call to adventure. Skywalker in the tree cave, seeing his face in his father's helmet, for example. And as if that moment wasn't scary enough, next you have to deal with people's feedback about your work. They start sharing their interpretation about what they think your art meant. And you have this choking sense of violation that arises in you, because people act like they know you, simply because they've read or watched or listened to something you created. Keep my name out of your mouth, you want to scream. But this is actually the whole point of making things. We need others to be mirrors for us, even at our most vulnerable places. That way we can see what we're supposed to be learning about ourselves. Tweedy writes about this in his touching memoir about his life as a songwriter. If you feel exposed when you're singing to someone and each word gives you a distinct terrifying thrill resembling embarrassment, that means you're doing something right. Does that mean you have to reveal every inch of yourself every time? Probably not. But if you really do feel called to make things, and you want those things to touch people, then part of the agreement you make with the muse is that you are willing to stand naked. To quote the famous copy shop clerk, that's how you become great, man, hang your balls out there. Even if you don't become great, you still become yourself. Which is not a bad consolation. Remember, as creative people, seeing is the easy part. Being seen is the real work. If you think it's scary being a ghost, wait until you try on visibility.

*Are you willing to make a huge effort to expose your innermost and richest wares to light?*

August 27

## **Okay, you're spending too much time on this.**

People analyze until they paralyze. Every little move and every tiny scrap of information becomes something to be weighted and debated. To a point where it not only creates stress for them, but stress for people around them. Like my recruiting manager who was recently onboarding a class of new employees. She couldn't decide whether to include people's first and last name in their new email address, or just their last initial. Is that too many letters? Do you think the new people will be annoyed? What if their names get confused with someone else's? Maybe we should go get a second opinion on this. No, we shouldn't. Please stop this madness. This small and irrelevant decision is not worth going back and forth about. These new employees are going to be so thrilled that they're starting a new job here, that whatever naming convention we choose will be the right one. Let's not invest any more energy in this decision. This exchange is a perfect microcosm of the larger problem. Most people haven't learned how to stop themselves from overthinking to the point of inaction. And to be fair, this is a difficult skill to master. The human brain puts up one hell of a fight. But at a certain point, we have to get good and interrupting the replication of our own suffering before it gets out of control. Because rumination is a spiral. It has a gravitational pull that sucks us in and makes us lose our bearings and all sense of proportion. One trick that helps me slow down my thought process is to notice when my body is getting tense. Scrunched up shoulders, clenched jaw, restless leg, all of these physical symptoms are clues that my brain is spiraling. Which is fine. There's no judgment when this very normal physical reaction to stress happens. But noticing the tension helps me stop, take a breath, and if need be, announce to myself, okay, you're spending too much time on this, let's decide and move on. How do you interrupt your obsessions? Do you have a trick to keep your thoughts from degrading into compulsions? Here's advice from my favorite startup founder's latest book. When you are facing an unknown, non-systemic risk, it may not even be worth expending the effort to analyze it, it's probably a small fire that you should let burn. Remember, the less time you give yourself to decide, the more likely you are to create something pure without overthinking it.

*What are you still spending too much time on?*

August 28

## **Once we've seen a ghost, we're always afraid of the dark.**

Most of us get scared and stop. Traumatized by the criticism of our early attempts, we condemn our creative work to the nearest desk drawer, never to be revisited again. All because one schmuck with a white beard and elbow patches said that our writing was too conversational or lacked heart or didn't meet modern language guidelines. But that's the way our egos work. They're hypersensitive and infantile. Big babies that can't stand to live in a world where they hear things that upset them. Consider the young songwriter. He spends hours and hours perfecting his first tune, to the point that he's finally ready to become an agency of sincere expression, giving strangers and friends alike the most secret impulses of his soul. So he does. And then they rip the song shreds. What are the odds of that artist sharing again any time soon? Slim to none. Because now he's seen the ghost and will always be afraid of the dark. Look, life is already disappointing enough. Everybody you encounter is fighting a battle you know nothing about. And so, why be the one who makes people scared of the dark? Even if it is easier to be a cynic than a celebrator, it still costs nothing to believe and encourage and affirm people's work. Be a source of light instead.

*Are you fundamentally affirmative or automatically critical?*



August 29

## **Once you know about something, it doesn't matter what the name is.**

According to the standard classification of mental disorders used by health professionals, workaholism is not included as a nonsubstance addiction. This distinction provoked a simmering debate in the therapeutic community. There are scores mental health professionals and civilians alike who don't recognize it as a problem. Because to them, workaholism no different than, say, caffeine addiction. In my opinion, the problem is that people are asking the wrong set of questions. Should workaholism become recognized as a psychiatric disorder? Is it nothing more than pop psychology? Are workaholics just obsessive compulsive perfectionists? These questions aren't unimportant, but what might be more valuable to ask is something like this. Is workaholism a useful construct to help heal your dysfunctional and unhealthy behavior? For me, it was undeniable. For nearly a decade, workaholism was my coping strategy. It wasn't the problem; it was the symptom. And finally learning see it as an addiction was deeply healing because it forced me to ask myself what the addiction was covering. To paraphrase from the inspiring book of awakening, working was merely the drink by which you were able to briefly numb your worthlessness. It's true that workaholism, as a construct, lacks conceptual and empirical clarity. But I'm not a doctor, and this isn't a university or a courtroom or a rehab center. This is my life. And whether the term is officially classified or not doesn't matter. Workaholism is and will always be a useful construct to help me heal. And nobody can take that away from me. There's a passage from a popular movie about a meth addict that summarizes it best. The junkie's sponsor says to him, look, your addictions aren't the problem; that's just how you've been treating your problem. Lesson learned, once you know about something, it doesn't matter what the name is. If it's a stairway that takes you down to more meaningful places, then call it whatever the hell you want.

*What construct has helped you heal yourself?*

August 30

## **Organisms that are better attuned to bad things.**

Baumeister pioneered the concept of negativity bias, which refers to the notion that, even when of equal intensity, things of a more negative nature have a greater effect on our psychological state than do neutral or positive things. In his groundbreaking study, his team found that the innate predisposition of the psyche was to focus on bad, not good. It's evolutionarily adaptive. Organisms that are better attuned to bad things are more likely to survive threats and pass along their genes. Makes sense. However, the psychologists ultimately concluded that even though bad events may have a stronger impact than a comparable good one, many lives could be happier by virtue of having far more good than bad. That's what gave me hope. Because my default response, especially during the creative process, is to pull the whip out and start beating myself up. Like many sensitive and critical artsy fartsy types, I have a habit of being too hard on myself. And yet, despite the pull of my negativity bias, I'm learning to err on the side of affirmation. Instead of waving a scornful finger at every misstep, I'm giving myself the recognition I deserve for my efforts. Because it's not about right or wrong, good or bad, winning or losing. Binaries like that create ulcers. What matters is that you demonstrate to yourself that you are determined to move forward. What matters is that you appreciate each execution that comes along, not as proof of worth, but as the next installment of your continuing saga. That's the mindset guaranteed to turn your dreams into realities.

*When was the last time you congratulated yourself?*

August 31

## **Originality demands a willingness to experiment.**

On my ten year anniversary of wearing a nametag twenty four seven, my family threw a huge party. We even ordered a cake shaped like nametag. And as I blew out the candles, I had a flashback about the twenty-year-old version of myself. Because the idea started as an idealistic vision of creating global friendliness, world peace and transcontinental unity. But after a decade, I had lost that childlike sense of imagination. I had stepped away from the very leaps of faith that made the idea successful in the first place. And so, the next day, I sat down in front of a blank screen and started chasing whimsy once again. I began to re-envision my concept of a world where everybody wore nametags. The only difference was, this time, I had ten years of field research under my belt. Meaning, I could legitimately support my hypothesis with real data and insight and experience and perspective, an asset that nobody else in the world had but me. I was the single most qualified person on the planet to address this issue. That day, I began mapping all of the social, psychological, anthropological and interpersonal implications of my idea. What would happen if everybody wore nametags? How would daily life be different if we changed just one rule in the universe? The result was a project unlike anything else I'd ever created. I could tell right away that I had something meaningful. In fact, I was so proud of the work, that I officially published it online as The Nametag Manifesto. Tens of thousands of people around the world downloaded it, I won an award for presentation of the week, and I even got an email from a professor who started using the manifesto as part of the curriculum of his ethics class. Hell, I might even convert the manifesto into a work of fiction. The point is, originality demands a willingness to experiment. Never be afraid of your own imagination. Put whimsy on wheels and be willing to see where creativity takes you.

*When was the last time you did something for the first time?*

**SEPTEMBER**

September 1

## **Other desires well up inside the human heart.**

Maslow's law of human behavior states that a satisfied need ceases to motivate. When a person decides that they're earning enough money, for example, money loses its power to motivate. Other desires well up inside the human heart. And unless that person diverts their attention to one of those higher level need, they won't sustain momentum and drive. Philippe's book on creativity comes to mind. The tightrope walker writes: There is no such thing as motivation in my world. I am not motivated to do what I do. As an artist, I am driven, I am compelled, I am thrust forward by a force so rooted inside of me, so convincing, that it seems futile to try and explain it. That's still motivation. Perhaps not in the traditional sense, but this artist still understands that only needs that are relatively unsatisfied are capable of motivating people. That's why he still makes public performances and gives lectures and conducts workshops and produces films and writes books and collaborates with legendary artists, well into his sixties. Because at this point in his career, the motivation isn't money or fame or mastery. Philippe has already asked and answered the question, what is deepest potential that I can create in the world, and why does the world need it? And so, now it's simply a matter of actualizing his potential. Creating something beautiful and original and note-worthy for his own internal satisfaction, separate from the needs of others.

*What issue are you shielding yourself from so that you are not close enough to the pain that you need to motivate to change?*

September 2

## **Ownership is not a set of rights; it's a state of mind.**

Professionalism is the gap between what you want to do and what needs to be done. And if you want to create significant value at your organization, specialize in doing the work that nobody wants to do. Train your opportunity filter to scan the landscape and think, well, somebody's gotta do it, so it may as well be me. My mentor used to think about this kind of ownership from a customer service prospective. She would remind me, your clients are never going to do it, but they will love that you did it for them. It's part grit, part anticipation, part generosity, but all initiative. Bezos famously noticed in the late nineties that web activity had increased that year by a factor of more than two thousand percent. That jolted him awake. He knew that somebody was going to make a fortune from the phenomenon, and he thought, well, it may as well be me. This is a common logline in entrepreneur stories. Read interviews with startup founders, corporate executives, inventors, innovators and investors, and it's always the same moment of conception. Someone realizes that someone should do something, but they remember that most people will do nothing, so they hire themselves, and that changes everything. Is there work out there that nobody is willing to do that you would love doing that would be useful to others if you did it? Hire yourself. Fill that hole in the marketplace. Keep trying and your effort will eventually be rewarded with good outcome. There is no guarantee everyone will love you for it, or even notice, but the internal result of building your muscle of grit will payoff no matter what.

*What if you dumped a pile of responsibility into your own lap?*

September 3

## **Patience is the highest form of faith.**

Most blogs are abandoned because individuals and companies fail to see results one, three or even six months into the efforts. They didn't get the traffic or conversations they were expecting, and so, the blogs were left to lie fallow. Like trees falling in the digital forest that nobody hears. Monuments to a rare burst of enthusiasm. Public remnants of their ambitions unfulfilled. It's like that old blues song. The thrill is gone baby, all I can do is wish you well, there's a new world, and I'm free from your spell. Beck's legendary research on spiral dynamics of leadership found that entrepreneurs had several traits in common, chiefly among them were the impulse to start something new and the patience to be satisfied with small victories along the way. This is a helpful reminder when our patience is hanging at the other end of a very thin thread. We have to ground ourselves in the fertile soil of faith; otherwise, we won't stay the course. The question is not, what are we waiting for? The question is, what are we not waiting for? Here is a case study from my own work. Years ago, I launched a weekly blog for our yoga community. It was an exhilarating project, as it combined two of my most cherished activities, writing and yoga. But after about eight months of consistent posting, the studio manager grew disappointed with the results. Perhaps it isn't worth the effort, she said. Maybe we should abandon the blog and find something else. As luck would have it, a few weeks later, our site won an award for one of the top yoga blogs on the web. And a few months after that, an editor from a major publisher reached out. She was a regular subscriber to our blog, told me she loved the articles, and asked if we would be interested in collating my weekly columns into a book. A year later, the book came out and is now the centerpiece of our yoga community's marketing efforts. Of course, this isn't about blogs. This is about patience.

***Does your capacity for delayed gratification make it possible for you to aspire to dreams that others would disregard within three months?***

September 4

## **Pay no attention to the craziness everywhere around you.**

Control is an illusion. Human beings are meat puppets, bone machines, moist robots, collections of atoms, accidental byproducts of nature and, my own personal favorite, chimpanzees with a firmware upgrade. We're guided and constrained and manipulated by systems that we cannot understand. And that's precisely why people continue to do things that give them the false sense that they are taming their world, taking command of its complexity and danger. We prefer to treat life as a problem to solve, not as a mystery to be lived. Because without that precious sense of control, we're lost. The only problem is, that's a boring way to live. If we pay zero attention to the craziness that's everywhere around us, ignoring the infinite wonders that are to be found, shutting out the facets of pleasure and beauty which the world reveals to us, how the hell are we supposed to be inspired and awed? Cohen's legendary interview on the creative process said it perfectly: If I knew where the good songs came from, I'd go there more often. Writing is a mysterious condition. It's much like the life of a nun. You're married to the mystery. Leonard reminds us, then, to accept that we do not have magical control over the world. To look closely enough to allow ourselves to be delighted. And to learn to tolerate and even love the mystery, without the need to change it and make it unmysterious. That's all spirituality means. Not having a personal relationships with some invisible all powerful sky daddy, but deepening our appreciation for, consciousness of, and communion with, the grace and mystery of life. Beware of any approach to life that closes the door on mystery. Say yes to it.

***What are you going to do to acquaint yourself with your own mysterious nature?***



September 5

## **Pick low, medium or high.**

Doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result doesn't make you crazy, it makes you an artist. You're somebody who is not afraid to show up at the same place, every day, do the work, and play the long term statistical averages of the creative process. It's not insanity, it's trusting that statistically, the greater the number of attempts you make at doing things, the more likely an anomalous result will eventually occur. It's only a matter of time. Now, that might sound crazy to some, but that's only because our impatient, attention deficit disorder, immediate feedback, instant gratification culture has conditioned us out of one of life's most valuable habits. Sitting down by yourself and practicing something over and over again. Not three or five or fifty times, but hundreds of times. Thousands of times. Nobody does that anymore. Because nobody needs to. Everyone wants to be a rockstar, but nobody wants to master the chords. Everyone wants the scar, but nobody's wants the scab. Too bad. Because for those not willing to submit themselves to some kind of practice, but are still hoping for immediate success, maybe they're the ones who are crazy. Ask anyone who's been doing a particular skill, task or habit for more than ten years. In many cases, the only way they get a different result is by doing the same thing over and over again. They might switch up their routine or modify the process in small ways. But on the whole, they keep coming back. That's why it's called a practice. Reminds me of something my yoga instructor once said during class. The best part of any daily practice is the commitment to seek what is fresh, spontaneous, and interesting in the same place you looked for it yesterday. She taught me that the yoga, like many things, is always the same. It's you who changes. Your body, your life, your priorities, your values. Those are the variables in this equation. The constant of the practice will reflect them back to you during each class. And if you keep trying those same postures over and over again, eventually, a different result will show up. One day you'll touch your head to your knee or execute a full back bend or balance your entire body on your big toe. The yoga will be the same as it always was, but you'll look in the mirror and realize that you're a different person than when you started. Remember, you can't experience fulfillment without any sort of delay. If something can be delivered overnight, then it probably won't offer you lasting satisfaction. But find a practice to keep showing up to, day after day, and you'll grow in ways nobody can take away from you.

***What are you letting take over your life just because it has a more immediate payoff?***

September 6

## **Reduce your number of decisions and create a foundation of security.**

In computer programming, there's a term called a subroutine, which is a sequence of instructions that performs a frequently used task within an operation. A common example is saving a file, which computers do automatically every few minutes. But instead of writing the code each time that task is performed, the subroutine is created and called upon when it needs to be performed. The secret with subroutines is speed and efficiency. Humans can learn from our computer counterparts and apply these values our own lives for positive gain. If we learn to treat certain experiences as subroutines that we can access on moment's notice, then we can take more agency over our lives. Here's a few popular subroutines within the personal creativity management system. The first is called priming, which is reminding yourself of your accumulated track record to build faith in your creative capabilities. Let's say you have a big review coming up at work, and you're anxious and doubtful all afternoon. Before walking in that conference room, take several minutes to remind yourself of your accumulated track record. Review your shipping log from the past few weeks to saturate your consciousness with victory. Your fears will dissipate quickly and you'll be able to walk into that room feeling confident. Another subroutine is called depressurizing, which is consciously responding to panic in a way that serves your creative efforts. Say you need to start working on a new project, but each time you sit down to work, you keep getting overwhelmed. Get in the habit of reciting cognitive reframing mantras to yourself. Inhaling, you trust your resources; exhaling, you are equal to this challenge. Inhaling, you have plenty of time, money and ability to do this well, exhaling, you are the one who can do this. This subroutine will put the overwhelm in its place and give yourself access to more choice. Here's one final example. Say you just got bad news or had a crappy performance, and you're feeling depressed. Try zooming out. Widen your lens to get perspective on the complete picture of your situation. Notice there are dozens of other factors that might be in play around your recent failure, over which you have zero control. And this isolated failure, rejection or setback actually has little to do with you. This subroutine strengthens your sense of emotional proportion during the creative process. You'll view events in their true relations or relative importance. What's your favorite subroutine? What sequence of instructions would reduce your number of decisions and create a foundation of security? Learn how to use this tool as an external mantra for aiding focus and calm and present state awareness. Remember, reality far more subjective than you're led to believe. Accept that your brain is fundamentally irrational, and start programming yourself for higher levels of happiness.

*How can you treat your mind like the computer it is to get better results?*

September 7

## **Change the convergence of light rays and correct the defect of your vision.**

I'll never forget the first day I tried wearing contact lenses. My friends and I were at a baseball game, and for the first time in my life, I could actually see everything clearly. It was breathtaking. The scoreboards, the advertisements, the players, the ball, the nachos—it all suddenly snapped into focus. I remember saying to my friend, holy crap, so this is what it's like to really see. Goodbye glasses, hello clarity. Behold, the power of lenses. That little plastic transparent circle changed the convergence of light rays and corrected the defect of my vision. Truly mesmerizing. Ever had one of those moments before? Even if you don't wear glasses or contacts, when was the last time you experienced a real crystallization before? If you can't remember, here's the good news. You can proactively create them for yourself. That's one of the most transformative tools in the personality creativity management system. Giving yourself a new way of interpreting reality. A few examples. The first lens is called *fictioning*, or treating memory as an art form for the purposes of nourishing yourself. Essentially, you remember things in a way that's consistent with the way you wish to ideally see yourself. Autobiographical memory, that vivid recollection of a past event that reflects what you value most about our life history, can be a beautiful thing. It fills you with a lot of useful positive energy. Another lens is called *storehousing*, or exponentially increasing your overall asset of creativity by giving more of it away. Even if you're paranoid somebody will steal your work, share it with the world anyway. Give away your talent to the market until they're ready to pay for it. And if they do, awesome. Or if they don't, that's awesome too. Because the reward for being generous is being the carrier of generosity. One last lens you might try is called repackaging, or, forcing yourself to appraise negative circumstances in a forward thinking way. Next time you fail or get rejected in your creative practice, open your eyes to the possibility that something good is just around the corner. Instead of beating yourself up and cursing the heavens, give yourself permission to see opportunities that were previously unavailable. This lens may not affect the outcome, but it will certainly alter your experience. Through which lens are you looking at the world?

***How might a new one changed the convergence of light rays and correct the defect of your vision?***

September 8

## **Intentionally indicate limits that promote your values.**

When my therapist first taught me the concept of boundaries, he encouraged me to write that word in permanent marker on the outside of my flip phone. Remember flip phones? Where the buttons and display were kept inside the closed clamshell, and you didn't know who was calling until you snapped open the hinge? Well, one of my foremost problems as a codependent was feeling obligated to answer every single call. Even from unknown numbers. Because that's what people pleasers do. They allow the demands on their time to be usurped by manipulators. And so, writing the word boundaries on the phone reminded me to pause before answering the call. And in many cases, just let it go to voicemail and deal with it later, if at all. This little trick was the first of what would become a lifelong strategy for setting healthy boundaries. As someone who struggled with chronic stress and anxiety for most of my twenties and thirties, the importance of this strategy cannot be understated. Once you discover that you don't have to be a loving landfill for everybody else's trash, it's amazing how quickly your blood pressure decreases. And so, boundaries are defined as intentionally indicated limits that promote your values. Let's explore a few examples. Are you trying to sustain momentum without burning yourself out? Try micro pacing, which is an elegantly balanced production effort between heating and cooling. If you're not sure how fast or slow your creative projects should be progressing, give yourself a longer interval of incubation than you think you need. Go slow enough so that if you run into something interesting, you have a chance to notice. Here's another one. Do you seek new work opportunities, but people and companies want your time for free? Use something called a labor limit, setting boundaries on your generosity of providing unpaid service. Decide ahead of time exactly how much time we are going to dedicate to this pro bono work. Spend thirty minutes on the job application questions, submit the document, and move on with your life. One last example. Do you ever get information overload and become stressed and overwhelmed trying to catch up with everything? Try conscious consumption, where you apply a level discernment to the intellectual nourishment you ingest. Agree not to look at your phone for the first hour after you wake up, and not to watch or read any news for the last hour before you go to sleep. See how little you actually miss out on. Look, there are as many ways to set healthy boundaries as there are people to set them. Find the tools that work for you. Don't even let people shame you for drawing the line. And trust that how others respond to your boundaries is not your problem. You don't necessarily have to write any words on the top of your phone, but you do have to intentionally indicate limits that promote your values.

*How might your people pleasing tendencies be causing you distress?*

September 9

## **Please, for the love of god, steal everything from me.**

Do you have a friend who is territorial about their creativity? Someone who warns you not to tell anyone when he comes up with a great idea? Me too. It's infuriating. Almost as frustrating as the guy who has tons of great ideas, but never executes a single one of them. But both personality types suffer from a scarcity mindset. Paranoid that there isn't enough creativity to go around, they paint themselves into an unproductive corner. Cagey about other people stealing their ideas, their expectation enables the very problem they're trying to avoid. This is the reason my product development and innovation gameshow is such a joy. Because the project is rooted in generosity and abundance and optimism. Every time we play, dozens of new ideas are put out there, and we literally tell people to steal them. Please, go right ahead, take this concept and run with it. Matter of fact, the card game edition contains nearly three hundred ideas in the box, many of which could easily and quickly scale into profitable businesses, if somebody really wanted them to. And part of me hopes and prays that happens. What a privilege to know that my absurd brain fart had a kernel of truth that some entrepreneur was inspired to convert into a valuable product that made the world better. Open innovation truly is a beautiful thing. Every creative should be fortunate enough to be plagiarized at some point in their lives. Sure beats being ignored. Besides, starting a new company, scaling that business, promoting the product, there's simply not enough fuel in the tank for me to do that anymore. Obsession is a young man's game, to quote the great inventor. And yet, that reality is not going to stop me from generating the seeds from which other people can build their forest. Nor is it going to keep me from sharing my ideas with the world out of the misplaced fear that my work will become bastardized for somebody else's gain. Please, for the love of god, steal everything from me. You have permission to pick my pocket. And ask yourself. Are you focusing so much on protecting your ideas that you never do anything with them? It sounds like the climax of a cheesy romantic thriller where the jealous, narcissistic character demands to be loved, telling their partner, if I can't have you, then nobody can. Wrong. Everybody can have everything. And when you're creatively optimistic, in a state of forward motion, you'll find that collaborating and innovating with others comes easily. Hyde said it best in his book about artists in the modern marketplace. Passing the gift along is the act of gratitude that finishes the labor. And when we have fed the gift with our labor and generosity, it grows and feeds us in return.

*What's the last idea you let somebody steal one of your ideas?*

September 10

## **Prolificacy is a dynamic process of increasing returns.**

Edison was affectionately referred to as the young man who kept the path to the patent office hot with his footsteps. To suggest that he was a prolific inventor would be the understatement of the century. According to recent data from the patent and trademark office, the average number of patents per inventor is approximately three. And to secure your spot on the list of the world's most prolific inventors, there is a minimum threshold of two hundred. Edison had over a thousand. Can you imagine executing that level of output in your life? It's as inspiring as it is intimidating. But it's also not as mysterious as you might think. Edison was so prolific because he was the first person to pursue invention systematically, rather than intermittently. He had an industrial research laboratory where accidental discovery was recurrent. There was no dependence on luck or providence; it was simply a function of volume. It ain't magic; it's math. Even in today's marketplace, corporate innovation labs and startup incubators are approaching invention in that systematic way. Because they trust the process. They know that if they just keep coming with new ideas, everything else just falls into place. Reminds me of the study that researched the traits of world's most prolific inventors. The scientists found that quantity begets quality. That the effects of someone's accumulation of patents have a profound impact on the overall value of their inventions. To put it simply, prolificacy is a dynamic process of increasing returns. The more things you make, the more valuable they become. This then, might be the advice of our inventive predecessors. Keep your head down, keep making things, keep exploring new ways to make them, keep finding new people to make them with, keep finding new people to make them for. In short, keep the path to the patent office hot with your footsteps, and the world will take notice. Just make sure to derive meaning from the journey because it's possible the world may not.

*What did you make today?*

September 11

## **Puke and shit your way to innovation.**

Do your ideas and dreams lie at your feet drained of animation? Are you fighting the terrible weight of creative inertia? You're not alone. Feeling blocked, stuck and uninspired is par for the course in the sport of making things. There isn't an artist alive who doesn't suffer from at least the occasional bout of compositional paralysis. Especially in the corporate world. For those of us who have ever worked at a job that felt like a creative abyss, it can feel like an exercise in futility to come up with new ideas. During my stint as a copywriter for a direct marketing agency, it seemed like our clients didn't actually want anything creative. All of my clever and inspiring messaging, our design team's eye catching visuals—they just didn't seem to go very far. In fact, many of our mediocre and even bad ideas passed for the agency's everyday standard. But hey, the money was great, so what's an artist to do? One afternoon during a particularly uninspiring week, I came up with an interesting solution to this common creative problem. Because marketing can be an extremely well paying profession, but spending your days making mediocre advertisements that sell pointless excrement that nobody needs, can really start to eat away at your soul. But what if there was a way for people to purge all of that creative bleakness? Maybe what the world needs is an ayahuasca treatment program that helps marketing professionals expel all the toxins out of their system that they've accumulated from their soul crushing jobs as pixel jockeys. Casting out their marketing demons, so to speak. Once people's bodies were finally cleansed of all that bile, there's no doubt that a few good ideas would surface. This service could revolutionize the industry, save for a few class action lawsuits. We could puke and shit our way to innovation! Anyway, these are the kinds of ideas I come up with when I have nothing to do all day. We all do what we have to do to survive. Point being, if you can't get your creative wheels turning, trust that you're not the first to suffer this injustice. And trust that unblocking is only a matter of time. Neumeier's book on the rules of genius uses a really interesting term to describe creative opportunity, and it's the kind of strategy that you might try to catapult yourself out of stuckness. The measure of a great idea is the quantity and quality of affordances it throws off. Affordances are the opportunities inherent in an idea. And the more affordances for customers, an industry, or society at large, the better the idea. That's certainly what motivates me as a creator. If there is a new idea that has significant movement value, with its ability to galvanize me through the possibility of affordances, you better believe the fire under my ass will heat up. Even the aforementioned idea about a new service that uses psychoactive spiritual medicine rituals to help people like me unblock, that's enough to get me going. It allows me the treat and pleasure of working on a new idea, as ridiculous as it sounds. Not to mention, doing ayahuasca would literally light a fire under my ass. Maybe it would do the same for you. To paraphrase the great transcendentalist philosopher, there is no

blockage so foul that intense light will not make it beautiful. Keep yourself where the light is, and you'll be able to fight the terrible weight of creative inertia.

***What must you purge to free up inspiration and create an endless flow of creative ideas?***



September 12

## **Pushing the whole world ahead in its march to the highest civilization.**

Edison had an appreciation for, among other things, utility. As much as he wanted to lock himself in a room and tinker away with his team for the rest of time, his biography talks about his one creative decision that was of great historical importance. Never to undertake inventions unless there was a definite market demand for them. Edison made damn sure that his inventions conformed to commercial demands as to the necessities of human use and convenience. It's not surprising that a journalist commented that his marvelous inventions were pushing the whole world ahead in its march to the highest civilization. That's what happens when you lead with utility. And that was over a hundred years ago. Today, in our modern innovation landscape, some punk kid can fart a useless idea that's not even a real product and gets seven figures of seed funding. Startups can be valued at tens of millions of dollars and not even make anything. Companies can make little to no profit and lack concrete business models, and yet, build a global brand. But those examples are exceptions to the rule. For every startup that cashes in on their pseudo innovation, there are a thousand garages with two guys tinkering in the dark whose innovations never see the light of day. All the more reason to lead with utility. If you want to push the whole world ahead in its march to the highest civilization, or if you simply want to create a fulfilling career for yourself, cater to the necessities of human use and convenience. Because usefulness never goes out of style. Even if the work you do is only useful to a single person, that's a great place to start. My company's suite of software applications was built solely to help me to do my job better. And to my knowledge, nobody else uses them but me, and most people don't even know, much less care, about them. Which is fine with me. Because the market of one got its demands met. What's more, the creative process of that project taught me how to innovate with utility as my north star. And that skill has served me well in my own business, but also as an employee of startups and other companies. What's your market of one? To whom is your work specifically useful? Edison, if he were still around today, would have observed that we now live in a world where direct interaction with customers is increasing, which means people are more willing to surrender their data, which means more personalization to audiences of one is not only possible but expected. Not that there is anything wrong with locking ourselves in a room to tinker away. Innovation for innovation's sakes still matters. But if we want to create the most amount of leverage, for others and ourselves, let us master the art of making useful things.

*How does your work conform to the necessities of human use and convenience?*

September 13

## **Put your process on a pedestal. Or not.**

The process argument is as old as business itself. And the challenge is, both sides make a good case. A lot of process leads to major bottlenecks, duplicative effort, wasted time and money, long delivery cycles for simple tasks, micro managed team members, deterred agility, lower results, anemic innovation and worn down employees. Every day feels like you're sledging your way through a muddy swamp. And the worst part is, it feels like nobody trusts you. On the other hand, a lack of process means chaotic projects, confused employees, lack of structure, context and perspective, limited documentation, longer orienting time, inefficient workflows and wasted time and money. Every day feels like you're so far outside the box that there's nothing to lean against. And the worst part is, if there's no process, it's hard to replicate great work consistently. Metric Digital has been in business for a while now, and many of our structures have coalesced, doing things consistently has taken precedent over constantly improvising. During my first month here, my thought was, well, maybe now is the time to upgrade our relationship with process. And so, we recently launched our first internal wiki. The wiki project took about three weeks to research, ideate, organize and draft. We started by asked each other questions like: What do you use/share over and over again? What resource or process would help save time & stress? What are clients asking you to provide or do for them? What are clients not asking for that you give them and they love it? What resource would have made onboarding easier, better, faster? What do you do intuitively that you haven't documented but team members would love to learn? And then, with help from Angelo Luppino, one of our brilliant developers, it took another few weeks to develop, edit and publish. The wiki is now live: #shipped. Obviously, this project is not going to change the world. It's not perfect, and it's not sexy. Our wiki doesn't get as much traffic as, say, CakeWrecks. But it's quite useful. Most immediately, it helped us save significant onboarding time for our new hires. And long term, now we have a platform for systematically capturing our team's knowledge as it's happening in real time. The other thing is, the wiki gives us a venue to do something that companies who work in client services don't do that often: Celebrate the values, processes and strategic thinking that make our agency so special. Is your company still going to the mat on the process argument? If so, here's how you might think that. If you find yourself in the over processed camp of people, ask yourself this. What processes do you currently have that are cumbersome, inefficient, redundant and outdated? Has your process become the proxy for the result you want? Do you actually own the process or does the process own you? If you find yourself in the under processed camp of people, ask yourself this. Has doing things consistently finally taken precedent over constantly improvising? Has the amount of your organizational knowledge is hit its threshold? Could you put more rigor, organization and documentation around how you roll as a company? As my mentor used to tell me, if you don't write it down, it never happened. Process is not a question with a yes or no answer. It's a spectrum. A matter

of degree. Every organization must find the middle ground that balances the need for predictability with the freedom to be creative.

*Assuming that technology and finances posed no constraints, what would you change right now about your business processes and operations?*

September 14

## **Putting yourself into better position to execute.**

It's impossible to start a microwave while the door is still open. It's impossible to shift into the car into reverse while it's moving forward at certain speed. It's impossible for an anesthesiologist to mistakenly connect the wrong gas to a patient's intravenous pump. It's impossible to withdraw money from an automatic teller machine without taking your card back first. It's impossible for a call center agent to view and therefore steal a customer's credit card information. It's impossible for a patient with diabetes to order a dose of insulin greater than the allowable daily maximum. Each of these examples has one thing in common. They are forcing functions. Behavior-shaping constraints that cause conscious attention and deliberate disruption. Now, although engineering, production and manufacturing seem to be the areas where forcing functions show up most, it's also a useful concept worth applying to many areas of life and work. One entrepreneur friend of mine, who does most of his work at coffee shops, often leaves his power cable at home. This gives him a finite amount of battery life, say, four hours, and that forces him to be highly efficient and expedient in his work. Another friend of mine who teaches math to third graders asks students to practice identifying the eye color of friends and teachers, which acts as a forcing function for concentration. The last example relates to writing. In my experience working both as a freelancer producer and part of teams, the trap of over editing can often cause friction and bottleneck the publishing process. Sharing a draft with five colleagues and waiting for feedback before going live seems like an intelligent and collaborative approach. But it usually just stalls the execution. Better to go public with the content now, imperfect as it may be, and then allow the publicness of the work to become the forcing function that compels people to edit on the fly. Proving, behavior-shaping constraints work very well. Forcing functions put you into better position to execute. And the best part is, it doesn't require more equipment or additional cost. Merely conscious attention.

*What's your best strategy for disrupting yourself?*

September 15

## **Quieting the monster inside your head.**

Parkinson's law, which states that work expands to fill the time available for its completion, creates an interesting predicament for artists. Because most of us work alone. And so, if we have a problem, we have all of the time in the world to obsess over it. There simply aren't enough structures and constraints to keep our minds occupied. Whereas people working a more traditional career path, complete with bosses and employees and offices and performance reviews, can't afford to spend their entire morning walking a hole in the carpet, mentally tormenting themselves about what a worthless piece of shit they are. There's too much work to be done. Which isn't to say we should stay busy all the time, avoiding difficult emotions and the exhausting work of regulating them, hoping time will magically heal our pain. But if we don't have enough things to bite into, our own chewing can't drown out our mind's chatter. If we have nowhere to be and all of the time to get there, the freedom works against us. And if we don't have an arsenal of activities to quiet our mental monsters, we'll become exhausted from fighting back all the worse case scenarios inside our head. That's one of the reasons yoga has been so transformative for me. Because I spend all day living inside my head. It's in the job description. But when I walk into the yoga studio for those critical ninety minutes, all I can do is focus on my breathing and pay exquisite attention to my body. It's too hot and too crowded and too intense to drift off to exile inside our head. By the time class is over, every problem I walked into the room with has been washed away like a face drawn in the sand. Every artist runs the risk of having too much freedom. Too much time to reflect and obsess and disappear down the rabbit hole of their own mythology. When the familiar clouds start to gather above your head, give that energy something else to do. Give it a project.

***What will you do when you get tired of beating your head against a brick wall?***

September 16

## **Renting my brain people.**

Renting my brain people. Perhaps my most ingenious idea as an entrepreneur, if I don't say so myself, was charging people to rent my brain. The first time those three ridiculous words came out of my mouth, there was no doubt in my mind that it was a brand with massive potential. Recently, I dug up the original journal entry for this idea in an old brainstorm folder from fifteen years ago. Just reading it made me giddy. Have you ever had that prescient feeling before? When you know you've just stumbled across an idea that you know is absolutely going to win, and you can't get to work on it fast enough? Oh man, it's like you need a cigarette after it's done. Let me share what was running through my brain during the exact moment this idea came to me. See if you can sense the momentum in my words. Here we go: Charging people to rent my brain is the logical expansion of my current business line. Lots of people are asking me for this service. I've already been doing this kind of work for years without getting paid for it. It's an absolute blast and requires zero preparation. And when people sit down and ask me questions, and I connect with them in a useful and inspiring way, the looks on their faces are undeniable. It really works. I've seen measurable results in people's lives because of these brain rental conversations. And in fact, many of these people are telling me that I should be charging for this. Which means there's a viable market for the service. Combine that with my expertise and passion for the work, and that's a business opportunity that cannot be passed up. This service could be packaged and positioned in a manner that's brand consistent and completely unique to me, and become a significant revenue driver. Plus, the only asset in play here is my brain, which means there's no overhead, and the service offering only grows in value, scope and impact with every passing day. There could be an entire line extension of products based on this brand down the road. It could last forever. And so, for now, job number needs to be making my brain as smart, creative, critical, analytical, brilliant, thought provoking, healthy, diverse, effective and potent as possible. Can you feel the love tonight? What an amazing moment that was. If you're in the business of creating ideas, you can certainly relate. Since its original conception, that service offering has afforded me many wonderful benefits. From actual income to meaningful relationships to innovative ideas to priceless learnings to an overall sense of fulfillment from executing an original idea that makes me proud.

September 17

## **Say goodnight to the bad guy.**

Rollo beautifully characterizes artists in his classic book on the courage to create. When I use the word rebel for the artist, I do not refer to revolutionary or to such things as taking over the dean's office, that's a different matter. Artists are persons who are concerned with their inner visions and images. But that is precisely what makes them feared by any coercive society. For they are the bearers of the human being's age-old capability to be insurgent. They love to immerse themselves in chaos in order to put it into form. Forever unsatisfied with the mundane, the apathetic, the conventional, they always push on to newer worlds. No wonder governments, religions, business and institutions have been censoring art for hundreds of years. If the work is offensive, immoral, harmful to society, it must be altered, silenced or erased. Otherwise their balance of power will never be restored. This tension between standards of decency and freedom of expression is fascinating to me. The fact that one person could create something that is hailed for its transgressive, controversial and taboo characteristics, that's motivating as hell. You know, it's funny; so many people out there are trying to write the next great novel. But maybe the secret to literary success is writing the worst one. That gives me an idea for a new business. Censiore is a combination legal advocacy and public relations firm that files a claim to get your offensive and disgusting book censored, restricted or removed from libraries and schools. That way, authors could leverage that very ban into a compelling marketing campaign that attracts rebellious readers. Censiore, building the best-laid bans. After all, this is one of our universal human rights. Article nineteen of the universal declaration states everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression, without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers. Maybe it's not as rebellious as society has made it out to be. Maybe it's just part of being a person. And understandably, there will always be a social cost of speaking our minds. Free speech may one day become a quaint relic of the past. The question we have to ask ourselves is, should the quivering lip keep us from sharing our inner vision? Will we tap into humanity's age old capacity to be insurgent? It might be worth the investment.

***Will you acquiesce to the mob's demands, or bravely accept the role as the bad guy?***

September 18

## **Scraping the bottom of the franchise barrel.**

Gervais, the philosopher disguised as a comedian, recently pointed out how time and culture have created an inversion of originality. When starting his career in the eighties, he said, the artists used to need to have a unique identity to succeed. Now it's quite the opposite. Today, if your work looks or sounds like somebody else, you succeed. Isn't that messed up? How the marketplace rewards artists for making things that remind them of other things? Makes me puke. But this doesn't mean originality is dead, or that our culture is creatively bereft. It's just that there's not as much money in originality. Similar to prevention in the healthcare world, not enough people profit from new ideas to warrant giving them the green light. Better to prescribe a daily pill than try to change people's eating habits, right? The most obvious offender of identity inversion is contemporary commercial cinema. Look at the top movie openings from the past two decades, and they've all been sequels and reboots and adaptations. Everything is a multiplicity of something else, using repeated and exploited texts, images, narratives and characters from earlier properties. This shouldn't be surprising, though, if you're thinking about art from a business standpoint. Hollywood, just like music, sports, digital media and all other massive entertainment industries, sticks with familiar brands for a reason. They're economically incentivized to make money, rather than telling quality stories and creating iconic characters. Today's audiences aren't catered to; they're marketed to. And so, let's not fault businesses for that. Getting mad at companies for prioritizing revenue is like getting mad at dogs for barking. They're just being who they are. But if you're an artist, somebody who believes that your uniqueness is your greatest weapon, my recommendation is, keep doing your thing. Keep elevating all attempts at originality, however daring, however violent, simply because it makes you feel like you. That alone is enough of a reason to do it. Just try not to get disappointed when your originality is ignored or rejected in favor of something that reminds audiences of something else. It's infuriating and unfair, but that doesn't make it wrong. Rogers, the father of humanistic psychotherapy, said it best in his famous book about becoming a person. Perhaps the most fundamental condition of creativity is that the source or locus of evaluative judgment is internal. The value of the product is, for the creative person, established not by the praise or criticism of others, but by himself. Have I created something satisfying to me? Does it express a part of me, my feeling or my thought, my pain or my ecstasy? These are the only questions that really matter to the creative person. Next time you go to the movie theater and see artists scraping the bottom of the franchise barrel, remember this. Just because nobody notices how special your art is, doesn't mean you should stop creating it. In the end, there's only one audience member who matters.

***What is the unique song you're supposed to be singing?***



September 19

## **Sensitive to the clamorous pulls of inner energy.**

Productivity researchers warn us that our inability to execute is a result of external distractions. Mounting emails, buzzing phones, loudmouth coworkers, unscheduled meetings, internet browsing, chaotic environments, cigarette breaks, unexpected visits, pointless meetings, noisy neighbors and gossipy water cooler conversations. But while these various demands on our attention can certainly be sidetracking, scapegoating them for our inability to ship does a disservice to our growth. Because it exports responsibility. It allows us take out our blame throwers and pass the buck to something simple and concrete and visible, like that annoying barking dog. That's why we couldn't do the work. The real reason we didn't execute is because we weren't strong enough to push away our inner distractions. We weren't sensitive to the clamorous pulls of our mental, emotional and psychological obstacles, such as permission and guilt and fear and anger and stress and unworthiness and hopelessness and not enoughness and, my personal favorite, the compulsive need to control the universe. Catching up on email is not a distraction, slaying the dragon that tells me I'm a worthless piece of shit, is. Going to pointless meetings doesn't derail my productivity, the crippling feelings of anxiety that I'm never going to get hired again, does. And watching insipid videos on the internet doesn't keep from doing the work, rebalancing my fragile ego above the precipice of apathy and hopelessness, does. These are the kinds of inner distractions that we should focus on. If we can master them, there's not a barking dog on this earth that can stand in our way.

*What are the inner obstacles that are preventing you from being effective?*

September 20

## **Setting out each day to set the world ablaze.**

Welles, while filming what critics have called the greatest movie of all time, coined a term called the confidence of ignorance. Orson said that it's when a person does something out of sheer enjoyment and creative fulfillment, unaware or unbothered that others consider them ridiculous and pretentious. Pleasure is derived from the activity itself, rather than from what others think of the activity. This is a deeply liberating concept. What a relief to know that we don't have to murder our creativity by demanding it meet the world's approval. What a joy to realize that we don't have to burden our work with the obligation to be interesting or good or relevant or useful. We can simply get on with making whatever we want to make, without having to set out each day to set the world ablaze. This confidence of ignorance, unfortunately, doesn't resonate when you're young. Because early in your creative career, you're still obsessed with making it. You're still putting all this pressure on your work to make a global impact and be the greatest thing that ever was. If anything you make doesn't change everything, you're nothing. And maybe that goal comes to fruition. Some exceptional creators live their whole lives sustaining this level of drive. It's deeply inspiring to watch. But for the majority of people, it's not sustainable. You can't just switch on the afterburners at age nineteen and never turn them off. Everything atrophies eventually. My career reached a point about twelve years in where creating work for anyone other than myself, for anything other than inner joy, became a significant health risk. The choice was to either double down on my addiction to approval and continue to be a victim of my own creative insecurity, or let go of all expectation and embrace the confidence of ignorance. Door number two it is. The irony is, because of my freedom to focus on the enjoyment and fulfillment of the process itself, the product has never been purer. Not necessarily better or stronger, but purer. Truer. Because it's not stained or burdened by the need to become or accomplish anything. It can just live. Just like it used to live when I didn't know any better. Welles was right when he warned young creators, you have to remember your old ignorance. You have to ask for the impossible with the same cheerfulness that you did when you didn't know what you were talking about.

*Are you scaring away your artistic gifts by demanding that they validate your entire existence?*

September 21

## **Shovel some coal into that engine and start toot tooting.**

My friend who teaches high school chemistry once told me that the secret to being a good teacher is, acting like you've known forever what you just learned yesterday. He wasn't kidding. Doug is a smart, perceptive, hardworking guy. But he also understands the reality of his profession. It's not about faking it until you make it, it's about steering people's perception toward realities that are more to your liking. It's about strategically choreographing attention in a manner that serves your goals. After all, the human mind is mostly a narrative and causation creation engine. And as a survival strategy when resources are short, it's always looking for shortcuts to bucket things. Why not make it easier for people? This is an invaluable tool in the creative arsenal. Whether you're building a company, building a brand, or building a house, compression solves the problem of time through reducing, condensing or combining. If you've ever asked yourself the question, how do you gain credibility when you have no experience, compression is the key. While working at a tech startup years ago, a potential client reached out to inquire about our company's sponsorship program. Their marketing team had decided to dedicate a portion of their annual media budget to native advertising, and since they already loved our publication so much, it seemed like the right fit. The only thing was, my company didn't have a sponsorship program. Nobody had ever asked for that service before. But as any good salesperson will tell you, never let a lack of inventory stop you from selling something. This is when the tool of compression came into play. Here's what happened over the course of the next two days. First, we emailed the prospective client back, thanked them for reaching out, and told them we'd get back to them with a quote. Second, we researched all of our competitors and industry colleagues who offered similar services, using their language and visuals as inspiration for our own. Third, we quickly mocked up a simple sell sheet that outlined and priced our sponsorship service. Fourth, we repurposed the content from that collateral onto a landing page on our website. And finally, we replied to that original email with the sell sheet and told the prospect we were excited about working together. The whole thing took two days. Cost zero dollars. We make it look, sound and feel like we had been doing sponsorships for years. Even though the service line didn't exist. Even we never had a paying client before. Now, to what degree did our potential client know that? It's hard to tell. Maybe it doesn't matter. But because it happened once meant that it was possible. Now our opportunity agenda was on high alert. As my mentor used to say, where there's one, there's a ton. Lesson learned: nobody wants to be the first person to trust you. Next time you want to gain credibility when you have no experience, use the power of compression. Act like you've known forever what you just learned yesterday. Treat your ideas like they've already been alive in the world for years. Hey, if someone wants to lay down the track in front of your train, then go shovel some coal into that engine and start toot tooting.

*Are you saving time or compressing it?*

September 22

## **You may have created something, but you didn't innovate anything.**

Agassiz, the innovative biologist and scholar of earth's natural history, is famous for his quip about innovation. Back in the nineteenth century, he said that there were three stages of truth through which all scientific discoveries have to pass. Stage one, the people say, it's not true. Stage two, the people say, if it is true, then it's not very important. And stage three, the people say, we knew it all along. In fact, many scientists have added a fourth stage to his framework. People say, yes, but we call it something else. Wow, isn't that just like humanity to behave that way? Perfectly on brand as a species, as usual. This wisdom should be painted on every artist's studio wall and every company's conference room. Because when you're in the business of innovating, that is, creating value by producing novel solutions to meaningful problems, you also have to fight numerous forms of resistance to your ideas. People ignoring you, markets rejecting you, competitors undermining you, colleagues imploring you, customers attacking you, the industry accusing you of being heretical, and so on. As if the creative process wasn't hard enough, now you have to do battle with the dark world of people's stupid opinions? Blech. Can't we just outsource that? My friend, an intellectual property attorney, loves lecturing me about something called novelty requirement. This is the inspection inventions must meet to qualify for patents. If the ideas are not new, the law states, and contemporaries in the field would not consider it to be nonobvious, you lose. You get nothing. Good day sir. You might have created something, but you didn't innovate anything. And so, my question is, since all innovation apparently has to pass through these various stages of truth, exactly how much time does that take? How long do you have to actually stay in the game? Five years? Five decades? Your entire life? Yes, the ethos of outliving the critics and still being around when the world is finally ready for you is optimistic and quite romantic. But it just takes for fucking ever. Nolan, one of my favorite philosophers disguised as a filmmaker, had an idea for a war film back in the early nineties. He wrote an innovative screenplay told from three perspectives, land, sea and air; and also from three time sequences, one week, one day and one hour. The film would incorporate the snowball effect, allowing all three perspectives and sequences to converge in the final moment of the film. Sadly, the filmmaker knew this project would demand a large-scale production to be put on screen. And so, he decided to postpone making the movie until he had acquired sufficient experience directing large-scale action films. Twenty years later, once he had built an impressive career of making numerous blockbuster movies, he finally decided to execute on his war film idea. Dunkirk eventually became the highest grossing world war film of all time earning over a half a billion dollars and receiving four academy awards. Nolan stayed in the game for twenty years, and it paid off in every possible way. Hollywood executives were probably laughing to themselves, we knew it all along. Lesson learned: the most valuable tool in the innovator's kit is patience. If there was one thing personal creativity management can teach you, it's learning how to hustle while

you wait. Ghandi once said that just because you're the lone voice in the wilderness, doesn't mean you're wrong. The question is if you're willing to wait long enough until the rest of the world catches with to you.

*How long will it take for your ideas to pass through the stages of truth?*

September 23

## **Size and scale didn't matter, satisfaction did.**

Lebowski's approach to ambition is to act naturally, not aggressively. He proceeds without dwelling upon the result or even the action itself, rather, he moves as the situation dictates. It's doing by not doing. Letting things flow like water, rather than letting his act of trying contaminate the result. Meanwhile, his enemies are struggling to flow uphill, against the current, against gravity, and even possibly against their own nature, achieving less authentic and effective results. This image of flowing water is deeply soothing to me. Because there are so many potential stresses and pressures along our journey, most of which come from cultural expectations around what ambition is supposed to look like. But we don't have to buy into those stories. Instead of forcing our will on every situation, we can wait for the tide to take us out. Thinking back to the many creative projects in my career, it was always the ones that moved according to their own timetable that felt the most satisfying and successful. Whereas the ones that shipped out unhealthily fast and hard, coming from a place of grandiosity and fear, didn't have the same impact. Makes me think about my suite of creativity based software apps. Not only one of the coolest inventions to come out of my brain, but something I actually use regularly. But initially, my goal was to roll out this behemoth of a system that was going to completely transform the way people thought about creativity and enable a passive income stream that would set me up for life. Ambitious would have been an understatement. According to that vision, the project would have cost tons of capital, been highly labor intensive, with no guarantee of success. Thankfully, a colleague convinced me to scratch my software itch in a more natural and less aggressive manner. Because he could sense my manic energy over the phone. And so, he recommended executing something smaller that felt more organic to my life. Something I could actually sustain. Like a single serving application, rather than an entire system. Something that solved a small problem first. And once that was finished, then the option to iterate could be considered. He was right. Once our first piece of software was quickly and cheaply finished, suddenly elements of the larger project started shuffling themselves organically into patterns in accordance with opportunity. Then came the next app. And the next one. And so on. All because the situation dictated it, not the cultural pressure. Size and scale didn't matter, satisfaction did. That's what happens if you wait for the birthing process to begin to move in its own organic time. Your patience with the flow of things is rewarded. Are you allowing your soul to be stirred by a magnificent ambition? Take your time. Trust that you don't need the whole world on the first day. And see if you can proceed naturally, rather than aggressively. Lebowski would be proud. But that's just, like, my opinion, man.

*How might your projects feel differently if they weren't such an uphill battle?*

September 24

## **So many things in life just go away.**

There's nothing more unsatisfying than spending a ton time and energy on a project that has marginal impact, or worse yet, never even sees the light of day. Kind of kills your motivation going forward, doesn't it? But that work doesn't have to go to waste. Cohen, one of the greatest songwriters of all time, reminds us to never allow the day to go down in debt. Meaning, regardless of our project's results, there are still certain things nobody can take away from us. Like our initiative, our effort and our wisdom. After working at four different agencies and startups over the years, I can remember dozens of projects just like this. Either they kicked off with a bang and fizzled out over time, died a horrible death two weeks before launch, or got deprioritized and forgotten halfway through the process. It happens every day. So many things in life just go away. But the more reasons to adopt an attitude of optimism about the progress of life, right? Look, just because your project didn't go on to become part of one company's legacy, doesn't mean it can't become part of ours. It may not be listed on their portfolio, but you better believe it'll be listed on ours. Hey man, we all take our victories where we can get them. We all tell the stories from the battlefield regardless of how much blood was shed. We all remember the past the way we need to. And those stories we tell ourselves about the work we did and the impact it had, they can be framed in whatever way best serves our careers going forward. If your next project becomes one of those things that just goes away, consciously keep optimism as your chosen attitude and the lens through which you view the world. Nothing is ever wasted. Only transformed.

*Are you learning enough through this experience to consider it part of your education?*

September 25

## **Sometimes you just have to do things to do them.**

Rushkoff, the author and media critic, observed that the most dangerous aspect of the current cultural collapse were in, is that everything has to have an answer. Every effort has to have a chief utility value that's recognizable. But you can't reduce all human activity, all writing, all products and all culture to their practicality, he says. We can't solely reward the things we can measure. There's a faith in human beings that's more profound than that. His words remind me that sometimes, you just have to do things to do them. Particularly in a team environment. My work experience at startups taught me this. There's a certain point where you can't obsesses to much about whether or not your idea works, because the fact that it exists, that fact that the team made something together, is proof enough that it was a worthwhile endeavor. This mindset might be difficult for executives, investors and board members to wrap their hyper competitive and rational brains around. Will this idea become a fundamental utility for the entire industry? Does our work contain functionality within a user context? Is our innovation more than romantic vision but also practical? The short answer is, maybe. It's difficult to know for sure. Sometimes when practicality tells you to walk away, intuition urges you to continue. Heeding that voice is what allows us to unlock real impact. Look around, most of these companies are governed by mediocre ideas. Facile celebrations of commerce. Counterfeit experiences passed off as the real thing. Koontz described it best in one of his horror novels. We live in a troubled culture where cream often settled on the bottom and the palest milk rose to the top. The work we do may be practical, but that doesn't make it human. If it's airless, then it's not going to connect with people. It's just junk food. Crap that fills us up without the distracting burden of nourishment. Sometimes you just have to do things to do them.

***What if the process alone was enough?***



September 26

## **Somewhere there are shoes into which we can step.**

Holy scriptures say that our faith can move mountains. Even if it's the size of a mustard seed, we can say to the mountain, be thrown into the sea, and it will move. This is a powerful vision, but unfortunately, it's not especially practical. Because when we're in the weeds of project, for example, it's less about having faith and more about working incrementally. Doing small things in strategic places. That's the only way we make real progress without going mad. Goldberg's book on cracking open the writer's craft offers a different visual. One way to move the mountain is to eat it, to take bites out of it. Then at least the power of its structure gets inside us and we become more of a match for it. Doesn't that sound like a more accessible and less stressful approach than trying to move the whole goddamned thing solely by belief? My first day working as brand manager at a tech startup felt like trying to move a mountain. The marketing team was only ten people, but it felt like we carried the workload of a hundred. Thankfully, our founder reminded me on day one, look, everything here is just another process. And know that whatever presents itself to you as barrier is really just a necessary next step. That became my operating principle. Whether it was a product launch, marketing campaign, summer press push or video production, there was always a process in place to handle any situation. Somewhere there were shoes into which we could step. We could eat the mountain one bite at a time and come out profitable on the other side.

*Are you doing small things in strategic place?*

September 27

## **Standing on a compost pile of bad ideas.**

Creativity is not about having one big idea; it's about sustaining a steady stream of ideas. Nothing against one hit wonders, as those are some of my favorite songs, and most musicians would rather have a single song that everyone knows, rather than labor in obscurity forever. But for the majority of us, one idea does not a career make. Prolific creators need to have an entire mountain of gold to mine, not just one nugget to milk for a lifetime. Remember the pet rock from the seventies? That absurd toy was marketed like a live pet, in its custom cardboard box, complete with straw and breathing holes. Interesting story, the inventor of that fad was also an award winning copywriter, creative director and advertising agency owner. It's not like he just came up with this idea one day on a whim. Dahl, over the course of his career, probably had tens of thousands of ideas. Many of which were bad or average at best. But he kept producing, every single day, because he knew that the best way to see a good idea was to stand on a compost pile of bad ones. Prolificacy then, is the intentional goal; and innovation is incidental result. In my own experience as the guy who made a career from wearing nametag, that's only because I left behind me a wake of failed attempts at dozens of other quirky identity experiments. Ask anyone who knew me as a kid, or in my first few years of college pre nametag. I was always trying to find my thing. Perpetually trying some quirky trademark that made me memorable and expressed my identity. It was only a matter of time before something stuck. Quite literally. Invention, then, could be expressed as a formula of volume plus time. Building a product that sticks out by being a person who sticks around. King comes to mind, maybe the most successful fiction author in modern literature. He wrote stories and novels that sold millions of copies, some of which were adapted into movies that became instant classics. According a recent interview with the author, no one in their mind could argue that quantity guarantees quality, but to suggest that quantity never produces quality strikes him as snobbish, inane and demonstrably untrue. There's a man who didn't have one big idea, but a steady stream of them. King has spent his career toning his hot body of work, and the results have been amazing. Are you willing to sift through piles of bad ideas, just to find the one that sticks? Good. Just know that it might take longer than you think. And be ready to keep returning to that mine every day, hammering away into stubborn earth, until some gold shows its shy face. Remember, creativity is a long-term relationship, and sometimes you have to crawl through a river shit to come out clean on the other side.

*How many ideas did you come up with today?*

September 28

## **Starting work that you're proud to finish.**

You don't actually learn anything in college; it just shows you can complete something. That's far more significant and respected and attractive than the yawnable ability to solve equations and memorize dates and regurgitate an ocean of information about eighteenth century romantic poetry. After all, we live in a world that rewards finishing. Following through. Fully and faithfully realizing the execution of a difficult, expensive, exhausting and long-term endeavor, however imperfect that journey might have been. And yet, most people don't finish things. Their creative landscapes are littered with the false starts. Grandiose but abandoned projects that have since calcified into monuments of their momentary bursts of enthusiasm. Miller's advice to young novelists comes to mind. Rule number six was, cement a little every day, rather than add new fertilizers. Meaning, focus on finding the right foundation. Better to produce a small handful of solid ideas than to promise a hundred shaky ones. Also meaning, don't get mired in the manure. If most people calculated the number of hours they spent avoiding the work in favor of disappearing down the rabbit hole of their own mental horseshit, they wouldn't be able to look themselves in the mirror. There's actually an obscure term in the dictionary for this very archetype. A *finifugal* is a person who hates endings and tries to avoid or prolong the final moment of a story, relationship or some other journey. Not that everything in this life has to be finished. Some projects are meant to be abandoned. Some journeys shouldn't come to an end. But if we have any intention of changing the world and ratcheting up our species, we ought to err on the side of completion. We ought to show people, especially ourselves, that we can complete something.

***Are you abandoning projects that are too familiar in order to experience the initial high that came at the beginning?***

September 29

## **Stifling that precious commodity within us.**

Curiosity means granting our own minds full permission to wonder and wander. Not only about the world in which we work, but also about ourselves. The penchant to explore and investigate our bizarre and unique thoughts, the passion to treat our feelings with curiosity rather than with fear—these things matter. They are what separate us from average marketers who treat business as a plug and play, set it and forget it activity. And like most things in life, this curiosity simply requires intention and attention. Each of us can deepen our curiosity about what we least know about ourselves, not to mention the world of business. However, some people's natural instinct might not motivate them to discover what lies underneath and beyond the obvious of their own behavior. And that's okay too. Despite the argument about nature versus nurture, curiosity can be taught and developed. All humans are all born with an innate ability to be curious. Sometimes they just need inspiration. Nichols, the famed professor and cognitive scientist, conducted the premiere study on curiosity in the early sixties. His research offered useful insight about scenarios that inhibit and foster curiosity, namely culture. Just as association with a group methodically killing curiosity soon serves to stifle that precious commodity within us, becoming part of a group concerned with intellectual growth stimulates our personal curiosity and growth. If we surround ourselves with doers, that will give us incentive to exercise the creative abilities that grow out of intellectual curiosity. We all have the opportunity to find and benefit from an environment that stimulates our curiosity if we only seek it. Does that describe the culture of your company? Are you surrounded by doers? It rings true at our company. When we hire new team members, we're specifically filtering for people who not only figure things out, but also actually enjoy the process of figuring things out. Especially about their own thinking. Courtney, one of our senior marketing specialists, is constantly asking herself questions about her own thinking. The other day she was showing me how she approaches a volatile paid campaign performance. It's a fascinating process. First, she will note the warning signs. Next, she will look at individual metrics to identify where the problem is coming from. Then she will piece the story together and test changes until the client hit their goals. Courtney also built a useful internal guide for everyone else the team. Now everyone can use their curiosity to mitigate similar scenarios with their own clients. Linklater, my favorite filmmaker, once wrote that a not very curious population is the ideal, because it's the least threatening. Every day, we have to fight against that pressure. Inside each of us is a crazy yearning to embrace incredibilities and walk with wonder, and if we want to make a difference inside our organizations, we must set free our innate capacity for curiosity, wonder and experimentalism.

***Have you given way to a bland numbness as the spark of curiosity fades from your dulled eyes?***

September 30

## **Storytelling isn't everything; it's the only thing.**

Here's a question that annoys me. Why can't you just give me a straight answer? People have said this to me a lot over the years. As if it's my job to satisfy their need for certainty so they can check their little plot box. But the reality is, my brain is anything but straight. It's not a linear system; it's an associative one. What happens inside my head goes in cycles and convergences and explosions, and that means very few things will come out in a clean, straight, tidy fashion. Baby I was born this way. And yes, this behavior is understandably frustrating to someone who thinks in a more straightforward manner, but everyone's mind works differently. We have to learn to live with that if we're going to make it out of here alive. My cousin is similar to me in that vein. He's a fashion designer who specialized in creating and manufacturing clothes that are stylish and sustainably sourced. If you ask him where the title of his new collection comes from, he'll tell you a three minute story that takes you on a beautiful journey of creative inspiration that doesn't quite make sense or answer your question, but you don't really care because he's so goddamn passionate about it. Like watching an art movie that kickstarts your imagination through a glimpse of the free associative world of ideas instead of plot. It's definitely not a straight answer. Plot seems to be the agreed upon structure we'd prefer to hang moments on, but then again, our lives don't have plots. There are turns in the narrative, but what we remember are moments. That's what you have to understand about the creative brain. Storytelling isn't everything; it's the only thing. Narrative is our basic tool for making sense of the world, the currency of human contact, the fundamental instrument of thought and the foundation that psychologically sustains us. Strangely, though, in the past few years, scientists keep reporting that human attention span has declined to a mere six seconds. Really? Tell that to the millions of viewers who watch thirteen hours of a television series in a single day. Tell that to the legions of fans who buy eight-hour audiobooks by their favorite comedians. Time is an irrelevant construct. It's totally subjective. Einstein even said that time dilates based on what we're doing and our intention while doing it. This is good for the artist. Because when we tell stories, we can focus less on how much time we have, and more on in taking people on a tour of our heads and hearts. We can share crumb by crumb and clue by clue of the universal human experiences and great sweeps of change that convinced us to believe what we believe, so that by the time we get to the end of the story, the story that we paid for and earned the right to tell, the audience is already nodding and yessing and laughing so much, they're intellectually and emotional satisfied and can't imagine another final action beyond where we've taken them. Narrative beats brevity. People would rather hear a strong story than a straight answer.

***Do you want to give people an answer that checks their box, or engage them with a narrative that wins them over?***

**OCTOBER**

October 1

## **Suffering stems from being mistaken about reality.**

I've lost count of the number of times I've tried, very hard, to talk myself into wanting something that I knew, deep down, wasn't for me. From technology to relationships to creative projects to joining organizations, there's this mechanism in my ego that always tricks me into believing that social conventions are eternal conditions. But they're not. There's always a choice to be made. We can always choose personal integrity over societally approved successes. And so, if we are to remain faithful to our personal vision of reality, we must do the work of figuring out where we stand and why. And it's not an easy process. One practice I find helpful is writing affirmations. Mantras that empower me to create a new model of reality. Here's a collection of ideas that I hope inspire you to do the same: I will advocate for the person I truly am, not acquiesce to the one I think I'm supposed to be. Even if that means rejecting the socially favored narrative at the moment. I will seek out ways to be whole on my own terms, instead of indulging some inherited fantasy that has nothing to do with me. Even if that means facing the judgment, scorn and pity of mainstream society. I will make deeply considered choices about what life suits me, rather than giving my life over to something other people want me to want. Even if that means rejecting attitudes and courses of action that most of the world treats as gospel. I will pay attention to what I really feel, as opposed to what I am supposed to feel or wished I felt. Even if that means being unpopular with those around me. I will find my way back to my gut instincts, instead of mindlessly consuming what society demands I should have an appetite for. Even if that means running counter to the currents of the world. All suffering stems from being mistaken about our reality.

*What mantras help inspire you to remain faithful to your vision?*

October 2

## **Surrender to the heavenly pull.**

Ebert once reviewed a film with the following statement. This movie clearly does not give one fiftieth of a damn what anyone thinks of its methods. It knows what it is and what it wants to do and commits to its singular vision from start to finish. It's a movie that only one man could have directed with such unabashed imagination, his best work in at least ten years, and a culmination of tendencies we've seen percolating in his work since his debut as a filmmaker. There isn't a creator alive who wouldn't want to have their work thought about in that kind of way. Because deep down, most artists believe that the commitment to their work supersedes the content of it. That the sovereignty they have over their process is more compelling than what it ultimately produces. But sadly, we don't live in a world that puts value on that kind of thing. People want whatever product will yield the most dramatic and immediate results. And if they don't get that from you, they will try to make you feel ashamed and embarrassed and inadequate about this journey that you have given your life to. How dare anybody criticize a creative that's ours, that belongs to us? Now, this doesn't make those people fools and haters and shills. They only believe what they believe because they have never had a chance not to believe it. And that's not their fault. We can't allow those voices to bulldoze us, nor to spend too much energy building a fortress against them. Our job is to make things. To hold both our creative vision and our current reality in our minds, and to surrender to that heavenly pull which comes from feeling the true distance between the two. When it comes to our art, it's not unreasonable to want everything our way and on our own terms. In this chaotic and incomprehensible world, that might be one of the few freedoms that we have as human beings that cannot be taken away from us. Welles once said that his last film was the one project where he had total control. Where the studio couldn't touch a frame. And that film was ultimately considered by many critics, colleagues and fans to be the greatest movie ever made. Proving, that creative visions are worth fighting for. No need to spend our lives making someone else's dreams.

***How are you expanding your own capacity to hold and seek a creative vision?***



October 3

## **Take a step in the direction of your wholeness.**

You're more prepared than you think. The groundwork has already been laid in the inner space of your mind. It's all muscle memory now. And so, let go of all your crutches and props and cheat sheets. They won't help you. Instead, trust that you've already done the work. Trust that you can be moved by whatever is inside of you. Trust that who you are is enough to get the job done. And just start from whatever energy is there. Yoda gave this same advice to his young apprentice before he ventured into the cave: Your weapons, you will not need them. Everything a Jedi needs to survive is already inside of him. Ability. Intelligence. Strength. Belief. Focus. Hope. Who needs a light saber when you have weapons like that? Jazz musicians feel this every night when they take the stage. Because they know the songs will be utterly chaotic and unpredictable. Just like life. And so, their goal isn't to spend two hours rehearsing every note in the green room, but to integrate every ripple of their life into the creative moment. Constantly and subtly building on who they already are and what they already do. If you find yourself confronted with tasks that are seemingly outside your skill set, tell yourself that you trust your resources to achieve your goals. That you are equal to this challenge. That your accumulated knowledge and experiences will be there to support you. And that if panic should start to grow, a surge of genius will bubble up as if from an underground spring.

*How do your performance shift when you're willing to being nothing less than completed integrated?*

October 4

## **Take it one whatever at a time.**

Williamson's book on the return to love explains that the real transformation of the world comes not from what we're doing, but from the consciousness with which we're doing it. As an example, here are two descriptions of my morning routine in two distinct phases of my life. The workaholic version of me woke up at dawn in order to achieve, get things done, medicate my loneliness with adrenaline, get a leg up on the competition, pack as many hours into the work day as possible, and prove my worth to the world before they discover that I have no idea what the hell I'm doing. And during that part of my life, the motivation came from a dysfunctional place of insecurity, compulsion and isolation. The sober version of me now wakes up at dawn in order to meditate, process my feelings, metabolize my experiences, nourish and nurture my body and mind, feel integrated in my community and equip myself to bring quality energy to my relationships. During this part of my life, my motivation comes from a healthy place of contentment, lucidity and connection. See the difference? The consciousness with which I approach my morning routine has transformed, although many of the activities are similar. And it was iterative process, too. This isn't the kind of thing that just snaps into place overnight. But what happens is, you start making these small changes. Mental, behavioral, spiritual and otherwise. One at a time. For years. Until one day, you look back and realize that you're a different person. More evolved and whole. Doing the things you do from a place of love and care for self and other. What shift in consciousness do you need to make in order to transform yourself? Perhaps there is a certain routine that historically felt heroic in your past, but now is preventing your from working effectively. You don't have to excise that routine from your life, but you might think about how to approach it in a way that's healthier and more sustainable. You could recite a mantra before or after doing your routine, or reframe and redefine your purpose for doing it. Any of these exercises will help you shift your posture regarding the process of change, which will impact the actual changes you themselves. Some people might say, take it one day at a time, but you can think of it as, take it one whatever at a time.

*What could you do to assure the soil of your consciousness will never be the same?*

October 5

## **Take your secret special separateness and run into the corner.**

As creative people, as thinkers and observers and reflectors and renderers of the world, it's tempting to take an antisocial vantage point outside of society. Because doing so makes us feel heroic. And special. Like we're somehow being responsible to our artistic gifts by separating ourselves from the herd. But there's a very real difference between observing life, and being observant in a way that always keeps us just outside of living life. There's a very fine line between healthy individuating, and becoming trapped in our own mythological status as outsiders. Take it from someone who always felt too eccentric and iconoclastic to be accepted, so he rejected and removed himself before anyone else got a chance to. Take it from someone who so feared becoming an outcast from the herd, that he cut the threads of connection before any real intimacy could be achieved. Take it from someone who prided himself on created art that guaranteed he would remain obscure, but then resented the world for not knowing who he was. It was a nauseating experience. Both for the artist and the people around him. Having to breathe the air of existential estrangement, ordained separateness, social deviance and extreme oppositionalism, blech. Humans weren't meant to live that way. We're social animals, not islands. We need connection, not eight billion sovereign nations. We need a more evolved and less adolescent approach to walking in this world. Maisel's manifesto on the mental health revolution says it perfectly. Brooding about your circumstances, stewing with your feelings, and standing alone and isolated, will only worsen your situation. You may have many powerful reasons for isolating. Feeling embarrassed, too angry to reach out, doubtful that anyone will understand you or care about you, scared that you'll lose control and freedom if you share your truth with another person, and more. But still, isolating isn't the answer. Do you see how you make yourself an outsider? Good. That's the first step. And each step we take out of isolation, out of our old antisocial behaviors, is a major mental health achievement. Next time you're tempted to take your secret special separateness and run into the corner to play by yourself, try extending your arm instead.

***How can you change your relationship to the world so you feel less estranged from it?***

October 6

## **Reducing the perception of creative fear.**

Threat level is a term commonly used in the field of counterterrorism. Governments will have a color-coded advisory scale, such as red for severe, orange for high, yellow for elevated, and brown for shit your pants. Most of these systems have been criticized as being vague and ineffective. Some politicians and pundits claim they're better at causing people to be scared than telling people how to proceed. And from a cultural scale, they're probably right. But from a personal creativity management standpoint, the concept of threat level is actually quite useful. Because much of our work in bringing our ideas to form is reducing the perception of fear. It's less about competence and more about confidence. As my yoga teacher used to say, you don't always need to get better, just less threatened. Here are a few tools that can be helpful in reducing the threat level of your work. The first one is called enlisting, which is when you transfer the architecture behind your core talent to an overwhelming task. It's especially useful for tasks or projects when you're doing things that don't come naturally to you. Instead of allowing accepting that you're in over your head, you ask yourself, what part of me could be enlisted to make the unnatural natural? That's been a lifesaver for me on my occasions. I've been able to use my gift of writing to lower the threat level of even the most intimidating tasks. A similar tool is called gravitational order, in which you use motion to create equilibrium so your creative work finds its place in the universe. Instead of worrying yourself sick about getting everything right, you simply get them moving in the right direction. Even if you're not ready enough, smart enough, experienced enough, whatever enough, you take action on your creative work for five minutes. That's it. A few strokes here, a couple of notes there, a line or two of code here, and you'll see that your creations always tend to their equilibrium. By virtue of motion, the threat level will go from red to yellow to green right before your eyes. Both of these tools share a powerful spiritual commonality. Start small and the path will illuminate itself. Take it from someone who has worked many jobs in which he was completely out of his depth and managed to execute anyway. Regardless of your perception of fear around the work, once you start taking action with whatever energy is in you, leverage that tight feedback loop that rewards speed and initiative, you will be able to move your creative work forward. Even if the threat level is brown, nothing will be able to terrorize you out of making progress.

***How will you recognize and remove the resistance that inhibits your creative process?***

October 7

## **Taking notes with your whole person.**

Sartre, in an inspiring letter he wrote to his girlfriend, summarized his writing process most eloquently. Focus on an image until you feel a swelling, like a bubble, also a sort of direction indicated to you. This is your idea. Afterwards, you can clarify it and write it down. This approach to writing resonates with me on a deep level. Because it's proof that creativity is nothing more than active listening. Listening to what the world is telling you, listening to your body as those messages land, and listening to your heart as you figure out what wants to be created in response. It's one of the reasons taking notes is such a physical, emotional, social and spiritual experience for me. The goal is not to write down every word. The goal is to let people's words wash over me until some sentence, idea, word or phrase triggers a feeling in my body. Could be a pang in my gut, that twinge in my solar plexus, blood rushing to my crotch, welling of tears in my eyes, or a full body reaction like laughter or shock. Whatever happens, I try to stay with the sensation level of my experience. The literal, simple biological feeling in response to the other. Then, with compassion to that feeling, write down the source material that activated it. Now, sometimes the emotions behind the words won't even be conscious to me yet. It may take minutes, hours, months or years until what wants to be written announces itself. On the other hand, sometimes my body speaks to my brain instantaneously. This active listening process makes the word flesh as other ideas collect around it. And before I know it, I'm borrowing energy from the ideas themselves. I can watch this creation start to take shape and acquire real structure and meaning and weight. As you can see, this notetaking process is more than simple dictation or documentation. It's a holistic, intersubjective process that uses my physical, emotional, social and spiritual resources to uncover insight. As a younger man, my notetaking process was much less connected with self and other. Writing was either a distraction during the conversation that took me out of the present moment, or performance that objectified the other person, making them feel like I was just using them for content. Today, I like to think it's much more compassionate, trusting, loving and generous.

*How do you take notes with your whole person?*

October 8

## **Tapping into your inspiration reserves.**

Anybody can meditate in the mountains. Reaching enlightenment while the world around you is serene and inspiring and clean isn't much of a challenge. The real test of inner peace is whether you can transform yourself into a force of calm in a time of turmoil. Whether you can attain mental stillness and physical relaxation in the face of impending chaos or, worse yet, overwhelming monotony. I once spent two weeks sitting on jury duty. The courtroom was cold, ugly and harsh; and the deliberation room was stuffy, cramped and boring. Not exactly an inspiring environment to stimulate my creative juices. But I didn't let that stop me from doing my work. After all, meaning is made, not found. And it's our responsibility to take control of our lives and make the most out of our environment, instead of allowing circumstances to dictate our happiness. And so, I brought a briefcase full of work to do, books to read, projects to start, upbeat music to listen to and other tools to maximize an otherwise dreary experience. During our many recesses, I setup my portable creative environment and found a way to thrive while the rest of the jurors whined and fumed and napped and bemoaned their fate and allowed the situation to gnaw away at the foundation of their serenity. And during those two weeks, my days were filled with joy and meaning and energy and productivity. I even learned a thing or two about the judicial system. But only because I was intentional. Only because I tapped into my reserves to create inspiration where none existed. It's like my yoga instructor always says during class. This is just practice. The real work is taking this yoga out into the world. It's one thing to relax in a studio, it's another thing to relax in the middle of rush hour traffic. And so, whether you're trying to meditate, or whether you're just trying to create, don't expect the environment to do the work for you.

***How quickly can you tap into your reserves when meaninglessness comes crashing in?***

October 9

## **The best way to eliminate the competition is not to have any.**

Kohn writes in his compelling book that competition is the most pervasive occasion for anxiety in our culture. It need never enter the picture, he says, in order for skills to be mastered and displayed, and for goals to be set and met. This view is difficult for most of us to wrap our heads around. After all, competition is in our biology. Apparently, it's an essential feature of the nature of being human. Economists, mathematicians and especially sports drinks manufacturers have been preaching this for years. Competing is precisely what allows each of us to bring out the best in each other. Which is fine. No arguments there. The danger, though, is when we start to preoccupy ourselves with the drama of winning and losing. When we start deriving much of our psychic satisfactions from beating others. We may think we are being heroic, but at the end of the day, there is nothing brave about competing to the point of sabotage, obsession, injury, exhaustion, distraction, bankruptcy or whatever other collateral damage may occur. Consider it from the entrepreneurial angle. The moment we make anything, we compete with everything. Which means worrying about it accomplishes nothing. And so, why spend a lot of time looking over our shoulder? Who cares what the competition is doing? Let's focus on actually innovating, instead of building a time machine. Let's focus on blazing the path ahead, not the critters nipping at our heels. Success isn't about winning anyway. It's about the privilege of staying in the game and doing more work. Keep adding energy to the system, keep moving the story forward.

*Are you poisoning your own well by limiting your vision to serve petty competitiveness?*

October 10

## **The force that allowed us to encircle the world.**

It's easier to give feedback on something that exists. That's why speed trumps accuracy. Instead of killing ourselves trying to knock it out of the park on the first try, we prototype the thing. Instead of doing too much work inside our heads, we can just get some eyes on the thing. We create a frame a reference, fail quickly, quietly and cheaply, iterate until it's good enough, and ship the sonavabitch out the door. Compare that approach to perfectionists and procrastinators and pleasers, these human tortoises who take six weeks to even consider thinking about the possibly of becoming interested in learning about how to maybe take a crack at some new fart of idea. Enough deliberation. Stop planning. We need momentum. We need somebody to start making something, anything, right now. And it might now work. But even if we're headed twelve knots in the wrong direction, at least the boat is sailing. And it's small enough to change course if needed. During my job interview for the content director role at a tech startup, the founder asked me what my task list would be for the first week. My answer was two words. Connect and create. In that order, too. Introduce myself to everyone, ask questions to anyone, read everything, and then start writing. Which is exactly what happened. And by the second week, the first piece we published shot to the top of our list of web traffic referral sources. Was it because it was the best thing ever written? Not at all. It's because even the tiniest movement can break the spell of inertia. Restlessness is the most underrated and overlooked skill that creates value in a growing organization. Bonhoeffer, the legendary pastor, theologian and spy, wrote a beautiful passage about this in one of his sermons. Restlessness is the characteristic feature distinguishing human beings from animals. It is the power that creates history and culture. It is the root of every spirit that elevates itself to morality, the most profound meaning blood-like power in the direction of the eternal. In a business world where ideas are free and execution is priceless, perhaps failing to plan is not planning to fail at all.

*Are you getting restless right on schedule?*



October 11

## **The forcing function of reality builds momentum.**

Everything has two births. First as an idea, and then as the real and tangible output of that idea in the world. The gap between those two events is where creators get tripped up. With each step they take closer to the launch date, the stronger the resistance grows. Reminds me of a friend who has been working on a documentary for the past year. His new series sounds exciting and valuable and absolutely deserves to exist in the world. Trouble is, his creative partner is an insufferable perfectionist. Which means fear rules the day. Fear of failure, fear of being judged, fear of being seen for who they really are, it's all damming up the executional flow. In fact, we talk about his project fairly regularly, and it feels like the gap between birth number one and birth number widens with each passing month. It makes me sad and angry, but unfortunately, it's not my job to be his project manager. All you can really do is love people as they sort things out. Fried, the creator of the world's most successful project management platform, reminds us that until we ship it's all opinions, hypotheses and hunches. You can only iterate on something after it's been shipped. Prior to release, you're just making the thing. Even if you change it, you're still just making it. Iterating is when you change or improve after it's out. If you want to iterate, you must first ship. This is a crucial requirement for innovation. Each creator needs the forcing function of reality to build momentum. They need that nice punch in the face that can only come from bravely shipping something out into the world. Otherwise they're just creating in a circle. Bouncing their ideas off a thin wall. Or as my favorite comedian once said, jacking off into a ceiling fan. Look, iteration is refinement, but you absolutely need a place to refine from. If you truly believe you can improve people's lives and delight them along the way, then your primary goal should be getting your product into the hands of a customer as quickly as you can. The first birth is only half the battle.

***Would you rather appear good, or know that you're good?***

October 12

## **The greatest path to grow is not going away.**

Carlin used to do a brilliant comedy routine about hair. He would complain about guys who shaved their heads completely bald. They were so ashamed that they lost eleven hairs that they tried to transform their look into some kind of masculine statement. George said: Shaving your head is ugly and repulsive and disgusting. If you really want to have no hair, do what I did. Wait a while. In the meantime, there's no excuse for running around looking like a freshly circumcised dick. It's a perfect metaphor for a much larger human problem, which is our inability to delay gratification. Because we have this insatiable need to get better and stronger and smarter and more mature, right now. Time's a wasting. Better employ every new life hack and force multiplier available so we can speed up the process of growth. Sorry, but not everything can be rushed. As the saying goes, nine women can't have a baby in a month. Sometimes the way to improve our situation is to just wait it out. There's a writer that I've been mentoring for several years that loves to ask me about which practices and tricks and tools have made me a better writer. And although there are usually recommendations that I can offer, the best suggestion is to echo the words of my comedian hero. Wait a while. Keep showing up every day, trust the creative process to do its thing according to its own clock, and eventually you'll wake up and realize that you're better than you used to be. It's not a very satisfying answer, but there are no shortcuts to meaningful change. The greatest path to grow is not going away. Lincoln was right when he said time is a great thickener of things. If you want to lose your hair, don't shave your head. Wait a while.

***Do you still get outraged when you can't impose your own time frame on growth?***

October 13

## **The heights toward which my ambition was driving me.**

Emerson famously said that nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm. Very true. And we also have to be careful not to become a victim of our own elation. Because everybody wants to come out of the gate with guns blazing. And the easiest thing to do is to enthusiastically plunge into a new project, only to realize that our ambition and intensity and ability aren't sustainable over the long haul. New students at our studio are often told, don't go for broke in the first ten seconds of the posture. You will literally burn out. One minute is longer than you think. That's the smart approach for doing almost anything. Relaxing into it. Pacing ourselves. Keeping our breathing consistent. And trusting the process to treat us well. Without that mentality, we make ourselves vulnerable to exhaustion, frustration, even injury. Especially if we're not honest with ourselves. That's a problem I used to have with my creative projects as well. I would become hyper enthusiastic about launching something, to the point that I would bite off more than I could chew. And the momentum would last for a few weeks. But it wouldn't sustain. After a while, I would just stop caring. And the fact that I wasn't feeling love for the project would become a burden that I carried in silence. No wonder I had stomach cramps all the time. Look, there's a time and place to get carried away by our own enthusiasm. We should always reserve that right. But life is a long arc game. And if we're haphazard with our energy in the beginning, our aspirations will soon outpace our abilities.

*How effective can you be in inspiring others if you're lying on your back in your hospital bed with a stress related illness?*

October 14

## **The intention with which you play has an effect on the audience.**

The word busker means itinerant entertainer. It's a more sophisticated way of saying street performer. But the best part about that term is, it comes from the root word which means, to seek. That definition really hits home for me. Because as a busker myself, the goal isn't to make money, although that happens. The goal isn't to get famous, although park goers will recognize me from time to time as the guy who sings in the tunnel. What I'm seeking there is joy, connection and service. In that order. This is my artistic approach as a songwriter in public. Step one, play my music as loudly and lovingly as possible. Sing like something's escaping. Play like your life depends on it. That yields joy for me. Step two, use music as a feeling bond between others and myself. Share the joy with them. Participate in a public exchange of energies that allows all people to feel held and nurtured by the presence of life. And step three, frame the entire experience as my contribution of service that makes a small, but real difference in the world. The other day a father of two and his wife hung out and listened to a few of my songs, singing and dancing the whole time. They said it was the highlight of their day. Which made that moment the highlight of my day. The funny thing is, I screwed up multiple times while playing those songs. But it didn't seem to matter to the audience. The sheer enjoyment I exuded overshadowed my shortcomings. Folds, the piano man of my generation, writes in his music memoir that an audience's time, presence, and attention are great gifts to a performer, and you should never sleepwalk your way through playing music, skipping across each note as if each one was a step closer to getting the fuck out of there. It is far braver to actually care, to savor each phrase, to give something of yourself, no matter what kind of music it is. The intention with which you play each note has an effect on the people listening. Whether you're a busker or not, seek meaning beyond the immediate transaction. Sing like something's escaping. Feel the relief of letting your guard down and expressing your love fully. Act from a motivation of contribution of service. And you will elevate your ability to bring joy yourself and others.

*How does what you seek impact whom you change?*

October 15

## **The joy that accompanies the experience.**

My mentor has this theory that some people are only chewing on one side of their mouths. They're getting much less than they could from life because they are experiencing it through a very small window of their minds or souls. Bill worries, ultimately, that too many people's gifts and talents go undeveloped, and much of their potential is unused. Do you have this fear? That you're living in a restricted circle of possibility? You're not alone. It's the fundamental human struggle. In fact, the challenge of how to fulfill our potential has been the central question of the personal development movement, having its origins in the late eighteen hundreds, and later gained mainstream adoption in the early sixties. But for over a century now, everyone from doctors to musicians to therapists to athletes to clergy have been trying to figure out why human potential always seems to be greater than its realized actuality. There is no right answer, but several ideas come to mind. Maybe it's a focus thing. People simply don't put a priority on actualizing their potential. Their way of life is exhausting and they don't have any energy left to devote to it. Spending minutes here and there doing what they feel they were put on this earth to do doesn't cut it. Maybe it's an accessibility thing. The idea of potential is simply too grandiose and overwhelming, so people can't nail the application of it to everyday matters. They don't know how to convert their potential into energy and genuine accomplishments. Maybe it's a fear thing. People are perfectionists whose high standards are unreachable, so they're afraid that anything that isn't amazing will feel like a waste. And so, why even bother starting in the first place? Maybe it's an ego thing. People doubt that even if they do manifest their potential, nothing meaningful will actually come from unleashing it. The process isn't fulfilling enough on its own, so they need to see external results in order to justify the effort. Because make your dreams a reality if there's nobody watching? Maybe it's a guilt thing. Burdened by inner pressure from a chorus of authoritarian and shaming voices, the knowledge that they have not sufficiently manifested their potential yet creates negative momentum. And after a while, the increasing weight of all that negativity is too heavy to overcome. All of these examples are how people are chewing on one side of their mouths. Which ones resonate most with you? Redford has an inspiring speech in one of his movies about the problem of potential. He asks his student the question, why is it better to try and fail than fail to try, if you end up in the same place? To which he answers, because at least you did something. And as you get older, promise and potential are very fickle. They just might not be there anymore. Does that mean it's too late? Not necessarily. Although it's certainly easier when you're young and hungry and the world is still in front of you. But the idea of manifesting your potential in everything you do doesn't have to be as overwhelming as you think. You can start small, for example articulating a statement about realizing your potential, sharing it with people you love, and reciting aloud it each day. That affirmation doesn't substitute for doing the work, but it's a step in the right direction.

*Why are you disconnected from the joy that accompanies the experience of actualizing your potentialities?*

October 16

## **Flying by the seat of your pants shouldn't be your primary ideation strategy.**

Few people would disagree that meetings are the most universally despised aspect of business life. Despite people's intention of improving efficiency and productivity, meetings typically have the opposite effect. They're mostly just theaters for people feel good about themselves and make their bosses happy. Harvard actually conducted a survey of senior managers in a range of industries a few years ago, and more than sixty percent of the participants agreed that meetings keep them from completing their work, come at the expense of deep thinking and forego opportunities to bring teams closer together. My response to all of this anti meeting rhetoric is, okay, fine. Meetings are completely wasteful and absurd. But they're not going away anytime soon. And so, let's not burn any more calories demonizing meetings, creating any unnecessary psychological fuel around something we don't even want. Talk about inefficient. Instead, let's accept the fact that meetings are a part of doing business, and do whatever we can to give our teams and ourselves the greatest leverage during that time. That way we can keep innovation high on the agenda. In fact, much of my research on personal creativity development shows that preparing for meetings is the source of people's fears, not the meeting themselves. Perhaps what they need are better tools to help set themselves up for success once the team is gathered. Here are few to try. Do you have a big meeting or presentation coming up, and you really want to knock it out of the park? Try something called over preparation. Create twenty percent more content than necessary so it's easier to adjust on the fly. In my career as a public speaker, this tool gave me a huge advantage every time I stepped onto the stage. Over preparation made me feel safe, confident and relaxed in my performance. And it made it easy to go on improvisational tangents to serve the needs of the audience in the moment. Other team members in the meeting may not notice that you're over prepared, and you may not even get a chance to fire all of your creative weapons. But one thing's for sure; your energy will be calmer and more confident. You may not be able to influence the outcome, but you can certainly elevate the experience. Here's one more tool. Say your team has a brainstorming session coming up, and you want to be a key contributor to the idea bank. Try walking into that conference room with an innovation frame. This tool is a system for pursuing invention systematically rather than sporadically. My old founder at our ad agency taught us how to do this. Each copywriter had to present their ideas for campaigns in the structure of five questions. What is the problem? What's the insight? What is the innovative idea? How does it work? What is it called? That's an innovation frame. You avoid the stress of starting from scratch, make it easy to arrange a large amount of information quickly, and allow your team to brainstorm the ideas in an organized way. Some of the team found it to be too structured, but personally, this frame was game changer for my ability to consistently generate innovative ideas. Because in my experience, flying by the seat of your pants can be fun and useful, but it shouldn't be your primary ideation strategy. Remember, meetings might suck, but they're not going away. Spending two hours in a

conference room thinking up a hashtag absolutely nobody on the planet will ever use is an absurd waste of time. But as long as you're there, you may as well contribute.

***What do you bring into the room intellectually, energetically and interpersonally that helps your team innovate?***

October 17

## **The kind of relationship we have with milestones.**

Thor, the god of thunder, was given a memorable piece of advice from his mother. Everyone fails at who they're supposed to be. But the measure of a person, a hero, is how they succeed at being who they are. Her words suggest a question that most of us have probably never asked. What kind of relationship do we have with milestones? That's a big word in our culture. We're constantly searching for all these external markers to reassure us that the proper path is being followed. Roman road builders originated the term a few thousand years ago. They used actual stones to record the name of the reigning emperor and demarcate the distance traveled. Today, milestones are still installed on our highways as metal markers, although for the most part, the term is used symbolically. On one hand, this norm of progress serves a positive function. Milestones help people navigate this absurd, complicated and agonizing world. In fact, some people are highly motivated by milestones. Those markers inspire them to achieve great things, and that's great. The danger is when we start expressing real and persistent distress over not being where we think we are supposed to be. The danger is when we grow constantly neurotic about the remaining distance to our destination. Because both of those anxious urges take us out of the present moment and devastate our opportunity for joy. We miss tons of beautiful experiences, simply because they aren't labeled as milestones. The channel is blocked. The nerves tighten with every tick of the clock. Are your values and identity inextricably tied to the sociocultural zeitgeist, rather than being rooted in who you really are? If so, find out a way to protect the piece of your identity that makes you go for what you want with total confidence. See if you can reframe your absolutist shoulds into simple preferences. Because there is no rush. It's not a race. And nobody is counting. Give yourself permission to disregard the clock and free yourself from the constraints of inauthentic and irrational milestone deadlines. You won't be able to wield the power of thunder, but at least you'll enjoy the rain.

***If you didn't have to worry about who you're supposed to be, how might you succeed at who you are?***



October 18

## **The marketplace demands it, and brands expect it.**

Sometimes clients make requests that don't make sense: Can you make our company branding really modern, but with a retro flair? Can you just write some junky code and get it done so we can go live tomorrow? Just breathe. Try not to punch your screen. It's not the client's fault, especially if they don't have expertise in your specialty area. Odds are, their company is just stuck in the past with an outdated way of thinking that has made them successful thus far. This is a perfect opportunity for you to bring disruptive thinking to your clients. We live in a business landscape where a new generation of companies is rapidly taking share from legacy brands, and brands have no choice but to think differently than the old guard. Otherwise they risk becoming irrelevant. Clayton, the professor who originally defined disruption in his pioneering research, described disruption as a process by which a product or service takes root initially in simple applications at the bottom of a market, and then relentlessly moves up market, eventually displacing established competitors. Look around. Many of the disruptors aren't inventing anything; they are just really good at performance marketing, retail, e-commerce, customer experience, and digital. They focused on one existing product or category, tested new approaches, made a huge difference at the bottom of a market, and then relentlessly moved up. Who says you actually have to invent anything to win? When you sit down with your clients, take ownership to drive disruption. Focusing on one product or category and rethinking the experience. Lead your clients where you think they should go, and get them there. Even if they're nervous along the way, they'll thank you when they eventually look at their revenue growth. Einstein famously said that the mind that opens to a new idea never returns to its original size. Help your clients get stretching. However, there is a misconception. Disruption isn't the veneer you layer on top of your work; disruption is the work. In your early conversations with potential clients, always ask why, rather than why not. Legacy companies tend to get mired in the details of trying new things, whereas disruptive companies try new tactics, take action on customer centric data, and if possible, spin off into new iterations. They're curious enough to always be improving. If you can begin training clients to think this way from your very first project meeting, innovation will always stay high on the agenda. Plus, pitching new ideas will be much less of an uphill battle in the future. And as you evolve your client relationships, you'll want to push your clients to be more and more disruptive over time. But you have to lead them. If they politely say no thanks to your design experiments or out of the box ideas, you have to push back. It may feel like a struggle, but being ready to defend your ideas will often persuade clients to take that risk. Don't worry, it's worth it in the end to push clients to do things differently. Even if your new ideas aren't embraced, or are embraced but perform average or poorly, at least you'll have demonstrated a track record of innovation leadership. That makes clients want to stay with you for the long haul. Sound like hard work? You're right. But there has never been a better time to bring disruptive thinking to your clients. The marketplace demands it, and more and

more brands are expecting it. But clients are scared to try innovative approaches, and they're waiting for you to lead them.

*How are you teaching your clients to disrupt themselves?*

October 19

## **The most natural way for me to engage with the world.**

When in doubt, create. These four words are not only the title of my book on being prolific, but they're also the daily mantra that equips me to live a fulfilling life. It's one of the few practices that has universal functionality. Whatever problem shows up, odds are, there is a way for me to create my way out of it. Or at the very least, create my way through it. That's how my brain is wired. Making things has always been the most natural way for me to engage with the world. Creating is the support system for my life. It's my primary way for weaving my picture of the world and speaking to myself about what I need. When in doubt, create. Maslow, on the other hand, opposed single mindedness. He famously said that if all we have is a hammer, then everything looks like a nail. His philosophy is known as the law of the instrument, which is a form of confirmation bias. Seeing what we want to see. Only searching for things that confirm our preexisting beliefs. But what the doctor failed to observe was, if we know how to use our hammer in fifty different ways to solve a thousand different problems, then why waste our time become a master at the chainsaw? There is no rule that says we have to be well rounded. Woody writes about this in the closing monologue of his black comedy film. Whatever love you can get and give, whatever happiness you can filch or provide, every temporary measure of grace, whatever works. Listen, we all do what we have to do to survive the impenetrable layer of black, icy futility that covers our lives. Hammers, nails, who the hell cares what the tool is called? The more we hammer, the more we will understand what hammering means for us, and the faster we can show ourselves the way out.

***What unique method of hammering can you bring to the nail of your problems?***

October 20

## **The new story we take our identity from.**

I recently had a heart-to-heart conversation with a colleague of mine, whose business volume isn't nearly at the level as he wants it to be. You could hear the fear in his voice. He even admitted, without the business, he didn't know what he would do with himself. Who can't relate to that struggle? It's a scary and vulnerable place to be. I've been there myself a few times myself. And what's interesting is, the longer I stay in the game, and the more laps around the merry go round I make, the less pressure I feel to put all my creative eggs in one basket. And not because I lack commitment or don't believe in my own abilities as an artist. But because I'm realistic about the future. I'm mature enough to accept that it could all be gone tomorrow. And if that's the case, so be it. I'm a smart and talented guy. I'll find something else. Everything will be fine. Benedict, the founder of western monasticism, the patron saint of balance, moderation and reasonableness, famously used a mantra that I've always appreciated: Keep death daily before your eyes. Meaning, never cling to anything too tightly. Don't over identify. Learn to experience life with a reverence and awareness that it could all be whisked away on a moment's notice. It's the kind of philosophy more businesspeople should embrace. Because as much as we love the work, as passionate as we are about what we're building, and as committed we are to doing whatever it takes to keep the dream alive, the healthiest attitude we could have is the willingness to walk away. And not in that alpha male, power negotiation, art of seduction, convey to your target that you're the prize to be pursued kind of way. That's all just macho bullshit. This philosophy isn't about creating attraction; it's about surrendering attachment. Giving yourself permission to walk away from something you thought you couldn't live without. It's all part of the mystery of how personal identity evolves.

***Who are you, stripped of those things that tell you who you are?***

October 21

## **Don't blame me, the calendar made me do it.**

Friday has statistically been proven to be the least productive day of the workweek. One study from a project management software company analyzed a data set of nearly two million projects and twenty eight million tasks from their user base. Their research found that, big surprise, the last day of the week was twenty percent less productive than the first. Another study of two thousand office workers found that the majority of staff mentally winds things down well before the official end of the day. By early afternoon, most people have already started their weekends in earnest. Now, anyone who's ever worked in an office before can relate to this slump. It's no wonder more and more employers are letting team members take the day off or leave early. People are already daydreaming about the weekend, so why not let them knock off before the clock strikes six? But let me play devil's advocate for a moment here. With all due respect for the end of the week, and the hard workers who put in their forty or sixty hours throughout, there's an inherent problem with this entire phenomenon. Because contrary to popular conditioning, the reason we're overwhelmed isn't because it's a certain day of the week, it's because we're horribly inefficient with our time. Let's not pretend the reason we're tired, unproductive and careless is solely because it's the fifth day in a row we've been working. Friday is the most common excuse people use to justify poor work that abdicates them from taking personal responsibility. Friday, if it were possible for a day of the week to have feelings, would be highly insulted at this treatment. It's not my fault guys; I just work here! The point is, life is hard for all of us, but throwing our arms up and announcing, sorry but the calendar made me do it, doesn't excuse poor performance. Here's what I would love for somebody to say in an office, just once. Friday lunchtime rolls around, and some account manager stands up from his cubicle and says, sorry team, but I'm wildly inefficient with my time, I didn't get proper rest all week, and I'm still hung over from last night's tailgating party, so that's why my end of the week report isn't even half finished. My bad. Won't happen again. Somebody give that man a promotion. Honesty in the workplace, can you really believe it? Let's get something straight. We don't need more time; we need a better routine. Shakespeare had the exact same twenty-six letters in the alphabet, and the same twenty-four hours in the day as the rest of us. Tolstoy wrote the greatest work of world literature and he had thirteen kids. What's your excuse? In a world where most people find reasons not to do their work, it's time we moved our internal calibrator from external to internal. To quote one of my favorite recovery devotionals, discipline is not a response to some external should, it is part of an inner strength.

*What's your favorite thing to blame for your lack of productivity?*

October 22

## **Giving people enough rope to find something better than what you came up with.**

When you're making something you've never made before, trusting the process is paramount. Because there's no creative precedent for what you're doing. The medium and the tools and output are all novel to you. You're suddenly using all these new types of words to describe your art, and it feels like walking through the dark with a sharp knife and no torch. That's how I felt during the design and development phase of my software product. As a right-brained creator who typically makes things using words, music, movies and stories, it was intimidating and challenging to suddenly be working with the left-brain world of code, numbers, interfaces and functionality. There were moments when my brain didn't quite know what to do with itself. Wait, what does this green box do again? Why does the icon move like that? Can't the user search results populate faster? Where did all of my fancy words go? But this tremble of uncertainty is healthy and productive. It means you're taking creative risks. It means you're stretching as an artist. And it means there's a certain degree of surrender you have to acclimate yourself to. Especially if you're partnering with third-party contractors to execute work outside of your skillset. You really have to trust them. Liberating those other creators to do what they do best. Giving them enough rope to find something better than what you came up with. Even if that means letting go of certain pieces of the initial project vision that are no longer tenable, now that the idea is becoming a reality. Now, all of this surrender this won't pull you clean out of the swamp of uncertainty. But it will make swimming a bit easier. My graphic designer's words come to mind, which ring inside my head in such moments of surrender. Jeff, anytime we'd be working on our seventeenth iteration of the cover image, would lovingly say to me, dude, let it be. Next time you're making something you've never made before, accept that there's no precedent and just let the work teach you. Because if you can't trust the process, and the people shepherding you through it, then your mind will become obliterated by a maelstrom of anxieties, uncertainties and doubts. And you already have enough to worry about.

***What's your plan for managing the tremble of creative uncertainty?***

October 23

## The paradox of friction.

In the past five years, my company has amassed a prolific portfolio of innovations in five distinct categories. Software platforms, consumer packaged goods, industrial goods, service businesses and music festivals. Spoiler alert, none these innovations actually exist. Not yet. But they could. And certainly should. But for now, they're simply ideas that have yet to be executed. Plus, they're good fodder for my product development and innovation gameshow. What is real, however, is the spirit in which those innovations were created. Because while each of my bogus brands serve customers in myriad ways and multiple verticals, they all have the same underlying focus. Increasing joy, healing loneliness, and my personal favorite, reducing friction. Those are easy starting places for solving real problems through innovation. Especially that last one. Because in any enterprise, the harder customers have to push, the harder the system pushes back. The more people resist, the more futile their efforts become. Call it the paradox of friction. Something that causes massive amounts of frustration for customers and employees. Which is why companies need to do everything they can to remove it. At my tech startup, our founder is vigilant about removing friction points. As the company owner, he knows how easy it is for him to become the bottleneck that slows everyone down and creates stress. The other day he sent out a chat message to our team. Hey guys, I'm pretty far behind on my email because I didn't respond to anybody yesterday, so please let me know if there is anything I'm bottlenecking and I will prioritize. That's how you reduce friction. Now, according to the product development world, friction is defined as anything that acts as a barrier to using the product. It could be overly complicated signup procedures, clunky navigation bars, cumbersome return processes, and so on. But as long as it's an obstacle for the user, it's friction. How are you reducing it at your company? What process could you create that removes the bottleneck? Remember, the last thing customers and employees need to hear is, so many things happened to stop you from getting here, but you made it anyway. And if people feel there is an uphill battle, it will discourage them from seeking you out in the future. If you want to innovate, reduce friction, reduce frustration and you'll have a real chance at raising profits.

What friction points are causing your team stress?

October 24

## **How grandiosity can be channeled into positive outcomes.**

Nobody stands at foot of an unblazed trail without a few mental abnormalities. A certain level of healthy narcissism and productive arrogance are required to become a prolific creator. You have to be just grandiose and just audacious enough to empower the belief in your own value as a leader. Otherwise your projects won't get off the ground and ultimately earn paying customers. Now, from a psychological perspective, the term grandiosity typically means an unrealistic sense of superiority. You think you're better than people and entitled to whatever you want. And there is little or no awareness of the gap between your expectations on reality, and how that impacts your relationships. For the record, that's not the type of grandiosity we're talking about here. Read the diagnostic interview for pathologically narcissistic patients. Grandiose people tend to appear arrogant and boastful, and are unrealistically optimistic about their future. They exaggerate their talent, capacity, and achievements in an unrealistic way without recognizing their limitations. Again, doing this isn't recommended. Despite the fact that many of our highest government and corporate officials do it every single day of their lives with zero consequences, it's still not advised. What's helpful is figuring out your own judicious use of grandiosity. Because it can be a motivating force for positive change. Hell, the word itself simply means, grand in effect. And so, when employed intentionally with empathy and awareness, it can be a useful mindset in executing your creative work. Grandiosity can be channeled into positive outcomes. If the painter elevates her commissioned pieces to the level of life purpose choice, and that fuels her to execute art that makes her proud, makes her money and makes buyers happy, then what's the problem? If the copywriter treats his advertising job as a daily opportunity to make meaning in alignment with his cherished values, and that keeps him sane at the office, then what's the harm? If the graffiti artist treats his subway tags as courageous public expressions of his cherished identity, and that keeps him off drugs, then what's the issue? If the social entrepreneur writes a press release about how her new software platform is going to revolutionize the industry, and that vision helps her attract venture capital funding to grow the enterprise, then who cares if she's grandiose? It's one thing to use grandiosity to medicate and distract yourself; it's another to use it as a tactic. Sparrow, the fictional pirate lord of the seven seas, has a hilarious quote from his movie that always stuck with me. Jack says, crazy people don't know they're crazy. But I know I'm crazy, therefore I'm not crazy. Isn't that crazy? Makes a lot of sense. Believing that you are going crazy is often a good clue that you are sane. Try using the grandiosity of your ambitions work to your advantage. Accept that you're not better than other humans and not a deity, but also remember that you have to be at least a little deluded to do this kind of work.

*Have you figured out your own judicious use of grandiosity?*



October 25

## **The rhapsody began as a purpose, not a plan.**

Where do you see yourself in ten years? What an outdated, irrelevant and potentially dangerous question. This whole notion of deciding where we want to be in a decade, and then formulating some brilliant plan for getting there, that only works if our environment is unchanging. Which it is not. Change is taking place everywhere at every moment. And not only with our surroundings, but with our identities too. That's the hard part about having a plan. We limit ourselves to today's options. Instead of thinking beyond our current successes and constantly looking for compelling ways to create new ones, we continue to fool ourselves into believing there is a chance everything will go according to plan. Consistency for consistency's sake. But where's the adventure in that? My twenties were all about having a plan. My professional life centered on a very particular career trajectory. The whole journey was mapped out on a whiteboard in my office. It was empowering. But in my thirties, something occurred to me. Having a plan is less important than holding a purpose. Because a plan is simply a set of actions, whereas a purpose is a desired intention. For example, my purpose statement is as follows. I am creating a fulfilling life that is engaging and inspiring to others and myself, integrates all of my gifts, and provides me a sense of stability and freedom. By holding that purpose in my heart, and committing to it every day, it frees me up to be flexible with my plans along the way. It keeps me nimble enough to stray from the plan when appropriate. And it allows me to remake my set of actions as I grow and as the world changes. Where do you see yourself in ten years? It's a moot point.

*As long as that place is fulfilling, it's good enough for me. Is your plan trapping you into a box of your own making?*

October 26

## **The right name is the one you pick.**

Taoist scripture begins with the following passage. The tao that can be told is not the eternal tao. The name that can be named is not the eternal name. The nameless is the beginning of heaven and earth. It sounds esoteric and dense, but it's not. Entrepreneurs deal with this phenomenon all the time. Hell, my first company was called Who's Your Daddy Records. The name is juvenile, embarrassing and has zero connection with my entrepreneurial vision or values. Truth is, my freshman year roommate actually came up with the name one night while he was drunk. Which was fine with me. It had enough instigation capital to get the job done. And so, my teenage brain didn't give it a second thought. Because the name was merely a formality. What mattered more was professionalizing my creative expression. Taking extreme ownership over my dreams. Hiring myself and getting my music out into the world. Besides, who even pays attention to the name of the label anyway? And here we are, twenty years, hundreds of concerts, nine albums and three music films later, and that goofy title remains unchanged. It's still not a meaningful name. But it's mine. Which is all that matters. Proving, that freedom is the only fashion worth fighting for. Now, compare that example to the procrastinating entrepreneur who spends so long trying to craft the perfect name for her company, that she talks herself out of launching it. Another potentially great idea, talked into the ground. Look, take it from the world record holder of wearing nametag. Don't drive yourself nuts trying to find the perfect label for something. Most of the people on earth have never heard of you, and never will. Sure, the name of your new project should be memorable and flexible and unique and not too embarrassing for people to share. But what's the right name? It doesn't matter. The right name is the one that the one you pick. And more importantly, commit to.

***What do you need to announce to yourself that you feel complete about?***

October 27

## The score matters less than the streak.

Here's a common reaction people have to my social experiment. You've been wearing a nametag every day for twenty years? I don't think I've done anything for twenty years. It always gives me a good laugh, since it's patently absurd that half of my life has been lived as a labeled man. But you have to admit, that's one hell of a run. And in fact, streak psychology is a topic that fascinates me. Why are people so compelled by these streaks, both as participants and observers? Maybe it's the raw Pavlovian thrill of task completion. Maybe it's the human need to stay consistent with past behavior. Maybe it's the ownership part, as streaks are hard won, and anything in our possession is psychologically felt as worth more than it actually is. Maybe it's brain chemistry, where the higher our streak number gets, the more valuable it becomes, and the greater our dopamine reward, so the streak is in itself an intensifier. The thing about streaks is, they can have a downside. Alter's popular book on addictive technology reminds us that streaks are insidious by nature. What may start as a genuine desire becomes more valuable over time, such that you have more and more to lose as you're ostensibly making gains. And when you become more concerned with a perceived loss than the streak's benefits, that's when you run into problems. The issue is that they tip into negative territory when they inspire obsessions. Working out every day is good for you, until you get a stress injury. Been there before many times. Wearing a nametag hasn't led to injuries, but over exercising certainly has. It all goes back to the type of streak you're going for. Because there are different categories. There's the acute streak, born out of impeccable timing and focused performance, which can't last forever, but boy is it exciting when it's happening. Like the basketball team that wins eighteen games in a row. Or the guy sitting next to you at the blackjack table who beats the dealer on ten straight hands. Or when your teenage daughter posts a video of herself on social media every morning for two years straight because it elevates her social status among her friends. Those acute streaks are admirable, inspiring and worth celebrating. But let's not overlook the ever-inspiring prolonged streak. When you stick with something for years or decades or entire lifetimes. Recovering addicts are big on this, who will not only keep, but also share the tally of the number of days of their sobriety. Every day that number goes up by one, they can feel proud, empowered and motivated to continue their journey. That's how it feels wearing a nametag everyday. It's been over twenty years, more than seven thousand days, and watching that number increase is a source of satisfaction for me. Funny, thing is, I don't anything remarkable. It's just a sticker. But as my mentor likes to remind me, it's not that I put the nametag on, it's that I never took it off. The higher that number get, the final score matters less than the streak itself. Because the whole of the long tail is mine. Forever. Godin's award winning blog, which has inspired my work for years, summarizes the issue perfectly. Streaks are their own reward. Streaks create internal pressure that keeps streaks going. They require commitment at first, but then the commitment turns into a practice, and the practice into a habit. Habits are much easier to maintain than commitments. Remember, the word *streak* derives from the

term *strica*, which means, line of motion. If you can find a healthy way keep that line going, your journey will be remarkable no matter what the path is.

***What personal streak are you proud of?***

October 28

## **The ship carrying a cargo that will never reach any port.**

Cruise delivers an amazing monologue at the end of his nineties legal drama. While consulting with his mobster clients, he reassures them of the confidentiality of their affairs with his firm. Dripping wet with sweat and blood, with nothing but a tattered briefcase in his hand, here's what he tells them. Whatever I know, wherever I go, I am bound by the attorney client privilege. I'm exactly like a ship, carrying a cargo that will never reach any port. And as long as I'm alive, that ship will always be at sea. This is a persuasive visual for an attorney to use with their clients, but it's also a beautiful way to think about life itself. Just imagine for a moment. What if we accepted that our ship will always be at sea? What if we forgave life for never allowing our cargo to reach any port? What if we embraced the fact the ride does not require a destination or an explanation, only occupants? It may sound nihilistically dark and existentially exhausting, but there's a freedom within this vision that we can learn to love. Personally, this sense of detachment has revolutionized my relationship with my own art making. Surrendering to the fact that nobody wants to read my books, that makes me more relaxed while writing them. Accepting the fact that nobody is waiting around to consume my latest and greatest creation, that makes the experience of creating it more joyful. Embracing the fact that most people are simply too busy and too overloaded with noise to even notice my latest endeavor, that makes me more confident in taking risks along the way. What a marvelous gift. Being unburdened by the need or even the want to earn people's attention for almost anything, every creative person should be so lucky. And this isn't just me being cynical or hard on myself. I've been making art professionally for the past twenty years. Trust me, telling yourself the story that your ship carrying the cargo will never reach any port, is an absolute game changer. As my mentor once said, when you expect nothing, anything feels like everything. Compare that mindset to the way my brain used to work, which was, holy shit, this could be the one email that is changes everything for me. Better obsessively check my inbox every three minutes for the next six hours. That's the attitude that gave me an ulcer. Pressfield wrote an entire book about this. Nobody wants to read your shit, he explains, and recognizing this painful truth is the first step in the writer's transformation from amateur to professional. Now, this doesn't mean people won't read your shit. They might. And if so, that's wonderful. But let's not hang our hat on that happening anytime soon, or anytime at all. Because that's not the point. At least not for me. I'm not writing to be read, I'm writing to be a writer.

*Are you a journey person or a destination person?*

October 29

## **There's no money in being a hidden gem.**

There's not always a direct correlation between product quality and marketplace adoption. Think how many horrible movies rise to the status of camp classic. Many of these films deliberately embrace of the ethos of, it's so bad it's good, while gaining cult followings and earning truckloads of cash. Maybe it's because they reinforce the audience's sense of superiority? Maybe it's because they enable a social experience of sharing a uniquely awful spectacle? It's hard to tell. Sharknado isn't exactly award-winning cinema, but that franchise produced five sequels and their total box office earnings exceeded four billion dollars. Pixar doesn't even make that much money per movie. Clearly audiences aren't interested in quality. Popularity, yes, but quality, bah, that's for the birds. What's frustrating about this marketplace reality is, the opposite also becomes true. Tons of legitimately brilliant and inspiring and original work out there is instantly ignored. It's not even noticed by enough people to be commented on. Prolific authors publish groundbreaking work that, if those books were read by even a fraction of the audience, would literally change the world. Companies launch innovative software products that, if those technologies were adopted by even a tiny slice of the market, would transform entire industries. Maybe it's because their marketing budget wasn't as large? Maybe it's because the marketplace is oversaturated and anytime anyone creates anything they compete with everything? It's hard to tell. But the sad reality is, mediocrity isn't just rewarded, its demanded. Average rises to the top. Hell, if people cared about quality, we'd still be watching movies on laserdisc. Truth is, our culture worships incompleteness and celebrates stupidity. Marginally talented people get fame they don't deserve, land gigs they don't earn, make money they don't work for, and achieve success they don't sweat for. God damn it. Why can't all of us smart, creative people with our naive high standards just learn to lower them once and for all? Why can't we just go produce some piece of shit we know will sell, take the money and get on with our lives? And the idealistic part of me wants to say, now look, just because your new product doesn't get thousands or even hundreds of customers, doesn't mean it's bad and you're wrong. Just because the marketplace doesn't adopt your work doesn't mean you're not brilliant and your ideas are garbage. But the cynical part of me wants to say, dude, the proof is in the putting. There's no money in being a hidden gem. Go for popularity, not quality. Better to be number ten on a list of products that are so bad, they're good, then number one on a list of amazing products you've never heard of.

***Are you producing work that guarantees you will remain obscure, and then hating the world for not knowing who you are?***

October 30

## **The silence was like a weight in the room.**

Carlin was famous for telling his comedian protégés, accept what comes from silence. Make the best you can of it. Silence is the sign of the professional. It's true on stage, and it's true in life. Music is the space between the notes. And yet, few of us have been trained to appreciate empty spaces, silence, formlessness and voids. It's too uncomfortable for us. We hate silence because our anxieties get very loud in our head. Instead, our natural inclination is to fill any blank space with speculation, theory or conjecture. To drown out the silence with our own wishes, fears and fantasies. The only problem is, because of this tendency, we obscure the valuable tension crucial to the creative process. We rob ourselves and the audience of the chance to make magic happen. Fritz's research on creativity reminds us that this very tension is the force that moves forward resolution and generates energy that is useful in creating. He calls it a discrepancy, which is the space between current reality and desired vision. And so, whether that discrepancy exists on stage at a comedy club, in the air at your painting studio, or during a conversation with a client, it's something that should be welcomed, appreciated and leveraged. Don't be so quick to rush into the silence. Relax into it without urgency. Allow it to hold you a little while longer. You might be surprised what the discrepancy produces.

*How are you making use of the space between the notes?*

October 31

## **The time fallacy of reinvention.**

The secret is to reinvent yourself before the decline occurs. To dig your identity well before you're thirsty, if you will. Because like any process, reinvention takes longer than you think. And you have to get out ahead of it. Hofstadter comes to mind, the famed professor of cognitive science. His eponymous law shows how hard it is to accurately estimate the time it will take to complete tasks of substantial complexity. Originally, he introduced this planning fallacy in connection with chess playing computers, although it has broader applications for more holistic types of growth processes. Here are few ideas to think about. First, forgive yourself for not changing faster. It's likely that you're planning with a lot of optimism, and that's a good thing. If you weren't excited about this next phase of life, that would make the process much harder. Just keep in mind, not only are most people poor historians, but most of people are also notoriously bad at predicting the future. There's no way for us to guess what will make us happy down the road, since we can't know in advance how we will feel when that thing finally becomes our reality. It's all happy hunches and lucky guesses, and that's okay. Entering into the growth process with our expectations at bay is huge. Something else to remember to do is, schedule some extra time to accommodate the unexpected. That way, you won't have to scramble around so damn much. It's like the woman at my office who always books five back-to-back meetings each afternoon. Her efficiency is helpful, but her stress level is also through the roof. And if one meeting goes long, it creates a chain reaction of anxiety that trickles down. It's just not worth it. On the macro level, if you're starting a new career, relocating to a new city, or even merging your life with a new partner, see if you can build in some buffers. Give yourself plenty of flexible windows, rather than hard deadlines. The process will flow much smoother. One final thought on the time fallacy of reinvention. As you evolve into a new version of yourself, resist the temptation to make rash decisions out of frustration. It's perfectly human to want to change your life yesterday, but don't rush off manically on some wild reinvention chase, just for the sake of speed. Just because the very first resume you send out gets a callback, doesn't mean you should start buying clothes for your first day at the office. Everything takes longer than you think. And if impatience clouds judgment, you risk losing sight of your motivation for wanting to change in the first place.

***What change do you need to be more patient with?***



**NOVEMBER**

November 1

## **The urgency had burned out.**

The space program once conducted a fascinating study on the effect of prolonged space flight on human skeletal muscle. Researchers took calf muscle biopsies of crewmembers before and after their trip aboard the international space station. Here's what they found. Even when crew members did aerobic exercise five hours a week and resistance exercise three to six days per week, muscle volume and peak power both still decreased significantly. Because there's no gravity in outer space. No matter how vigorously the astronauts worked out, eventually, their muscles were still going to atrophy. The question is, how many zero gravity environments do you have in your life? Which of your muscles are starting to wither? My experience with this phenomenon came in the form of entrepreneurial atrophy. After running my company for more than a decade, there came a point where there were no more places to go. My schedule was barren empty. There were no more accountabilities, no obligations, no community counting on my contribution and no tasks requiring my attention. Sure, there were tons of people who liked me and supported my brand and appreciated the work I did. But the world was not on hold until my next project was finished. The urgency had burned out. I was just sitting there with nowhere to be, and all the time in the world to get there. It was a zero gravity environment. Mostly of my own making, but also as a function of time and space and economics. Which meant, I had a choice to make. I could double down and try to recreate gravity from scratch. Or I could call ground control, set a course to depart outer space and relocate to a more breathable, sustainable environment. In the years following, I tried both options. And looking back, all I can think to myself now is, thank god I'm not an astronaut anymore.

*How will your life change once the urgency burns out?*

November 2

## **They can't steal it because you're giving it to them.**

In the modern business landscape, competitors from thousands of miles away can replicate your product overnight. These lightning fast copycats have become a huge nuisance for many startup founders. Reminds me of the heartbreaking story about the entrepreneur who spent a year designing the product that was going to make him rich, a smartphone case that unfolds into a selfie stick. The man drew up prototypes, secured funding from his family and launched a crowdfunding campaign. But then, a week before his product hit the market, he saw it on sale on a wholesale website across the globe. Same exact design, but one fourth of the price. They beat him to the punch. As a creator, entrepreneur or company founder, there are legal measures you can take to insure against this type of counterfeiting. Signing nondisclosure agreements, securing patents and trademarks, doing your due diligence, even jumping on a plane to get eyes on the ground in another marketplace. These strategies are helpful in protecting a company from this ruthless copycat culture, although most intellectual property lawyers say that enforcement of the problem is essentially impossible. However, just because imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, doesn't mean it has to be a one-way ticket to bankruptcy. Not if you're strategic from day one. Rubio, one of the founders of the billion-dollar luggage brand that's disrupting the travel industry, explained it succinctly in her masterclass on building direct to consumer brands. Competitors can replicate your product overnight, but they can't replicate your brand and the community it serves. The best way to protect your company, is to treat your product as table stakes, and treat the brand and its relationship to the customer as your differentiator. Remember, without a brand, a company will continue to struggle to flow uphill, against the current, against gravity, against the marketplace, losing out to people who are faster and shrewder. Find the love you can never lose, and nobody can touch you. Belsky best explains the issue of brand in his book about the messy middle. While it's not essential up front, it's hard to change your name later, and having brand product fit from the start gives you the confidence that, if you get the product right, you'll succeed rather than wonder why a great product isn't spreading.

*Are customers using your brand to copy perceived successful behavior?*

November 3

## **Time plus volume equals enrichment.**

Wearing a nametag everyday has been a source of eye rolls for many. But that's okay. Because doing so has also accelerated my life in ways that would otherwise be invisible. It's given me several lifetimes worth of creative output, which has given me innumerable interfaces with myself and others, and that has also allowed me to run into tons of walls, human or otherwise. All of which has been great training. What's your version of that? What ritual or experiment could you embed into your life to exponentially increase your activity level? How could you tap into the power of volume and give yourself an unfair advantage? My friend who runs a tech startup has a great term for this. He calls it getting your units up. Meaning, find a way to get the sheer mathematics on your side. It's not difficult. There is no right way to do it. Anytime you apply intention and attention to your own growth, you can't help but benefit from it. The greater the volume of experiences you have to work with, the better context you create for yourself. Time plus volume equals enrichment. Belsky applies this notion to startups and other creative ventures. He writes in his comprehensive book about bold ventures that time adds a value to creative work that cannot be replicated any other way. While there is nothing extraordinary about each little moment in isolation, the magnitude of time the experiment represents creates real value. As the cheesy motivational speaker inside of me loves to say, it doesn't have to be a nametag, it just has to stick. Do something, anything, daily, for a long time. Use the sheer volume of experience to allow for all kinds of possibility, including running into as many walls as you can. And just watch how your life improves. My nametag is the magical object that helps maintain the continuity of my life. And in a chaotic world where we're all searching for some permanence to help us through the turbulence, personally, it's deeply comforting for me to know that at least one thing will be the same tomorrow.

***What do you have to do create a baseline of value no matter what?***

November 4

## **Transferring the architecture behind our core talent.**

We're all given one thing in life that's a little easier for us than it is for most people. Call it our divine gift, our zone of genius, our unique talent, what have you. All names aside, its purpose is to whisper to us, specifically in those moments when our sense of competency is assaulted, hey, why not do everything like you do that thing? This question is perhaps the most powerful tool to help us breathe from the atmosphere of possibility. To stop overlooking our capability to transfer the architecture underneath our core talent to all the other areas of our lives. Years ago, I realized that writing was that thing for me. It was my first love. My first language. The support system for my life. The tool I used to weave my picture of the world and speak to myself about what I need. The only thing I couldn't remember not doing. And so, now, whenever I feel clogged or incapable or in over my head with certain activities or tasks, I think to myself, okay, well, how could I make writing a part of this? What are the architecture elements underneath the writing process that might also work here? Sure enough, I began embedding that thing into whatever other thing I was doing, and everything was fine. I felt like the best version of myself. All because I transferred the architecture. Look, it's a game. A curiosity experiment. An awareness plan that challenges you to see which part of myself, unrelated as may be, that I can integrate into this moment to solve problems and create value and make things happen. Next time you find yourself stuck and blocked and trapped, practice a little transference. Think about the one talent or skill that you can execute brilliantly but intuitively. Consider the core principles that have silently guided that behavior for years. Figure out how to generalize them in an exact and practical way. And then replicate them to the task at hand.

*Are you overlooking the transferability of your own talent?*

November 5

## **Trust your intuitive choices about what you're doing.**

The writer and director of one of the most successful spy movie franchises of all time said this. When you're cutting a movie, there's the movie you think you're making, and then there's the movie you've actually made. It's only then that you realize what it is. Christopher reminds us that art goes where it wants to go, and we go with it. And all we can do is trust the process, trust ourselves, trust whatever else is out of our control, and hope we end up somewhere interesting. The challenge is, our childhood educational training has brainwashed us into always searching for solutions that are congruent with the teacher's answer key. And this deeply seeded compliance mindset now causes us to override our intuitions as adults. Estes writes in her book about the women who run with the wolves that when we assert intuition, we are therefore like the starry night; we gaze at the world through a thousand eyes. Where do you most trust your intuitive choices about what you're doing? My painter friend is a perfect example. Jason starts a canvas with a sketch, not knowing what the concept means or where it's going to take him. But he presses on, quite literally, trusting that he can create his way out of uncertainty and into beauty. He also says that sometimes his wife will view an unfinished piece, make a comment about a particular image or color, and that small reflection will open up the entire piece into its rightful direction. Oh, so that's what this thing is, he thinks to himself. Funny how having an audience changes the way the creator experiences their creation. If you're in the middle of making something right now, and you're unsure of where the work wants to go, trust it. Go with it. Don't allow your desire for certainty to override your intuition. Because unlike school, you can't fail at expressing yourself.

*In what areas of your life are you most intuitive?*

November 6

## **Try to catch up on years of neglected goals in four days.**

Decision-making is about timeliness, but it's also about trust. It's about having faith in your intuitive choices about what you're doing. Even if all the data isn't there, even if you don't have a strong preference, and even if you don't have a robust how to support your why. You still have to be comfortable making decisions in spite of all of that. Believing that you're making them for a good reason, and no matter what happens, you will survive them. Otherwise you accumulate negative momentum. With each moment of indecision, your marginal cost of deciding becomes higher and higher. It becomes impossible to regain any semblance of order. Reminds me of an office mate from a few years back. He never outright admitted that he was a hoarder, but it was obvious to everyone. The guy's desk was covered in a tsunami of papers and folders from accounts he had closed seven years ago. His email inbox had several thousand unread messages. And apparently, he also had four years of back taxes that were never paid. Robert wasn't a bad guy though. He was just chronically indecisive. And as it turns out, that's one of the essential features of any hoarding personality. People who struggle with excessive acquisition, difficulty discarding, clutter and disorganization literally have a different brain chemistry. The national institute of health ran a study that discovered hoarders exhibited abnormally low activity in the brain region called the anterior cingulate cortex. Meaning, their native wiring makes it difficult to identify the emotional significance of certain possessions. Hoarding isn't about the desire to keep stuff; it's about the inability to eliminate it. But that's why we have deep empathy for anyone with this personality. Who among us hasn't been in that situation before? We're down and convinced ourselves, okay, this is weekend when all the shit we've been putting off for years, big and small, is finally going to get done. Who among us hasn't spent years letting things fall apart and then gone on a crusade to fix it all in four days? It certainly happens to humans, not just hoarders. Negative momentum. Our streak of indecisiveness persists for so long that it's impossible to overcome. The issue, then, at its deepest level, goes back to trusting ourselves. Not only having faith in our ability to make decisions, but have faith in our ability to survive their consequences.

***In what situations don't you trust yourself?***

November 7

## **Twisting the truth every which way to make us look like fools.**

The overarching intention when launching my product development and innovation gameshow was mischief. Period. The question asked before each recording was as follows. How can we execute this project so well, so methodically, so insightfully, and make it so enjoyable for people to listen to, that audiences won't be able to tell if it's a joke or not? Sure enough, friends and family members starting telling me after listening to various episodes that they still weren't sure what was real or not. From the contestant bios to the show sponsors to the portfolio of innovations to the scoreboard, it was hard to tell where the truth ended and the fiction began. Good. Mission accomplished. After all, isn't that what a good hoax is all about? It's a mischievous trick played on the world. It's a falsehood deliberately fabricated to masquerade as the truth. Hoaxes make people experience perplexity, confusion and tension. In the hopes that they might learn something about themselves and the world. Or at the very least, have some joy. It's not like it's malignant. It's all in good fun. Kramer famously stumbled across the set of the old Merv Griffin Show in a dumpster on the street. And just for kicks, he took the discarded set pieces and perfectly recreated the set in his apartment. Pretending that the show was still on the air, acting as the new host, using the show's theme song when guests come onto the set, cutting to a commercial break, even conducting real interviews with everyone who enters his apartment. It was a good old-fashioned hoax. Interestingly enough, there is a science behind successful hoaxing. Hancock's pivotal research identified several key characteristics a truly successful hoax. The first step is identifying a group of people who, for reasons such as piety, patriotism or greed, will truly care about your creation. Next, identify a particular dream that will make your hoax appeal to the constituency. But keep it ambiguous. And then, do what you can to get your new creation discovered. Enlist at least one champion who will actively support your hoax. And finally, make people care, positively or negatively, ongoing through interest and debate. In short, make it so people can't tell if it's a joke or not. Doesn't that sound delicious joyful? Now, for those of you judging me, listen up. We live in a post fact society. The truth has become a quaint relic of the past. Governments and organizations have been suppressing and obfuscating information to meet their objectives for thousands of years. Why not join in the fun? Tonya said it best in her deposition video. Everyone has their own truth, and then life just goes and does whatever the fuck it wants.

*How is your art magic delivered from the lie of being truth?*



November 8

## **Used as bargaining counters by the moneyed patrons.**

Edison was the world's most prolific inventor. Most people know that. What's even more fascinating about his body of work is, his first hundred patents mainly dealt with the telegraph system. And they weren't exactly revolutionary innovations. Mostly instruments, governors, magnets, circuits, boxes, and other apparatuses. But although those early inventions may have been of minor importance, they still mattered. Josephson's compelling biography of the man explains that his fabled first one hundred patents created the two things every young inventor seeks. Credibility and leverage. First, those early patents showed the man's distinctive skills and insights. From those preliminary improvements, the world started to discern how he systematically attacked problems. And as a result, people trusted him as someone who could make practical improvements upon this product for which there was a growing strong demand. That's credibility. Next, the inventor's patents, even if without operational value, were starting to be used as bargaining counters by the moneyed patrons of applied science. As the story goes, even if his products were not workable yet, they had what the inventor called negative value, since they protected his clients against competitors who might turn up with a similar product. That's leverage. Are you undervaluing the asset value of your early work? What if your first one hundred creations were merely precursors that were setting the stage for something bigger down the road? Perfect example. My first book was eighty pages of longwinded, unfocused, sophomoric stories about a dorky guy who wore a nametag every day. Actually, my layout designer increased the font size to push our page count past one hundred so it appeared more credible. But despite going viral after several national media interviews, the book sold bupkiss. Maybe few hundred copies to friends and family members who humored me. The remaining three thousand units were force fed to audience members of my speeches, dozens of which later surfaced at used book fairs. However, it still mattered to me. It showed the world my distinctive skills and insights, built credibility where none existed, and gave me the fuel to start leveraging my simple idea into a successful enterprise. And by the way, every copy of the first run of that book had two free nametags in the back. People not only loved that, but told their friends about that. They didn't even care about the book; they just wanted the nametag. That's a win in my book, quite literally. Point being, your first hello world probably won't be the greatest thing that ever was. But it doesn't have to be. This is a huge misconception for first time creators. Whatever you ship on your maiden creative voyage, that thing doesn't have to be good; it just has to be yours. Because nobody can argue that, and nobody can take that away from you. And if your early work creates even the tiniest shred of credibility or leverage, you win.

*When will you give up your perfectionistic standards of what good should be?*

November 9

## Using our awareness like a scalpel.

Mellin writes in her book about wiring our lives for joy that if we tend to be really hard on ourselves, it is wise to purposely accept our emotional state more often. But why stop there? What about our professional state as well? Because that's one of the anxiety traps that creative people often fall into. We grow angry with ourselves for all the things we're not doing for our careers. Meanwhile, constantly comparing ourselves to people who are doing the things we think we should be doing, that only leads us into minimizing and denying the things we're already doing well. It's a vicious, unkind cycle, and it's a problem of acceptance. Our inability to believe that we are exactly where we're supposed to be keeps us from relaxing into the moment. My mentor once said something about this issue that always stuck with me. He was doing a workshop about business growth when the topic of focus came up. Somebody asked him how he managed to stay so relaxed and so productive at the same time. His response wasn't a technique or a software application. Mark just said that he didn't have a big furnace to feed. Despite the constant bombardment and indoctrination of shoulds, he worked hard to free himself from their tyranny and stay focused on a few things he loved, was good at, and customers wanted. An advanced degree in acceptance right there. Noticing that inner tension between what we want and what others say we should have, and acting accordingly, that's inspiring to me. It's not an easy place to get to, but it's certainly a worthwhile posture to aspire to. Ellis wrote that people take their strong desires and preferences and raise, escalate and propel them into absolutist musts, shoulds and demands, and that is the primary cause of their suffering. Perhaps this is the ultimate artistic challenge for the creator. Can we use our vast powers of imagination to notice our own cognitive distortions? Can we use our awareness like a scalpel to carve away at nonessential matter blocking our finest expression? We may as well save some creativity for ourselves. And maybe we will have a real chance at joy.

*What furnace have you convinced yourself that you still need to feed?*

November 10

## **What can do some of the heavy lifting for me?**

Yoga is an activity where leverage can make or break the experience. Without it, class will feel like a sweaty, uphill battle. But by using the right tools, both internal and external, students can learn how to locate the support they need to find the balance between ease and effort. This ultimately lessens their learning curve and makes for a more enjoyable practice. Here are several examples from my own practice. Pushing your hand against the wall for leverage creates a stronger opening in your torso. Sitting on a block for leverage positions your spine for optimal angle for greater traction and stretching. Holding the sides of your mat for leverage makes it easier to lift up your hips. Pressing your front hand into floor and away from you gives you leverage to move deeper into the twist. Leaning your feet into the mirror creates the leverage to strengthen a rounded back. Placing your fingers behind your foot and using your thumb to absorb the weight gives the rest of your body leverage to balance and maneuver. All of these examples have one thing in common. Find the support you need to do some of the heavy lifting for you, freeing you up to focus on specific moves. Even if you're not a yoga practitioner, this is still a powerful strategy for increasing your return on any experience. You have to train yourself to always be looking around at your immediate environment and asking, okay, what can do some of the heavy lifting for me? Now, if you're concerned that doing so makes you exploitative and manipulative, you're right. It does. And there's nothing wrong with either of those two words. To exploit means to use to the fullest extent allowable, and to manipulate means to handle or control in skillful manner. Look, if that allows you to provoke greater joy and fulfillment from your experience, and it's not negatively impacting other people, then it's absolutely worth doing. After practicing yoga for more than a dozen years, not a single instructor has ever come over to my mat and scolded me for using myself, the wall, the floor, or physical props to deepen my practice. Because they understand that we all take our leverage wherever we can get it. And such is life. Ever seen a horse scratching his butt with a tiny tree? Same thing. We all do what we have to do. No regrets, no shame.

***What tool can you utilize to move heavier objects with significantly less effort?***

November 11

## **We apply a drop of oil to keep friction away.**

We should seek to operate with as much honesty and integrity as we can afford. The key word in that sentence is *afford*. Because those are some very expensive and labor intensive values to uphold every minute of every day. Stubbornly staying true to ourselves, it's not exactly downhill work. Integrity can be exhausting, can't it? Charlize's screen portrayal of the first female president comes to mind. In one notable scene, she lectures her idealistic boyfriend about integrity. You never compromise for anything in your life, and that gives you the perfect excuse to fail. But I'm not giving up everything I ever wanted just because it doesn't live up to your moral code. Where was that advice ten years ago? Would have been helpful to me. But I was too busy sticking to my guns, only to shoot myself in the foot. Stupid integrity, hasn't earned me a dime. The question I have no learned to ask myself is, where are you willing to make reasonable but not unfair compromises? How can you find a middle ground that's imperfect but not unworkable? Some basic math might do the trick. Hell, if a certain decision adds value to our life at a level that outweighs the downside, then it's not like we're selling out and sacrificing our values, it's just a technique of adjustment. We apply a drop of oil to keep the friction away. Rather than forcing harsh mandates on our imperfect selves, we negotiate a deal that makes us feel okay with ourselves. During my stint at an advertising agency where the work was mundane and unfulfilling, I gladly accepted a level of career compromise in the service of something greater. It didn't feel out of integrity because my day job created the financial buffer of commercial pay which funded something bigger, which was the writing, directing, producing and releasing of my animated folk rock opera, of which I'm insanely proud. The best part is, by biting the bullet in my day job, creative compromise wasn't even on the table for my own personal work. I spared no expense. Hired the most talented, expensive animator I could find, and along with my art director, I executed everything I wanted, exactly the way I wanted to, with all the honest and integrity in the world. Where are you willing to make reasonable but not unfair compromises? If you're the kind of person who shuts themselves off to anything that doesn't completely live up to your moral code, I would like you to consider the possibility that you have made the wrong investment. You only need to apply a small drop of oil to keep the friction away.

***What kind of compromise can you live with?***

November 12

## **We thought we were smart, but we were just lucky.**

Going viral means your idea evokes a cultural response. Virality springs from the qualities of your content that are funny, shocking, or surprising. People's first impression demands further investigation. They believe that spreading your idea will either enhance their power or deepen their peace of mind. But despite everyone's best effort, virality can't be ordered, faked, planned, forced or reverse engineered. More often than not, it's lightning in a bottle. A function of timing and luck. Fitch, the evolutionary biologist and author, explains it as follows. Some memes are fortunate at birth. They represent clear new concepts, blessed with a memorable name, and have prominent intellectual parents who ably shepherd them through the crucial initial process of dissemination, clarification and acceptance. Many other memes, though, are less fortunate in one or more of these respects, and through no fault of their own languish, for decades or even centuries, in the shadows of their highborn competitors. My nametag idea went viral two different times. First, on my college campus, without the aid of digital media. It was a purely grassroots, organic word of mouth marketing accident. But by the time graduation rolled around, everybody seemed to know me, or at least know of me. Very strange and exciting. The second time it went viral was about a year later. A local paper ran an article about my little experiment. And that piece was sent out on a national newswire. Within a few months, hundreds of media outlets around the world were calling for interviews on a weekly basis. My website even shut down once because of too much traffic. Super cool. However, there was no strategy behind this effort. It was just a ride the world took me on before I was ready to go on one. And so, there is no credit for me to take. Simple fact is, the meme was fortunate at birth. Some guy wearing a nametag all day, every day was funny, surprising and fascinating. It struck a cultural chord. Are you looking to go viral? Don't hold your breath. There's no formula. All you can do is keep trying lots of stuff so luck has a chance to find you.

***What shocking, surprising and funny thing are you doing that demands further investigation?***

November 13

## **Weapons of mass procrastination.**

Most people deliberately wait for the pressure of a deadline to sharpen their thinking. They heighten the tension around a project by setting the amount of time between vision and current reality. And the pull of gravity helps thrust them to completion. Unfortunately, I don't work that way. Deadlines are not how my brain operates. Ever since I was a kid, I was always more of a reverse procrastinator. The student who finished the project the day it was assigned, and then spent the next two weeks screwing around or working on something else. What's interesting is, as an adult, those tendencies haven't changed. Execution is a non-issue for me. I'm wired for volume and velocity. And so, since I know that any elusive deadlines I set for myself would be too easily revised or abandoned anyway, I don't even bother. Instead, I focus on routines and priorities and systems and habits. Because I know that those holy rhythmic forces are the organizing principles guaranteed to make my work happen. Every day. Irrespective of available time and resources. Regardless of some arbitrary date on a calendar. If you're the kind of person who believes that it's a great discipline never to be too far away from a deadline, more power to you. But if you're more like me, someone whose drive to excel exceeds their capacity to procrastinate, move matters to a higher ground. Focus on continuity, consistency and commitment. And it won't even matter what day of the week it is.

*Have you ever asked yourself why you procrastinate?*

November 14

## What are you so good at that you make look easy?

Some people have an amazing facility for parlaying their modest collection of gifts into a successful career. Even if their natural talents are not that extraordinary, they still find a way to integrate and deploy them with maximum effectiveness. That process is actually a skill unto itself. One that can be learned. The key word here is parlay. In the gambling world, parlays are also known as accumulators, multiples or combo bets. They happen when two or more individual wagers are linked, and the payout depends on all wagers winning together. It's a long shot, but the benefit is that there are much higher payoffs than placing each individual bet separately, as the difficulty of hitting all of them is much greater. But for the brave gambler, it can be the difference between a few hundred dollars and a few hundred thousand dollars. Careers are similar, as they are a form of betting on ourselves. And in fact, the word *parlay* derives from the term that means, to exploit to advantage, or to increase and otherwise transform an asset into something of much greater value. And so, leverage is the name of the game. Each of us can turn our gift into opportunities, as long as we think about our talent stack strategically. Here's a framework that helped me parlay my first career as a freelancer into my second career as an employee. The first step is asking the passion question. What are you so good at that you make look easy? Most people can come up with at least two or three items on that list. If nothing comes to mind, simply ask that question to a few close friends or a spouse. They'll know. The next step is to ask the process question. How might you deconstruct what you do rather intuitively and abstractly, so it can be replicated more exactly and practically? This phase requires a lot more reflection and codifying, but tracing your own steps and searching for the principles that have been silently guiding your work is a deeply energizing and empowering exercise. Who knows? You might surprise yourself with just how much useful knowledge you have accumulated. The final step is to ask the pivot question. When you get hired for a new position, what will be the impact of their ownership of that value? Answering this question requires considerable empathy. Because in order for the parlay to work, you really have to get out of your own head and think in terms of resale value. Imagining how your unique collection of gifts increases revenue, decreases cost, create connection, reduces friction, adds joy, saves time, or whatever other form of currency might be valuable to an organization. This series of questions and exercises around passion, process and pivot has worked several times for me. It allowed me to create considerable career momentum during the transition into act two of my professional life. There's no guarantee of a payoff, but then again, hitting the parlay is all about increases your odds. Besides, if you're unemployed, what else are you going to do all day? May as well double down on your own value and figure out how to bet on yourself. Remember, you can't use what you can't find, and you can't leverage what you forgot you had.

*How will you build and leverage your personal competitive edge?*

November 15

## **What can you do to your physical environment to have it nurture and relax you?**

Our environment can be the most potent nurturing force in our lives, or it can be a pressurized prison that triggers unhealthy habits. It all depends on the degree of intention we bring to that space. From a very young age, my rooms, desks, lockers, cars, homes and other physical environments have essentially served as the user interfaces for my mind, body and spirit. They were never spotless, but all the spots mattered. And that made a positive impact on my life. Here's how those user interfaces work today. In the very early morning, I put a pillow in the window sill to prevent that abrasive street light from shining into my barely awakened eyes. During my yoga class before work, I spend a few extra minutes in final meditation to soak up the benefits of the practice and hold hands with my sweaty wife. On the train ride into the city, I wear sunglasses on the subway to give me privacy in an otherwise claustrophobic environment. While walking from the subway station to my office, I sing karaoke from my favorite playlist to process my feelings through music. While doing my job at the office, I have installed the high contrast and dark mode themes on my screens to make text easier to read. During my daily bathroom constitutional, I play soothing music and read books to put my body at ease. Around my desk, I have almost no paper and allow objects that are charged with specific and powerful meaning to me. On my phone, I disable all push notifications, mute all system sounds and adjust my screen brightness to the lowest possible setting. In my safe and cozy man cave, I have covered the walls and surfaces with pictures of friends and family, love notes from my wife and other power objects that elevate my psychic effectiveness and rejuvenate me spiritually. What can you do to your physical environment to have it nurture and relax you? People might give you strange looks and call you obsessive compulsive or anal retentive, and that's fine. Hell, my coworkers give me shit about my desk all the time. What is all this stuff? Do you even use all those markers? How many nametags do you really need any given time? Not the point. Look, we all do what we have to do to create a life that supports calmness and fulfillment. People can say whatever they want, but it's more important that we are thoughtfully and intentionally creating a diversity of environments that are framed to support our individual pursuit of meaning.

***How could you modify your surroundings so that your life produces less stress and more joy?***



November 16

## **What could you build to help solve this problem faster?**

The word *project* comes from the word *proiectum*. It means, something thrown forth. This is the core of what it means to be prolific. Throwing things forth. Melting the glaciers within you. Finding a productive obsession that galvanizes you and serves your meaning making efforts. Brainstorming and creating and organizing and executing ideas and enlisting smart people to help you fulfill your vision. Not to mention, discovering the ecstasy within the process of the work itself and experiencing sublime joy of seeing things come together to produce an artistic whole. That's a project. Doesn't have to make money, doesn't have to make sense, it just has to make you fulfilled. The hard part is deciding which one to work on next. Uncovering a new and exciting idea with enough momentum to catapult you out of limbo. Because you can't force it. And people make this mistake all the time. They start working on a project they want to want, but in their hearts, it's not the best use of their time and talents. It's just some silly, puny, uninteresting pursuit that does little for the world. It may help to scoot boredom out the door, but ultimately, it doesn't point them in the direction of reality and accomplishment. It doesn't serve their meaning making efforts. I recently found myself in between projects. It happens every few years. But this time, instead of standing in the void and taking a good, hard whiff of the impending meaninglessness, I reverse engineered the process and built a software program to catapult me out of limbo. You can use it for free online. It's a brainstorming template to help you decide which venture to tackle next, which populates this randomly generated one page map of project possibilities, based on your answer to a series of leverage questions. Check out the website when you get a chance, it's super fun. But for now, here are the fields to consider. What problems can I solve? What skills can I use? What interests can I mine? What themes can I address? What markets can I serve? What assets can I leverage? What technology can I use? What change can I create? What projects can I emulate? That's how the brain works. Once you empty it on a piece of paper, all you have to do is sit back and listen for what wants to be written. Once you empty it on a piece of paper, all you have to do is sit back and listen for what wants to be written. Use this framework to uncover and nurture an idea that fascinates you into something real in the world.

*How are you saving some creativity for yourself?*

November 17

## **What idea will you be kicking yourself about in five years?**

Crichton was a doctor by training. But after a professor criticized his prose style, he started writing on the side to help pay tuition for medical school. And it paid off. Michael became one of the world's most successful screenwriters, film directors and producers. His obituary stated that his fiction explored the moral and political problems posed by modern technology and scientific breakthroughs. In his imaginary worlds, human greed, hubris and the urge to dominate were just as powerful as the most advanced computers. Quite a legacy, huh? One of the pieces of advice he famously gave to young writers was this. Working inspires inspiration. Keep working. If you fail, keep working. But also if you succeed, keep working. That last part is what interests me. Because while many of us are told not to stop after our first failure, few of us are encouraged not to stop after our first success. Sure, we might pat ourselves on the back for our nice little victory, but then we move on too quickly and leave a lot of leverage on the table. It's not our fault, though. Blame it on our puritanical roots for taking hold and pulling us back to the ground. You can almost hear that angry preacher's fire and brimstone voice. Pride goeth before the fall, so don't get too full of yourself. Have you ever experienced that type of cultural gravity before? Where the members of your family, congregation or community seemed to want to prevent you from rising according to your own talents? This is the antithesis to leverage, and it's both common and tragic. People will work diligently to achieve success once, and then they stop. Gravity drags them back to earth. And as a result, they miss out on a whole world of opportunity. I'm reminded of a question my mentor used to ask that always made me laugh. What idea will you be kicking yourself about in five years? Meaning, if you want leverage, imagine future potential from the onset. Anticipate that everything you create might become part of a series, franchise or larger brand. Make sure to put your name on everything to maximize distribution opportunities. Because you never know what will hit. Momentum is perishable, so capitalize on it while you can. Otherwise you will leave a lot of leverage on the table.

*Are you willing to keep working after you succeed?*

November 18

## What key could you create to unlock this door?

We have everything a person needs to be happy. And yet, depression still finds a way to sneak in through the side door and remind us of the essential hopelessness of existence. What the hell? How are we supposed to heal from this existential nightmare called life? After all, covering up our feelings of severe despondency by just pretending like everything is fine isn't working anymore. We need innovative solutions that stop us from sitting around all day, brooding over the cold and vast nothingness of the universe. Thankfully, having trudged through my own share of mental health challenges in the past several years, I have invented a variety of new products and services that will revolutionize the way our society understands and treats the noonday demon depression. Let's start with the problem of pharmaceuticals. Because while they are effective for raising our neurological floor, they are not the sole path to healing mental illness. Meds are just a helpful start toward relief. What people need is to pair drugs with something stronger. Desparity is my new group exercise program for sufferers of depression who want to purge their pain through sweat. Our program incentivizes you with financial compensation, discounts and other rewards that will motivate you to get out of bed, rejoin the world of other people and treat yourself. Desparity helps you sweat out the sad and stay fit at the same time. Classes starting at a warehouse near you! Okay, for my next invention, let's talk about one particular variant of depression, seasonal affective disorder. This condition affects more than three million people nationwide, causing fatigue, depression and social withdrawal. But sometimes all people need is a change of scenery. Gloomswap is my revolutionary home exchange program where rich assholes with empty vacation homes in tropical locations offer their garages to the depressed and lonely during fall and winter. Now instead of actually working on their problems, people can simply run away from them, in style. Gloomswap says to all depressed people, hey, why lodge the bullet when you can dodge it? Talk about using your head. Finally, let's explore the collateral damage of mental illness. Like smelly apartments. These human pigsties gross out neighbors, landlords and guests. But how can you expect someone to clean the house when they're too busy capitulating to the cosmic farce of humanity? Unclutterance is the answer. This is my combination housekeeping therapy service that sends mental health professionals to help depressed people with household chores that they're too emotionally incapacitated to do themselves. Clean out the gutters of your mind, and your home, at the same time. Maybe even with the same brush. Unclutterance helps you wean your heart, and clean your home. Now, if you laughed at least once while reading this list of ridiculous ideas, then there is still hope for you. Even if your depression has been whispering to you more than usual lately, it's not too late to rethink your existential crisis. My goal here was not to solve your depression, but to show you that writing this very list of wacky product ideas has made me feel joyful and satisfied, which helps solve my depression. My goal was not to fix you, but knowing that you're reading this makes me feel of useful service to at least one other person in the world, and that helps me avoid staring into the cold void of nothingness.

Pharrell, the legendary rapper, songwriter, fashion designer and entrepreneur, said it best. Every door has a key, and if you can't find it, make one.

*How could you invent your way out of this existential predicament?*

November 19

## **What value are you not capturing from the work you create?**

In business, there's creating value and capturing value. The former was always my strong suit. Inventing new things, building efficient processes for doing so, expanding my body of work, building my brand as an entrepreneur, easy peasy lemon squeezy. Creating value plays to my strengths; however, capturing value, that is, productizing ideas into sellable offerings, monetizing my users into profit centers and growing equity in something that generated recurring revenue without my direct involvement, that wasn't so easy for me. Capturing value was always sporadic, and my enterprise had mostly episodic earnings. Now, part me feels shameful about this approach, as running a business is exhausting and unsustainable when you disproportionately create value without capturing it. Imagine a farmer who spends all his time planting and growing delicious crops, but only harvests and sells a small percentage of them. That was me. God, it's actually quite embarrassing to thinking back to my twenties and thirties. Scott, how the hell did your business survive for so long? What were you even doing all those years? Great question. Not sure there's an answer. But as compassion training has taught me, prosecuting ourselves for crimes past doesn't help or heal us. We have to forgive ourselves for being who we are and who we were, in order to evolve into who we will be. Anyway, it's true that a brand has to create value before they can capture it. That's step one. But eventually, the ratio must tilt toward the business's ability to create profit from its transactions. Laney's profound book on infonomics teaches companies how to generate higher levels of value from their data assets. His philosophy was a paradigm shifter for me. He writes, even if your information won't ever become as valuable as your existing products or services, it is unconscionable to forgo an opportunity to monetize it in one or more ways. Information is worth big money, and those who don't exploit its value are leaving valuable resources on the table. In raw form, it may not be immediately usable. But sitting idly in your databases, it's of no benefit to anyone else whatsoever. Woe, what value are you not capturing from the work you create? And don't feel guilty; you're not alone. Most organizations limit the economic potential of their information assets in some way. The key is thinking extramurally. Getting outside the four walls of the company and economically availing your information to the marketplace. For starters, here are a few strategic questions to ask your team. What does your company have that people want or crave, but you've been giving away all these years? What captured data, that's not particularly useful in the context of your business, may be financially beneficial to others? What wealth of public information, when juxtaposed with yours, could yield monumental monetization opportunities? Once you've answered those questions and identified various points of leverage, the next step is packaging your information in various ways to appeal to different markets and users. Architecting the parts to make it understandable in a way that gets you to your goals. That process is complicated and nuanced, but the overriding theme is as follows. You don't have to tell anyone anything they don't already know. All you have to do is capture insights,

intuitions, patterns and learnings and put them into a coherent set of tools that can be used for future decision-making. Figure out how to do that, and you won't just create value, you'll capture it.

***What treasured warehouse of data is nobody building?***

November 20

## **A gross misappropriation of our finest natural resource.**

Creativity is, at its simplest level, the act of turning nothing into something. It's this highly human phenomenon whereby a new and valuable idea is brought to form through a person's imagination. What a beautiful endowment we've been given as a species. It's about as close to divinity as human beings can get. Unfortunately, sometimes this process gets inverted. Because while it's natural for our species to turn nothing into something, the converse can just as easily be true. Some individuals who have a persistent negative evaluation of life have mastered the art of turning something into nothing. Perhaps you've met someone like this. They downplay and reject almost every experience, blinding themselves to things that are real. They stick a pin in every word and consciously drain life of its power to affect them. Even in the face of joy and meaning and mystery and magic, they choose to let life's meaninglessness swallow them whole. In short, they turned something into nothing. Creativity has inverted. By habitually labeling everything as nothing, that's precisely what they experience. Why do people act this way? It's hard to tell. Maybe it's some kind of defense mechanism against the perceived perils of happiness. Maybe they're sabotaging themselves in order to return to their more comfortable and familiar state of misery. Maybe they don't believe they're worthy of joy and meaning in the first place. Maybe their traumatic past has conditioned them to mistrust any experience. Point is, they're not building anything up, only breaking things down. They only use their powers to stop things, not to create. And that's no way to live. It's a shit response to life. It's an insult to humanity. And from the economic perspective, it's also gross misappropriation of our finest natural resource, which is the ability to make something out of nothing. Make me sick to my stomach. And admittedly, there have been a few periods in my life where this kind of cynicism appealed to me. After ending a toxic four-year relationship in my twenties, my cynicism skyrocketed for a good six months. Swore off intimacy like it was a plague of locusts. Who among us wouldn't have responded to heartbreak in that way? Another time in my early thirties, the association for which I was a longtime board member was having its worst membership numbers in a decade. That made me never want to volunteer for a leadership role ever again. You would have felt the same way. Because none of us are immune to the seductive forces of creativity's shadow. But no matter how relentlessly life tries to beat the softness out of us, we can't allow that to be the end of our story. We can't allow our hearts to become calcified. Otherwise we'll become black holes who keep turning something into nothing. Further robbing ourselves of the fulfillment we are worthy of. Godin characterized the creative process beautifully on his award winning blog. He said that art is a human act, a generous contribution, something that might not work, and it is intended to change the recipient for the better, often causing a connection to happen. This is why we are here. To make something out of nothing.

It's our divine assignment as a species. Anything less is gross misappropriation of our finest natural resource.

*Are you someone who builds things up, or breaks them down?*



November 21

## **What will assist me in building trust with my true self?**

An old professor friend of mine who teaches quantum physics says that motion organizes and creates order. In his research, he found that through motion, all things tend to their equilibrium and find their place in the universe, thus conspiring toward some unifying geometrical situation. He calls it the theory of gravitational order. This concept has been deeply empowering to me since the moment he told me about it. Because anytime life tasks me with some challenge, whether it's carving the holiday turkey, leading a complex project at work, composing a new song, driving a passenger van full of angry drunk people, or simply doing something that I've never done before, reminding myself that motion organizes and creates order makes taking action that much easier. When I trust that things will tend to their equilibrium, suddenly executing isn't so overwhelming. Compare that to when I was younger, and I would get paralyzed by the weight of fear. Scared of not being good or getting it wrong and looking foolish and letting people down, I either shut down or talked myself out of taking action. It's as if there was gravitational pull. No force of resistance to help propel me forward. I was just kind of weightless. If you want to avoid falling into this execution trap, start by telling yourself some new stories. One, that you're never going to be ready enough, smart enough, experienced enough and organized enough, so you may as well knuckle down and buckle in. Two, when you start doing things with whatever energy is in you, the work teaches you. It's a tight feedback loop that rewards speed and initiative, not accuracy. Motion doesn't just create emotion; it creates education. Three, the faster you say yes to the moment and dive into whatever responsibility you've been tasked with, the less time you'll give your brain to obsess over irrelevant things standing in your way. And four, once you get used to the process of trying things, you'll find out what really works for you and be able to flip from improvising to being more deliberate. Remember, life rewards action, commitment and trust. Forget about getting things right and focus on getting things moving in the right direction. Use motion to organize and create order, and you'll be amazed at the results.

***What story will help you trust your capacity to handle difficulties?***

November 22

## What would positivity do here?

Being positive, fostering an affirmative orientation, leading with optimism, these interpersonal strategies sound squishy, saccharin and touchy feely. And maybe they are. But that doesn't mean they're ineffective. Quite the opposite, in fact. Positivity is the kind of force that has its own vector, like a geometric object with strength and magnitude and direction. It's been clinically proven. Fredrickson's psychology research found that experiencing positive emotions broadens people's momentary thought action repertoires, enlarges cognitive perspectives, and enhances their ability to attend to more information, make richer interpretations. The important distinction to make about this data is, positivity doesn't increase your success. But what it does do is increase your field of vision, and that allows you to better notice the valuable opportunities that might lead to success. Negative emotions don't afford you that kind of leverage. They're important and useful to the human experience, but negativity will almost certainly narrow your perception. I've seen this play out in a variety of situations before. When contestants come on my product development and innovation gameshow, the most important rule we discuss before starting the game is, say yes. You have to say yes to the game, to each other, to the ideas we come up with, and of course, to the concept of sitting around and trying to create ideas that other people will steal. That's the spirit of improv comedy. Players absolutely must have an affirmative orientation. Because that positivity stretches their minds open. It widens their array of possibilities. It puts everyone in the game in a state of forward notion. Without framing the game in that way, it wouldn't be fun, wouldn't be funny, and wouldn't lead our contestants down the innovative path. It would just feel like another one of those boring meetings at work. How biased toward optimism are you? Are you someone who uses negativity to focus on the problem, or uses positivity to find solutions to it? Get in the habit of asking yourself these kinds of questions. Focus on being affirming and life giving, rather than critical and life numbing, and you'll create leverage for yourself and those around you.

*How are you taking responsibility for the energy you're bringing to the world?*

November 23

## **What you hear is the sound of a squealing dinosaur.**

In one week's time, four of the magazine industry's best known editors stepped down from their publishing posts. Reporters say it wasn't a coordinated exodus, but it wasn't a coincidence either. It's simply the arc of the industry. What you're hearing is the sound of a squealing dinosaur. Apparently, nobody in their right mind wants to take on the arcane and exasperating world of publishing. And who could blame them? But there is a bigger issue here, pun absolutely intended. This trend is not about publication; it's about reinvention. The very human questions that cross my mind are, well, what happens when somebody is compelled by a calling to take their life somewhere else? How does a person create a new context from which to relate to their work? And what does it feel like to engage in a new conversation with the world? One former magazine editor said she looked around at her environment and honestly didn't see where she fit it anymore. Another one said that her industry was dying, and she didn't want to be there when the lights went out. While a different editor said that her original goal of nabbing some coveted publishing title wasn't admirable anymore. A different editor said she was no longer up for living the brand the way that you have to in the publishing world. My favorite was the magazine veteran who admitted that he felt like a patch of mold on the kitchen ceiling that you're not quite sure about it, but as long as it doesn't start dripping, you can just let it be. If you've ever found yourself in that situation before, it can be a bizarre and complicated moment. One that brings you to your knees. On one hand, you experience yourself as alien and obsolete and alone, which feels sad and scary. On the other hand, there is a newfound sense of freedom and possibility for what's next, which feels invigorating and euphoric. Either way, few things in life are more natural than reinvention. Just as nature reinvents itself minute to minute under the influence of light, rain, soil and wind, human beings do the same. Next time you read an article about a celebrated athlete or business mogul who announces their retirement, listen loudly. That squealing dinosaur sound might be coming from inside the house.

*What are your triggers for reinvention?*

November 24

## **When we dash away from ideas too fast.**

In the first year of wearing a nametag twenty four seven, there wasn't single day where quitting didn't cross my mind. And yet, something inside told me to stick with it. Not sure why. It just didn't seem fair to dash away from this idea too quickly. There was just too much juice there. My experiment needed some room to breathe before it told me what it was supposed to become. Sure enough, two years into the project, not only did my nametag go viral on campus, it also went viral online. Which transformed my life forever. That was twenty years. And since then, one of the lessons that still sticks with me is this. People abandon things far too quickly. And they assume it's because of impatience, distraction, fear, anxiety, doubt or even discernment. But it's really just the mathematics of ignorance. The reason people give up because they simply haven't put in enough time to accrue enough volume to earn enough insight to know how they should proceed. It's those old school placements tests. Every few pages, there would be a trick question that went something like this. A book costs four dollars and a pen cost two dollars. Can the woman buy three of each? Smart test takers would realize, wait a sec, there is no way to tell. It depends how much money the woman has. Which means the right answer is, not enough information to solve this problem. This is the key moment in the execution process. Instead of abandoning things too quickly, we stick around and try to collect more data. We try and reach the point of statistical significance in our experiment. During high school, my English language teacher used to joke, you haven't written enough to know what kind of writer you are. Meaning, each creator has to keep working toward this thing that is not quite yet a reality. Only through the process of doing will they understand what doing actually means for them. That how they get enough information to solve this problem. Look, if you are willing start small and trust the path to illuminate itself, eventually, you will have deeper understanding of the destination. And so, don't try to move too quickly because you're only new once. Commit and create, and don't worry, there will be plenty of time to give up on yourself later.

*Are you willing to contract a case of the humbles to find where you're going next?*

November 25

## **There will plenty of time to give up on yourself later.**

People abandon things far too quickly. And they assume it's because of impatience, distraction, fear, anxiety, doubt or discernment. But in reality, it's really just the mathematics of ignorance. The reason people give up because they simply haven't put in enough time to accrue enough volume to earn enough insight to know how they should proceed. It's like one of those school placements tests. Every few pages, there would be a trick question that went something like this. A book costs four dollars and a pen cost two dollars. Does the woman have enough money to buy three of each? Smart test takers would realize, wait a sec, there is no way to tell. It depends how much money the woman has. Which means the right answer is, not enough information to solve this problem. This is the key moment. Instead of abandoning things too quickly, we stick around and try to collect more data. We try and reach the point of statistical significance. During high school, my English teacher used to tell me, you haven't written enough to know what kind of writer you are. Meaning, each creator has to keep working toward this thing that is not quite yet a reality. And only through the process of doing will we understand what doing actually means for us. But if we are willing start small and trust the path to illuminate itself, eventually, we will have deeper understanding of the destination. Remember, don't try to move too quickly, because you're only new once. Commit and create, and there will plenty of time to give up on yourself later.

*Are you willing to contract a case of the humbles to find where you're going next?*

November 26

## **When you make things, reality is optional.**

Dylan wrote music to define the way he thought about the world. He believed that a song was a dream you make come true, and that your role of the artist is to bring sanity into a world of madness, never letting people forget that you have your own way of seeing things. Van Gough painted canvases to create a different world to express how he felt about this one. He believed that the only way he could relate to the world was to create a counter-world in words and images, pursuing an alternative idea of society, and taking reality as his starting point rather than striking out to create a literal image of it. The commonality of these two artists is simple. They make things to convey their personal vision of reality. Whatever is going on out in the world has nothing to do with what's going inside their hearts. This is the profound liberation and glorious consolation of art. We can do whatever we want. We can play god. We can be as naïve and idealistic and hopeful and irrational as humanly possible. Our vision splendid draws us away from facing life realistically. Unlike the rest of our lives, where we stoically give up any expectation of what life should be and allow it to be what it is, when we make things, reality is optional. And who knows? Maybe one day the world to catch up to our vision of what could be. Maybe the world will reduce our work to hopeless spells of insanity. Maybe the world will greet our art with crickets, yawns and shrugs. But whatever the response is, we won't notice because we'll be too busy working on the next thing.

*How might you make works of art that are truer than the literal truth?*

November 27

## **When you're doing the work that matters, everything recedes.**

In physics, the formula for calculating momentum is mass times velocity. The quantity of an object's motion can be understood as the product of its size and speed. Do you remember that equation from high school science class? Not me. Physics was always my worst subject. English was always my thing. And yet, I had no idea this equation would become fundamental to my work as an artist. Because when you're fighting the terrible weight of creative inertia, having a basic understanding of momentum is a game changer. You realize that, as a creator, there are only two variables under your control that can lead to success. Being bigger or being faster. Change one or both of those elements, and you're guaranteed to increase momentum. This concept first crystallized for me while visiting my friend's church. Ten years ago, he relocated his family across the globe, dreaming about building a community of faith like they had back home. But they didn't tempt fate by postponing their journey. With a heaping ton of hard work, they spent a decade starting a number of ministries in various local neighborhoods, along with a foundation that invests hundreds of thousands of dollars each year in the process of planting churches globally. Liberty is now my favorite case study about creative momentum. Paul and his team started small, got their congregation from a state of rest to a state of motion, and slowly built momentum for their bigger challenges ahead. Mass times velocity really does work. It actually gave me an idea for a new business. Every year, thousands of churches close their doors due to low attendance and funding. Growing membership really is a holy challenge. And as a leader, achieving your divine dreams can feel hopeless. But what if somebody built a placement service that paid actors to attend services at new congregations to preserve the illusion of community growth and momentum? Performers can attend services at their assigned church, and through their method acting techniques, become the most engaged members that your church has ever had, galvanizing others to do the same. You essentially create fake community until it happens for real. And nobody will know the difference, except god. Churchplants. We're looking for a few good men. Do you think my business idea would take off? It's possible. Companies have profited a lot more from a lot less. Either way, it's still a good lesson in momentum. If you do creative work of any kind, accept that you have two choices. Increase mass or increase velocity. Don't try to gain momentum by scratching the surface of a seventeen things. Pick one or both of the two key variables, and focus your efforts relentlessly. Make the small, daily moves that propel your work to the next steps with the least amount of friction. Constantly ask yourself, where is the easiest place for me to build momentum right now? What would it have to take to get on a roll immediately? Then use that energy to replace your anxiety of not knowing how to move forward. It won't guarantee success, but you'll dramatically increase your odds of success, not to mention, feel satisfied every step of the way. And eventually, the power of your momentum will become so strong, that things will just stop being hard.

They will simply become the way that you live. The quantity of your object's motion will be undeniable.

*How could you build momentum by building on whatever comes naturally to you?*



November 28

## **When your worst gets better.**

Time is our friend and partner. It's the most valuable commodity we don't own, and it has faith in us even when we don't. Lincoln once said, or at least, the film version of him once said, time is the great thickener of things. In my experience, the thing that time thickens the most is the faith we have in ourselves. Because time gives us something that nobody can take away from us. Evidence. Undeniable proof that we can do this, and win. We've done it before, and we will do it again. It's empowering as hell. Once we've accumulated a certain amount of evidence to make a case for our own talents and skills, we learn to trust our capacity to do things. One of my favorite comedians talked about the creative thickening process in a magazine interview. Louie explained, the first thing that happens is that your best gets better, but what really matters is when your worst gets better. You can't always be crackling with energy. Sometimes you go up there, and the thing didn't happen, but you've got to put together a fucking amazing show anyway, so your worst show has to be above everybody's best. That's what you really want. Your worst, which comes with time, which comes with experience. Have you reached a point where even your bad days still get the job done? That's the mark of a true professional. You're not in the mood, you don't want to show up, most of the world won't care or even notice your work, and sitting down to do it is the last thing you want to do in the moment. But you deliver anyway. And while it's not perfect, it's good enough. It's better than the person who didn't show up. Startups often use the term minimum viable product in regards to this issue, which means enough features to satisfy early customers and provide feedback for future development. It's the smallest possible slice of benefit you can deliver to the smallest group of users. Artists could say the same for our work, although a more fitting term might be minimum viable value. It's when our worst gets better. When we're patient enough to stay in the game long enough to aggregate enough experience to obviate failure. Wow, that's your advice? Just stick around and wait until you get better? Absolutely. It's simplistic and time intensive, but that doesn't mean it doesn't work. What's more, it makes quite the strong argument for getting older. In a world where everyone is desperately scrambling to drink from the fountain of youth through age defying anti wrinkle cream, now you have another reason to look forward to getting older. That thickening mountain of evidence of your worthiness. Which, of course, was there all along, you just needed a few years to develop the vision to see it.

*How will time thicken the faith you have in yourself?*

November 29

## Where can you create the most asymmetry?

Hite, the hedge fund manager and the forefather of systems trading, is known for pioneering an investment concept called asymmetrical leverage. He says people who get really rich usually have found an asymmetrical position. Typically through time, knowledge, money, or some combination thereof. Like people employed by large companies who have stock options as part of their compensation package. That person's salary may be stagnant, but their income can increase dramatically over the course of time. The trivial suddenly becomes paramount. Another example is tech startups that often overspend on product, research, development and talent. They create asymmetrical leverage by virtualizing the cost away. Their product doesn't habit the notoriously inefficient physical world. Compare that to a rental car company that has fleets of sedans sitting in parking lots across the country. They're paying out the wazoo for on the ground expenditures, which don't promise an exceptional return on investment. Where can you create the most asymmetry? Where can you put in a little and get out a lot? This form of leverage is powerful, but it can also hard to find. Sometimes you have to undergo a bit of trial and error until you figure out the right formula. During my first few years as an entrepreneur, I had a bad habit of doing tasks that took up a disproportionate amount of time compared to their result. My effort versus the value that my company got in return was embarrassing. Apparently cruising around town attending multiple networking events per day didn't put more money in my pocket, it just ate up my time, burned gasoline and made me feel like a working adult who wasn't actually living with his parents. Duly noted. On the other hand, every once in a while I would invest my time on tasks that somehow created the highest return on investment with the least resources. Like writing one article, submitting it for publication to numerous media platforms, getting editorial approval, and watching my website traffic and inbound leads immediately uptick. Talk about asymmetry. Once that source of leverage revealed itself, you better believe my weekly attendance at local chamber of commerce events plummeted. Because there was no asymmetry there. Not that connection wasn't important, but it certainly wasn't as urgent as it appeared. That's the sweet spot each of us needs to find. Focusing on pulling levers that have a disproportionate impact on our odds of not only surviving but succeeding. Even if we're not businesspeople or investors. Ferriss wrote about asymmetrical leverage in what has become the modern time management classic. He encourages people to ask the question, if you had a heart attack and only had to work two hours a day, what would you do with your time? It's morbid and dramatic, but it's not a bad way to identify and prioritize which efforts have disproportionate impact on your life.

*How can you use time, knowledge and money to get a lot out of a little?*

November 30

## **Whew, we found the right guy.**

What will be the impact of their ownership of your value? Meaning, once they hire or contract or collaborate or partner with you, how will your unique gifts elevate their standing in the universe? Both on an individual and organizational level? This is the frame every professional must enter into when starting a new gig. We have to believe that we're a welcome presence who's creating value. That way, when we show up and show them what we do, everyone in the room will be thinking to themselves, whew, we found the right guy. Ask yourself this. Are your coworkers so blown away that they want other whom they respect to know of your value? The strange part is, we fear being that guy. Like it's some sort of workplace sin. Remind me of my transition from working as a freelancer to operating in the corporate world. Initially, part of me wanted to downplay my fruitful entrepreneurial past. There was constant internal pressure to hesitate sharing stories or insights from my former life. It just didn't seem appropriate to boast about my history. Until my bosses began doing it for me. At meetings with clients and partners and investors, they would just start telling my story before I even had a chance to. Scott is our newest hire, and he's the world record holder of wearing nametags. How many days is it now? Oh, um, seven thousand days or so. To which my bosses would exclaim to our clients, isn't that cool? I'll never forget the time one of our clients tweeted about me from his taxi on the way home from our kickoff meeting to say just how excited he was to be working with the only agency in the city who had a creative that wore a nametag twenty four seven. You're welcome. Lesson learned, if people are using you as a way for them to enhance the status of their organization, you win. It means you are somebody worth recruiting to the team, and keeping around. Withers and his classic soul song comes to mind. I want to spread the news that if it feels this good getting used, oh you just keep on using me until you use me up. Remember, every employer loves to brag about the awesome people they've brought on board. When you show up, do so in a way that makes it in their interest to tell people about you. Because if you're not bragged about and asked for by name, if you're not making people think to themselves, whew, we found the right guy, then you might be replaced.

*Does your team feel it's impressive to be partnering with you?*

**DECEMBER**

December 1

## **Which audience that you can't see yet is watching?**

Publishers, agents, journalists, editors, scouts, investors, producers, managers and recruiters all have the same job. Go out there and find the creators and entrepreneurs and business leaders who are making a big difference. Connect with them. Evaluate the commercial potential of their brand. Acquire and develop their talent to be marketed profitably. It's the same in all industries. The job titles might differ from company to company, and the product certainly varies, but for the most part, that's how those people spend a large part of their day. Looking for you. Now, it's true that many of the gatekeepers have left their gates. Those people don't have nearly as much leverage as they use to. Thanks to the massive democratization of the internet, the days of waiting for a gatekeeper to say yes for a creator to practice their craft are over. However, that doesn't mean there isn't value in making yourself attractive to them. Because you never know. The audience you can't see yet is watching. Henson, the famous puppet master, was also a master at letting the gatekeepers find him. He knew that the royal road to being seen, being cherished and ultimately being sponsored as an artist, was volume. That's why he put out as much work he possibly could. Even if the applause wasn't there, even if the commercial interest wasn't there, he still executed his vision, trusting that his entire body of work would become the standing sales pitch to his imaginary benefactor. It was only a matter of time before somebody pulled the trigger. You can do the same. It will require the uncommon combination of discipline and patience. Discipline, which means executional volume, velocity and value. Challenging yourself to continually produce as much as you can, as often as you can, as well as you can. And patience, which means getting good at not going away, rather than picking up your toys and going home just because your work isn't heralded as the next great whatever. Think of it like a gravitational orbit. The stronger you get, the sooner they will find you. Not because you need them to feel complete as a creator, but because it's always smart to keep that door open. To paraphrase my favorite scripture, fear not to entertain strangers, for by so doing you have entertained angel investors unaware.

***What sponsorship opportunity might be out there waiting for you?***

December 2

## **Who cares what you got on the test if you have a superpower?**

Contrary to what the comic books depict, your superpower doesn't have to be something that you can do better than anyone else in the whole world. There's no rulebook that says you need this exaggerated, telekinetic or world class ability. It can simply be a gift that you possess, that nobody can take away from you, which contributes a disproportionate amount of meaning in yours and other people's lives. My superpower, for example, is and always has been writing. And not because my words have this profound literary quality or influence, or because my books and songs are top sellers that have impacted audiences around the globe. Truth is, most people have never heard of my work, and never will. And that's fine. My superpower doesn't require that level of reach. Nobody's does. What matters more is that writing makes life possible for me. That's what makes my power so super. The creative process has become the number one arrow in my quiver for understanding myself, metabolizing my experiences, solving problems, creating value, speaking to myself about my own needs, processing all my emotions and coping with the inevitable ups and downs of life. Who cares if my words are good? Who cares if anybody sees or hears them? There is not a single compelling reason anybody could come up with that would persuade me to stop writing. What superpower defines your life? If you're not sure what that thing is yet, you're not alone. But that doesn't mean you don't have one. Ask yourself this. What is the one activity that is existentially painful for you not to do? Meaning, if you were the last person on earth, you would still do this thing every day. That may not be your superpower, but it will certainly point toward it. Treat your answer as a clue. A stepping-stone toward some gift you possess that nobody can take away from you. You may not be able to shoot lasers from your eyes or leap tall buildings in a single bound. But you might just be able to make life a little better for yourself and others.

*Are you looking for your gifts, only to find that you've been carrying them within the whole time?*

December 3

## Who has already tested and optimized this before me?

Reinventing the wheel is a slow, uncertain inefficient and exhausting enterprise. It's a suboptimal way to make progress on our creative projects, and is seldom advisable in most situations. Particularly since we're living in the modern digital media era, where anybody can learn anything for nothing. Whatever it is you're trying to make, odds are, somebody somewhere has already optimized it. There are very few if any significant operational flaws in what exists out there. And so, instead of wasting resources trying to start from scratch, go leverage the work that's already been done and divert your time and energy into more worthy goals. Naturally, there are exceptions. Here's one of my favorite case studies. Shark is an innovative skateboarding company that manufactures something called helical wheels. Rather than that old-fashioned circular wheel shape that human beings have known, used and loved since the dawn of modern technology, their wheels are composed of three-dimensional sine waves. According to their popular crowdfunding campaign, it's the best wheel in the world over rough terrain or wet conditions. The wheels perform similar to how auto drivers intuitively know to go over a speed bump at an angle to reduce the shock in their car. They've been scientifically tested and proved by a leading engineering university to last fifteen percent longer when cruising, as these wheels have multiple center points compared to one center point on a traditional model. It's cliché, but this skateboarding company has literally and figuratively reinvented the wheel. That's innovation. But outside of that isolated exception, this strategy is still not advisable. Because why make the creative process so hard on yourself? Pressure is a choice, and there are almost always a pair of giant shoulders you can stand on. You've got to get into the habit of asking yourself and your team, who has already done the heavy lifting of testing and optimizing this? Working in the startup world will teach you to think this way, as most of the companies have no choice but to be small, scrappy and relentlessly resourceful. When there are only seven people on your team and everybody is wearing multiple hats, reinventing the wheel is a luxury you simply can't afford. There are too many constraints. Business moves too fast to start from scratch. The best way to iterate quickly is to tap into the power of other people's energy and learn from those who have already done the work. That way you're not starting from scratch, you're starting from experience. Remember, we are walking in footsteps, everywhere we go. No need to reinvent the wheel to get in the race when you can just hitch a ride on somebody else's chariot.

***If you didn't have to start from scratch, how would you divert your time and energy differently?***

December 4

## Who is this guy?

There's a popular trope in television and film called the out of character alert. It's when a person is pretending to be someone else, and they unwittingly say something that would be against type for the individual they're impersonating. Friends, family members and coworkers tilt their heads like confused dogs. Hmm, that's weird. David is acting contrary to the way he normally behaves. Who is this guy? What's interesting about the out of character alert is, popular culture typically portrays it as a negative thing. It's a plot twist or a harbinger of awful things to come later in the story. But sometimes acting out of character is exactly what we need to grow. It's how we ripen into more mature ways of relating to ourselves, others and the world. Years ago during the research and development phase of my software as a service platform, I would send biweekly progress reports to a small circle of colleagues. Partly to keep a record of my creative journey, partly to keep myself accountable, partly to add a layer of connection to an otherwise lonely project, and partly to get feedback and encouragement from trusted peers. One report was particularly technical in its depiction of my software's information architecture, user experience and revenue model. Which, as someone who is more of an artist than an administrator, was difficult for me to write. That kind of stuff hurts my brain. In fact, half of the people on my list jokingly responded with something to the effect of, whoa, who is this guy? But not in a disappointing way. My friends were delighted to see that a right brained, abstract thinking person was learning new and exciting things about subjects that were formerly off limits to him. Talk about an out of character alert. When was the last time you fully immersed yourself in tasks that were completely outside of your skillset? Doing so isn't an affront to your authentic self. Remember, identity is not something given, once and for all. There's no fixed point at which you can finally proclaim, okay, this is it, this is all I am. Identity is a malleable and performable entity. Your core personality may have been set from an early age, but there's still new development to layer on top of the foundation. Everyone needs to adapt and evolve. Learning cannot be left to chance. Next time you find yourself standing on the borderline between everything you have been and a new way of being, do something out of character. Show yourself that you are capable of acting in new ways. You never know what kinds of positive plot twists might result.

*What new learning could widen your understanding of what was possible for you?*



December 5

## **Who would crawl out from under the obscure?**

Originality is source dependent. Only by casting our creative lines unexpectedly into the waters of obscurity can we do something truly innovative. As my mentor once told me, if you want to create something nobody has ever seen, you need to search for inspiration where nobody is else is looking. Most people, however, play nothing but inside baseball. They spend all their time incestuously studying the current state of the industry, lingering too long on the fruits of other people's creativity. They're so focused on the world around them that they send out too much imitative energy. It's no wonder they produce safe, derivative, reheated and unremarkable work. Everything they make is just another copy of a copy of a copy. To quote the indie film zen master, every single commodity you produce is a piece of your own death. Bezos, however, knows that there's no point in wasting his valuable energy on that struggle. He says that if we are obsessing over our competitors, then we have already lost out. The real goal should be to keep our competitors focused on us, while we stay focused on innovating for the customer. In my experience after three decades of publishing my own work, it all starts with the source material. Becoming more promiscuous in our listening. Making our senses entirely open and vulnerable to every shred of stimuli that crosses our path. Even allowing for some emptiness so there is room for unexpected gifts. That's where the juice flows. And so, ask yourself this. Are you reading and listening and watching and engaging with the exact same recycled drivel that everyone else is binging on, or do you flood your brain with a chaos of inspiration that is uniquely interesting to you? Are you uncovering hyper specific source material that is completely out of the ordinary but surprisingly relevant? If so, you work won't be able to help itself from being original and innovative. Don't allow your slowly diminishing circle of reference to become a reinforcing dark star. Go out daily and nightly and feed your eyes on the horizon. Sit down before the feast of life, consume it all, and then see what kinds of magic you can poop out.

*How much of your creative energy is channeled in the wrong direction?*

December 6

## **Every day you sit down to work on it, you've already won.**

When we're operating from a place of fear, we base our decisions on other people's opinions. And that can prove to be detrimental. Deciding from the outside in disempowers us. It weakens our trust in self. It disconnects our heart from the inner wisdom that guides us in the right direction. Whereas when we decide from the inside out, we build greater confidence and trust in ourselves. Any time our decisions are based on a vision of life that represents our strongest values, then we've already won, regardless of the outcome. During the initial development phase of my software as a service company, one of my friends wrote me a letter that always stuck with me. He said, in the early stages of growing a brand, everything is undetectable. And as the creator, you will overreact to negative or lack of positive feedback about it. You will have a crisis of confidence and think, clearly, my project will never succeed. But none of that matters. Because the fact that you are moving forward toward the realization of your own dreams and values, that's good and noble. Every day you sit down to work on it, you've already won. And nobody can take that away from you. Do you make decisions from the inside out? Are you rising up confidently and declaring your choices without the crutch of other people's opinions? It's harder than it sounds. Particularly in a work culture that fetishizes collaboration. Sometimes our excessive focus on teamwork feels like we're all just jumping on the train to nowhere. I've worked at companies that over relied on collaboration, and they lost many of the advantages of having independently motivated people who had the confidence to work from the inside out. Ultimately, excessively collaborative just became code for insufficiently decisive. My recommendation to people is, don't open your aperture so much. Stay connected with self, stay focused executing against your own values. Let people be in love with their own opinions, but don't rely on that input to ship what you believe is the right work. Remember, the main problem with other people's opinions is not that they're wrong, it's that they're based on somebody else's experiences, values and beliefs. Jobs, only a few months before dying of cancer, delivered a commencement address that has since become legendary. There is one passage about deciding from the inside out that's worth repeating here. Your time is limited, so don't waste it living someone else's life. Don't be trapped by dogma, which is living with the results of other people's thinking. Don't let the noise of other's opinions drown out your own inner voice. Most importantly, have the courage to follow your heart and intuition. They somehow already know what you truly want to become. Everything else is secondary. Look, if our goal is to maximize the fulfillment of our life, then we need to learn how to decide from what's in our heart, not from other people's influence. Don't give people's opinions more weight than they deserve. Trust that you already have everything you need to win.

*Do you relish your independence and make decisions on your own, or are you excessively collaborative?*

December 7

## **Finely calibrate your creative filter for fresh powder.**

Here's the frustrating reality of the modern job search. Most companies aren't looking for creative visionaries. They need warm bodies. People who can fill holes, check bosses, follow maps and execute on the vision the leaders have already cast. And that's okay. There's nothing immoral with that kind of role. Besides, you have to appreciate it from an organizational perspective. The more visionary someone is, the more complicated they are. The more complicated they are, the more expensive they are. Don't hate the player, hate the game. However, if you don't believe that you can be fulfilled in that kind of role, that's okay too. Because there is a small percentage of companies out there who really do need creative visionaries. They're looking to hire prolific team members who don't just show up and hit the target, but people who will fashion new arrows, change entire field upon which the target rests and redefine what it means to hit it. Are you that person? Do you believe deep down in your bones that you can join the right company and have that kind of creative impact? Awesome. Because it's not impossible to land that kind of role. Your pool of prospects might be disproportionately smaller, but the openings will be better. The secret is finding fresh powder. This is a term for professional opportunities where you can write your own ticket and set the standard, rather than just comply with it. Here's how you do it. When you're applying for positions, reading job descriptions and doing interviews, have your fresh powder radar on. Get that antennae up. Look for the roles that have no precedent. Seek out positions and departments that the company has never hired for before. Pay careful attention to key phrases like upward growth, first creative hire, individual contributor, one person team, build out the department, and so on. As long as the company has never hired anyone for this position before, then you're guaranteed to be the best they ever had, simply by comparison. Whereas if you land a creative position at a legacy company, you're constantly battling years of precedent. Look, it's not easy being a creative visionary. It's not easy selling yourself as someone with an inner vision not supported by external facts. But just know that it can be done. If your filter is finely calibrated for opportunities that provide fresh powder, then you will find a team to take your talents on the ride they deserve.

*Are you looking to embrace, extend or become the standard?*

December 8

## **Whom does this person need to answer to and look good for?**

Herding cats is a management term people use to describe the futile attempt to control and organize a class of entities that are inherently uncontrollable. The earliest available reference of this idiom dates back to an article about a software design company from the eighties. The phrase later popped up in the nineties in reference to dealing with writers, and has since become a catchall for managing anyone with a fiercely independent spirit, from toddlers to actors to physicians. Essentially, these are people who do whatever they want, whenever they feel like doing it. Sounds like my first report card from kindergarten. Those poor teachers. My poor parents. But as frustrating and chaotic as it sounds to herd cats, it's actually skill that anyone can learn. Even if you're a dog person. It has less to do with managerial tactics and more to do with mindful intentions. Beginning with empathy. To galvanize any team, we first accept that each member has their own individual set of thoughts, feelings, values and beliefs. And we constantly ask ourselves questions to further understand their motivations. What's this person's currency? Whom do they need to answer to and look good for? What is guaranteed to make them feel they got a return on their investment? What battle might they be fighting that we know nothing about? What is their unique definition of success? Once we learn some of these traits about the cats we're attempting to herd, we can tailor our approach to each. That might mean shotgunning certain tasks for people with varying timetables and commitments, creating multiple versions of the same document to satisfy people's many learning styles, even hiding details and variables from those who would only become derailed from knowing them. Certainly, we can't make everybody happy, but we can find out what makes everybody happy, and with our intention and attention, reverse engineer our interactions accordingly. This brings me to another element to effective cat herding. Assembling a mass of distinct parts into a coherent whole. Managing a delicate yet dynamic union of disparate elements, be it human or otherwise. Having managed hundreds of projects over the past twenty years, including publishing more than forty books and ten musical albums, my experience tells me this. Expert cat herds are masters of acceptance. You accept that along the journey of any project, people and things will go astray. And when they inevitably do, you don't allow that to bother you. You let it go, respect the process, trust that what needs to come back will, act kindly toward yourself and keep moving the story forward. Babuta writes about this in his award winning blog on zen habits. Accept that uncertainty and disorder, and relax into them. Stay with your intention despite the chaos. Keep pushing into the discomfort with it, go forward, and stay compassionate for any missteps or interruptions. If you find yourself in a position where inherently uncontrollable entities are swirling around your head, don't void your bowels in your litter box just yet. Pressure is a choice. Start

where you are, help others start where they are, and have faith that you'll herd all the cats to where you want them to be.

*How do you manage fiercely independent spirits?*

December 9

## **Why is right now the perfect opportunity for flourishing?**

Here's the letter I wrote to myself in the very early stages of a new project. Perhaps it will inspire you to inspire yourself. Scott, you generate more intellectual capital in one year than most people do in a lifetime. That's your superpower. But it's also your inventory. You accumulated tens of thousands of raw and minimally developed ideas. Good ones, too. And many of those ideas could be taken further. They could be productized. Developed into standard, fully tested, packaged, supported and marketed products, that could create real value for people, and equitable compensation for you. Even better, they could help you scale your level of contribution and impact on the world. The hard part about executing this project will be overcoming all the mental blocks you've built against the process. Because while you have productized many of your ideas before, you've always had an inner resistance to it. There's a part of you that's uncomfortable monetizing your intellectual property. It runs contrary your personality as the sensitive artist who would rather be heard than paid. You believe productizing is a sin against your artistic integrity in the gift economy. The other thing is, you're clinging to your limited right brain narrative. Your identity as someone who only focused on the conceptual and theoretical served you for a long time. But now is an opportunity to trade in that understanding which you have outgrown. Now is the perfect chance to build something tangible and concrete for exploitation and monetization. And the good news is, you have evolved as a person and a professional. You've proven to yourself and others many times over, that you are, in fact, amazing. You are a master of creation, connection and contentment. You can do anything. The brand you've built for yourself is undeniable. Considering all of your experience, talents, skills, resources, tools and wisdom, you have never been more equipped to productize something to its fullest extent. Just look at your life situation. You're healthy, wealthy, happy, fulfilled, employed, inspired, supported, strong and connected. Come on. How many people in the world can say that and really mean it? That's what you would call a profound position of strength. There's no better time to try something new. Fear is the response to threat, and greed is the response to opportunity. Fear seeks to preserve an asset, and greed seeks to expand it. And you have the privilege of choosing greed right now. If it's true that ideas are free, execution is priceless, then it's time get your money's worth.

***What is it finally time for you to try?***

December 10

## **How can you become successful before you're successful?**

At the outset of any project, entrepreneurs are urged to set smart, measurable, achievable and relevant goals. They must consider how they're going to measure their results when it's all said and done. If they can't answer that simple question of how they you know when they're successful, it means their problem is not properly defined. The project is doomed from the start. The flaw in this approach is, it assumes that success is a single, fixed endpoint. But that's not how life works. Success isn't a final destination; it's a continuing process of actualizing your human potential. Success is a series of small wins. Each of which builds your confidence, blesses you with the experience of meaning, reminds you how much you've grown, and deepens your reservoir of resilience. The real question people should be asking themselves is, how can you become successful before you're successful? Say your project is to build and launch a new software platform. You don't have to wait to feel successful once you hit the thousand-user mark. Or even the hundred-user mark. Hell, the moment you had your epiphany and listened to your intuition about what wanted to be created, you were successful. The day you started a blank document for your new project, you were successful. The night you stayed up well past your bedtime because you couldn't stop your fingers from typing your every thought about this idea, you were successful. The first time you shared a working prototype with your spouse and a few friends and they cheered you on, you were successful. It all counts. Everything is a victory. Any time you sit down to work on a project, you've already won. Any time your decisions are based on your vision of life that represents your highest values, that's a success. The fact that you're moving forward toward the realization of your dreams is enough of a victory put up another point in the 'W' column. Period. Nobody can take that away from you. Sure, getting the brand awareness, site traffic, press coverage, paying users and recurring revenue would be wonderful milestones too. And if the software gods are so inclined to bestow that success upon you, so be it. But that's just icing on the creative cake. Today, your goal is to become successful before you're successful. From the inside. That way, by the time something comes along from the outside that more traditionally symbolizes success, you'll be all stocked up. Remember, entrepreneurship is an infinite game. You're not playing to win; you're playing to keep the game going.

*If your perception of success were changed, what would you attempt to achieve?*

December 11

## **Why should customers care that we exist?**

Humility, which is the acknowledgement of our relative insignificance, is something we learn very quickly in the business world. Because all companies project their brand biographies onto the marketplace. We assume that our customer's objective is the same as ours. But the cruel bite of reality rudely awakens us with the following insight. It might be our full time job to sell our products, it's nobody's full time job to buy them. In fact, customers are only becoming more and more indifferent to our brands with each passing quarter. They are not particularly interested in how much time something took to build, or why it is better than the competition. Industry trends, data points, social missions, number of years in business, none of these masturbatory abstractions are creating any value for them. The only thing that matters is that the product serves their needs, right now. Reminds me of a publishing agent friend of mine. Every time he worked out of his neighborhood coffee shop, authors would sidle up and pester him about their mediocre book manuscripts. Matt said it was draining and boring, so he ordered a custom printed laptop skin that simply read, so what? That way, anytime authors lost his interest, he could simply point to the sticker. Reminding people that the customer's only real question is, why should I care? It's a primer of humility is a necessary step in any sales and marketing process. And if we are going to shepherd people through their journey to becoming our customers, making that empathetic leap as early and as often as possible will pay dividends down the line.

*Do all of your beautiful, award winning marketing materials actually influence customer decisions?*



December 12

## **Wow, there might be something to this.**

Back in the twenties, having tan skin was a sign of poverty. That was for the working class. Only rich people had the powdery, porcelain look that was luxurious and glamorous, as if they had never spent a day out in the sun. But that longstanding trend changed in a single weekend. Chanel herself, the entrepreneur who would go on to revolutionize the fashion industry and liberate women from the shackles of their corseted silhouettes, got herself a sunburn on a yacht trip. Her skin turned to that undesirable bronze color, and she was mortified. But to her surprise, once she had returned home, everyone loved the new look. Wow, she thought to herself, there might be something to this new tanning thing. Sure enough, her sun kissed look birthed the beginning of a trend that hasn't stopped rolling ever since. Chanel didn't just launch a fad; she inspired an entire industry to emerge. Tanning is now a five billion per year industry, providing a foundation, no pun intended, for over twenty thousand small businesses worldwide. Lesson learned: don't be so quick to back away from perceived negatives, weaknesses and limits. Often times, what you think is working against you might end up being a core strength. As long as you leverage it strategically. Deficiencies can become tactical advantages. You just have to commit to it and own it and see how far you can take it. The first ten years of wearing a nametag everyday invited a tsunami of scorn, discomfort and humiliation from around the world. Despite being nothing but a goddamn sticker with my name on it, people sent hate mail and started fights and said awful things about me. And it really hurt my feelings. But it also strengthened my commitment. Part of me thought, so these people think wearing a nametag everyday crazy? Well then, the adhesive on my label just got sticker. It's definitely not coming off now. Kiss my ass. That's the beauty of negatives, weaknesses and limits. If you push them far enough, they can come back around and become memorable. You just have to stick around long enough for the pendulum to swing back in your direction.

***Do you have a poor understanding of your own strengths and weaknesses?***

December 13

## **A new creative drive from a sense of okayness.**

Refueling is a tool in personal creativity management that didn't come until later in my life. The definition of this term is setting an intention for how you want to experience life and doing your best to thread that through creative endeavors. Doing so helps you tap into ambition from a place of security within yourself, building a new set of contexts and motivations from which to approach your work. Here's a case study, with examples from my own career. Comparing my twenties to my thirties. Instead of trying to escape or conquer life, I'm now trying to embrace and enjoy it. Instead of feeling obsessed by compulsions that lead me to abuse myself, I'm now feeling compelled by compassion that leads me to love myself. Instead of proving myself to earn attention, applause, approval, I'm now expressing myself to create, connect and contribute. Instead of feeling pulled by social expectation, I'm now feeling pushed by inner necessity. Instead of draining myself by operating from a place of fear, I'm now energizing myself by coming from a place of abundance. Clearly, the main difference here is joy. My motivation is the emotional expression of the courageous yes to my own true being. This new drive comes from a place of okayness within myself. How did it get there? It's hard to tell. Maybe through the simple passage of time. Maybe through doing lots of work on myself. Maybe it was there all along, but buried underneath thousands of layers of naiveté, hubris and chocolate. It doesn't matter. Lesson learned, if you want to evolve into the next version of yourself and find new arenas of fulfillment through life projects, find a new intention.

*When was the last time you refueled?*

December 14

## **Kiss my ass, guys; you're on your own.**

In my work as both an entrepreneur and employee, I've contracted and collaborated with hundreds of designers and illustrators. They've all been amazing artists and partners. Each one of them has helped me fill in my skills gap when I surpassed the perimeter of my competence. With their support, my projects have grown light years beyond what could have been possible on my own. What's more, they've also trained me how to think and act like a designer. Which is not my natural state of mind. To be perfectly candid, drawing gives me anxiety, I'm basically colorblind, and my attention to detail is basically an allergy. Not exactly the ideal skillset for a visual artist. And yet, sometimes, creative professionals have no choice in the matter. Particularly when you work for a startup, where budget is tight and headcount is light. Unless you're a design company, it's unlikely you'll have a staff designer on call to respond to your every visual request. Even if you do, that person is probably expensive and in high demand. More than likely, you will have to solve design problems on your own. Reminds me of a job where our startup actually did have our own in-house graphic designer. Rachel was a wonderful collaborator for our marketing team. She always made our ideas beautiful. But she ultimately resigned to start her own company, as brilliant people are want to do. And sadly, the founders didn't plan on hiring another artist after she left, as the economy was in the shitter and we couldn't afford to rehire for that role. As they say in the military, kiss my ass, guys; you're on your own. This is when the personal creativity management system becomes powerful. Because if you have no choice but to execute tasks that are outside of your skillset, you're going to need tools that make sure you're not starting from scratch. One approach in particular is called minimum viable knowledge, aka, the lowest amount of information you need to know about a subject to operate effectively. This constraint is wildly effective in small businesses, where team members don't always have deep expertise in the task they need to do. In which case, they need to figure it out on their own. It's the combination of curiosity, grit and patience, and it pays dividends individually and organizationally. Back to my graphic designer problem from before. Once our illustrator was gone, it quickly became my new job responsibility to execute a lot of sales and marketing collateral. Which frustrated and intimidated me initially, since words are more my thing, not images. But once I started fooling around on my computer, it wasn't so bad. We had plenty of design templates to work from, there were infinite tutorials online, and there was no need to perfectly hit the bullseye on every single detail. And so, I used the spirit of enterprise to compensate for my lack of expertise. My minimum viable design knowledge turned out to be much less than I thought. I didn't actually need to achieve mastery in image and video editing software, I just needed to leverage technology to greater add substance to design solutions. Are you stressing out trying to master every detail? If so, consider introducing the constraint of less than complete information. See if your judgment and perspective give you enough momentum to

overcome your lack of technical skills. You might discover that you're not as screwed as you think you are.

*What parts of your creative repertoire will you tap into when life gives you no choice?*

December 15

## **You can't help but create real and lasting value.**

There are certain employees who possess a unique set of qualities that make them extremely rare and valuable. They can't help contributing all over the place, making a difference in many parts of the company. Some startups jokingly call these people unicorns, with their mythical qualities to bring joy and magic to those in their presence. But that's just a name. Without the executional force backing it up, there's no value. Rango, my favorite cartoon chameleon who found himself in the grip of an identity crisis, comes to mind. His spirit guide gives him some great advice. These days, they've got a name for just about everything, but it doesn't matter what they call you, it's the deeds that make the man. Any of us can have this kind of impact at our organizations, even if the people we work with don't call us unicorns. Here's an example from my career. After outgrowing my origins as an entrepreneur, the corporate world came calling for me. Or maybe it was the other way around. Either way, my goal was to start working for companies where I could see myself as a contributing individual holistically. Job titles didn't mean squat, it was all about creating the opportunity to create value in new and exciting ways. An innovation studio hired me as their strategist to create marketing ideas for pitching big brands. It was essentially a business development role. Which was fine with me, but it only consumed about thirty percent of my bandwidth. And so, my side project became creating and operationalizing an accelerated strategic framework that the whole team could use with any client. Having spent the previous ten years facilitating marketing workshops with companies around the world, it was the perfect marriage of my skills as a communicator and a creator. As expected, the first few months garnered a lot of weird looks. Other employees and even a few clients looked at me like some sort of madman. Although, to their credit, I was walking around the office wearing an orange jumpsuit and drawing twenty foot tall whiteboard murals. They weren't far off. However, something inside told me to keep my project moving. To follow through on this crazy idea, long after the mood had passed, long after everyone else was bored with it. And to only stop when it stopped working. Over time, though, these thinkmapping sessions led to great results for our clients and notable work for that agency. What started out as a bit of a stunt actually became a communication ritual and winning presentation style that expanded our ability to engage our audience. Fast forward to today, years after my work there is done, that agency still uses my thinkmapping process as part of their service offering. Their website features it as the energizing kickoff phase of their design process that helps jumpstart collective innovation. And that makes me proud. It reminds me that when you only do the things that only you can do, you can't help but create real and lasting value. It doesn't necessarily make you a unicorn, but it does make you unique.

*Are you delusional, or is everybody just not able to see your gifts yet?*

December 16

## **You don't carry lamb carcasses around town without building a few muscles.**

Darwin's premise was that evolution does not favor the strong, only the most adaptable to change. Entrepreneurs are confronted with this reality on a regular basis. Particularly when business is slow. My management consultant friend has spent the past two decades working with organizations around the world, and she said she's been feeling the evolutionary pinch lately. Because historically, her response to an economic downturn was always, okay, let's put the pedal to the metal and rev up the gas. But that approach is no longer working like it used to. Her phone isn't ringing off the hook like it did ten, five, even two years ago. And so, the question she's forced to ask herself is. What happens when you run out of fuel? What happens when your tank empties and you're coasting on fumes just to get from point a to point b? Eventually, you have to adapt. You have to either switch lanes, switch vehicles, switch races, or hang up your keys and stop driving all together and find some other way to create value for the world and satisfaction for yourself. Reminds me of an inspiring obituary of a legendary innovator. Ratcliff toiled in anonymity as a ghostwriter in the personal finance industry until the sixties, when she surprised everyone and left the world of publishing to start a small farm. When she first arrived on the scene, she started to recognize that farming was a dying industry, noticing that farmers were being forced to sell their livestock at low auction prices. Lydia soon decided to launch a coop that organized local farmers to raise their animals humanely. Before long, she created a working farm that marketed her meats to some of the top restaurants in the area. She began delivering whole carcasses herself from slaughterhouses directly to premiere chefs in major markets, making her an early practitioner of sustainable farming and what would become the farm to table movement. Lydia was a strong person, no doubt. You don't carry lamb carcasses around town without building a few muscles. But more importantly, she was adaptable to change. Ratcliff's story of reinvention proves that if you connect the dots between culture, commerce and community, you can find the whitespace, aka, the area where there is latent demand without supply, fill it with your talent and desire, and leave one hell of a mark on the world. Darwin's immortal words come to mind once again. In the long history of humankind, and animal kind, too, those who learned to collaborate and improvise most effectively have prevailed. If your winning strategy is no longer working like it used to, figure out how to maneuver your way to something that works for today's demands, not yesterday's dreams.

*What is the driving force of your career evolution?*

December 17

## **You're not the first person to try to make your company more innovative.**

My retail-consulting friend tells me that at the biggest consumer products company in the world, there is a forty-person innovation department that sits on the same floor as the executive management team. These people are incredibly smart, driven, creative and well paid. They've spent the last three years incubating dozens of retail products within the company's internal innovation lab. But not a single project has been approved. Not even one. The company is so big, that if these innovations don't represent a minimum hundred million dollar market cap, they will never see the light of day. There are simply too many gatekeepers in their way who are going to say no. Sorry team, your idea is not a big enough opportunity. This story is quite sad, but it's not surprising. Because large organizations demand certainty. They're designed to be bad at innovation. They're built to suck at transformational growth. And so, no matter how many creative people are on that innovation team, big ideas for new products will likely be passed over for simple iterations on proven things. There is simply too much bureaucratic sluggishness, too much need for consensus, too much internal pressure, too high of a need to operate efficiently, and of course, too many shareholders to appease. The irony, of course, is that if you know exactly what you're going to build in three years, then the project you're working on can't be innovative. It's one of those chicken egg conundrums. All the more reason to show mad love to the organizations that actually pull it off. All those crazy opportunities that might only bear fruit in the long run, if at all. Sometimes they do work out. But disproportionality, the corporate countryside is littered with the carcasses of smart, creative people who thought they were the first person to try to make their company more innovative. God bless those pagans.

***Do you work on a team that exists to execute, not innovate?***

December 18

## **You've got an ocean of oil under your feet.**

Rumizen writes in her outstanding book on knowledge management that action, or the ability to take action, is what makes knowledge valuable. This is the most important criterion for knowledge within an organization. We not only assess what knowledge we need, but we also imagine what critical capability-owning that knowledge give us. Maybe it allows us to serve clients better. Maybe it helps us do our jobs faster. Maybe it speeds up our learning curve for new employees. Another way of saying it comes from my favorite leverage question. Now that we have this, what else does this make possible? Every startup should ask this question on a regular basis. Especially if that company has been around for more than a few years. Because odds are, there is an ocean of intellectual oil under their feet with nowhere to go. It's simply a matter of where to drill. Geologists know this better than anyone. To locate oil, they used advanced tools like gravity meters, magnetometers, electronic sniffers seismic surveys that send shock waves into the earth, all of which help them find the prospective oil strike. We do the same thing at our companies. We use our more human tools, like intention and attention, to sniff out the reservoirs of genius that are going underleveraged. For instance, one of my coworkers recently struck oil during our process improvement brainstorm. She noticed that our chat platform was the place where team members typically shared a lot of cool, small wins. But the problem is, that knowledge was getting buried in that channel and was never seen or used again. Hannah's idea was to build an internal database of small wins, use cases, mini case studies, tests, experiments, learnings, insights, tools, strategies and other cool successes. Thanks to her, it's not hard to imagine what critical capability owning that knowledge will give us. It's perfect content for sales calls or weekly meetings or even daily communications with clients. And down the road, when that ocean of oil reaches critical mass, perhaps it becomes a proprietary data set our company becomes known for. Plainview, the great fictional petroleum executive, said it best at the height of his career. If I say I'm an oilman, you will agree. Now, you have a great chance here, but bear in mind, you can lose it all if you're not careful. Out of all men who beg for a chance to drill your lots, maybe one in twenty will be oilmen; the rest will be speculators. But you have to act quickly, because very soon these fields will be dry. If you're thinking about drilling down into the source rock of your organization, focus on how that knowledge will increase your ability to take action.

*Now that you have this, what else does this make possible?*



December 19

## Using creativity to catapult yourself out of depression.

Years ago I tuned into an interview on public radio with an award-winning novelist. She said something powerful that has stuck with me to this day. Modern writers are afraid of their imaginations. That resonated with me on a cellular level, as I was feeling quite depressed at the time. Maybe that was the problem, I thought to myself. Maybe you need to revisit your original nametag idea and try thinking about it from a completely different angle. After all, people are always asking me if my goal is to get the whole world to wear nametags, and my answer is always no. But what if it wasn't? What if everyone in the world really did have to wear nametags? How would daily life be different on this plane if we changed just one rule in the universe? My car couldn't have turned around faster. I sped back home, bounded into my office and did something completely uncharacteristic of my personality. I started a spreadsheet. As you can guess, spreadsheets are not my default canvas for ordering my thoughts. More of a blank document kind of guy. But that was the whole point. My brain's patterns needed to be disrupted in order to unlock new energy. My ideas needed a new format to be fleshed out properly. In this scenario, a spreadsheet was the ideal way to take ten years of research and compartmentalize the many societal implications of everybody wearing nametags everyday, ascending in order of magnitude. What's the interpersonal upside? What problems do nametags solve for people? What new value would that make available to society as a result? What are the broader, downstream economic and cultural implications of wearing nametags? Here's an excerpt the sheet. If everybody wears nametags, cultural understanding spreads. Because as humans, we tend to avoid what we don't understand. But knowing the name of someone, especially from another ethnicity, race or culture, not only brings us closer to them, but also makes us more understanding of who they are as a person. It's an unmasking. And because diversity is respecting people's right to be, while honoring that same right in ourselves, nametags bridge connections across different cultures. Now it's harder to treat people with disrespect. No more hatred, no more judgments and no more bigotry. That spreadsheet slowly filled up over the course of the next few days. You couldn't have pried me away from my desk with a crowbar. I could tell right away that this new project, whatever the heck it was, was a newfound source of energy. One that could be leveraged to get me out of my funk. Over the next month, that spreadsheet turned into what would become my official nametag manifesto. Every artist should have a manifesto, right? Unabomber, eat your heart out. Once the content was properly illustrated and edited, I published it on a content sharing community. And it was quickly awarded as the presentation of the day. The manifesto went some version of viral, receiving eighty thousand views in the first week. I even got an email from a college professor who started using the manifesto as part of the curriculum of his ethics class. Pretty cool. If you're struggling to find a new project to look forward to,

maybe you need a new productive obsession. Something in which you can overcome the fear of your own imagination.

*How could you create an existence with more resistance?*

December 20

## **You're here for me; I'm here for me, and nobody's here for you.**

Rubin, the former record executive turned legendary producer and guru, tells his musicians that the audience comes last. If you're lowering yourself to making what you think they want, then you're not reaching what's highest in yourself. It's an inspiring insight, but the question is, how applicable is this strategy? Can we, as artists, reasonably afford to give the audience our best, rather than what they want? My theory is, it all depends on where we are in our career. Because if we've already put in the proverbial ten thousand hours and made a name for ourselves and reached some level of contentment along our artistic journey, then we can probably get away with putting the audience last. Carlin epitomized this when he would come right out on stage and tell his fans, you're here for me; I'm here for me, and nobody's here for you. And people loved it. They just ate it up. Carlin's productive selfishness didn't require explanation. Keep in mind, though, he was in his fifties at the time. With a huge track record of success behind him. George was in the privileged position where by giving himself what he wanted, he could give the audience a great experience. Whereas if a new comedian that nobody had ever heard of came along and made that same remark to his audience, he would've been booed off the stage, shamed on the internet, and excommunicated from the tribe forever. Meaning, if you're early in your career, still looking to find your breakout moment, then creating art solely for you might be an uphill battle. Without giving your audience some kind of handle, something they can latch onto because it reminds them of something else, then it might take longer for your work catch on, and you may be tempted to give up early out of frustration or impatience. My first book was one hundred pages about a guy who wore a nametag every day to make the world a friendlier place. Not exactly a strong value proposition that matched the marketplace need. Despite my stroke of luck going viral with the idea, people still didn't quite know what to do with it. It was mostly just headline fodder. Yes, my first book launched my brand because it was something I wanted to do solely for me, but it wasn't something that other people wanted to consume. Nobody jumps out of bed in the morning thinking to themselves, you know, maybe it's time to buy a book about how to make the world friendlier. It's no wonder I had to give away three thousand copies of the damn thing. My second book, however, was about approachability. How to become a more engaging communicator, one conversation at a time. That title crushed it. Sold thousands of copies almost immediately. Because it was aligned with what audience wanted, rather than just me jerking myself off. It was a valuable lesson in the creative process, in terms of the intention with which an artist makes things. Both of those books were invaluable to my business in different ways. If you're not sure which approach will get the most traction for you, think about where you sit along your career trajectory. Timing isn't everything; it's the only thing.

*Have you earned the right to ignore your audience yet?*

December 21

## **Your idea is not any good unless it's on the verge of being bad.**

The thing about creativity is, there's a very fine line between ingenious and idiotic. Here's a fun exercise you can do with your friends. Think back to any of the advertisements, product names and marketing messages you encountered in the last day. Now ask yourself this question. Was that an organically built, compelling, value driven idea that was brilliantly executed; or was it just another hackneyed, over engineered piece of crap affectation created by committee? The funny thing is, it seems like it's becoming harder and harder to tell the difference. This became clear to me while inventing three hundred ideas for my product development and innovation card game. Many of the items were clearly jokes. There's simply no way any company in its right mind would manufacture such a product. Let me give you an example. When you live in a city, there is no way to stop homeless people from peeing in your doorway. But there is a way to make sure they only do it once. Scorch is my innovative product idea for an odor activated wall sprinkler that detects the scent of urine and emits a powerful blast of pepper spray to repel its owner. Now those public uriners think twice about dropping trough at your front door. Scorch proves that there's no pees for the wicked. That idea is idiotic and insensitive. You could really hurt someone. Then again, it would most definitely solve your problem. Not to mention, taste great on steak. Who's to say? Here's another one. Back scratchers are helpful, but you can never find one when you need it most. And if young children get ahold of them, they might become dangerous. Frictional is my idea for a line of textured wall finishes that guarantees people will always scratch that pesky itch on their backs that they can't normally reach. They're safer and more satisfying than your run of the mill plastic tool. And you'll never lose them. Deck the walls of all your halls, at home or at work. Frictional is a scratch made in heaven. Tell me that's not ingenious. My product would fly off the shelves at every domestic merchandise store in the nation. Think how many lonely, single people don't have a loved one to scratch their backs. Then again, this product would train millions of people around the world to treat themselves like barnyard animals. Who's to say? To quote the great comedian, these are the ideas that kept me out of the really good schools. Anyway, this proves my point that ingenious and idiotic aren't that far apart. Your idea is not any good unless it's on the verge of being bad.

***Is your idea complete bullshit, or the next best thing?***

December 22

## **All you really have to do is finish.**

My eleventh grade literature teacher gave our class a final assignment that would change my creative life forever. We were told to make a capstone project around characters from the classic novels we read during the semester. And the only rule was, just do something creative that expresses your feelings, thoughts and learnings from the books. My idea was to write a song. Each verse would tell the story of a particular character, the chorus would reinforce the common thread between those characters, the bridge would prepare the listener for the climax, and the final chorus would bring it all home. The song took a week to write and another few days to rehearse. The process was exciting and engaging and challenging. Of course, that was all inside my own head. When final exam day came, things were about to get very real very fast. The entire leading up to fifth period, my insides were a mess. Ruminating about all the things that could go wrong, imagining how ridiculous that song was going to make me look, my anxiety was at an all time high. When the bell rang, we took our seats. And our teacher looked around and asked who wanted to go first. Not a single hand went up. The class went silent for a good ten seconds. But for some reason, some part of me decided to say, oh fuck it, let's just get this over with. Here we go. Five minutes later, drenched head to toe in sweat, the last chord of the song was played. And looking up from my guitar, I watched thirty of my classmates give me a standing ovation. I actually started crying. Overwhelmed with pride and joy, I had never felt so artistic, brave and seen. When the applause died down, our teacher looked around the room, and with textbook comedic timing, she chuckled, so, who wants to go next? My creative life has never been the same since. Something inside of me changed that day, for better, and for always. That afternoon was my artistic moment of conception. And today, reflecting on the last twenty years of my creative journey, here's my insight. When you're seventeen, writing and performing a song in front of your entire class, about fictional characters from books that most students probably didn't even read, is such a terrifying, vulnerable, courageous and socially risky act, that all you really have to do is finish. And you'll blow everybody away. Including yourself. Because in that formative moment, the work you do doesn't have to be good, it doesn't have to be right or smart or even interesting. It just has to be yours. You just have to stick yourself out there and own the moment.

***What dream in you that serves or helps other would cause you deep regret if you never took the risk to go for it?***

December 23

## **Trusting the process to lead and teach you.**

The transition from creation to discovery is what fuels innovation. Instead of sitting down with form already in mind, we arrive at the page, the canvas or even our office, trusting that the sculpture is already inside the stone, knowing that our job as the worker is to simply chip away. Instead of attaching ourselves to a particular approach, we commit to an unknown process, thinking less and emerging more, allowing everything to come out from the center of us, as opposed to blindly throwing spaghetti against a predetermined wall. And instead of our tendency to drive toward closure, we consciously make more time for ideas to germinate than is comfortable, sitting with their namelessness, slowly waking up to what is true about ourselves, our customers and the world in which we live. The cool part is, while discovery takes longer, requires more uncertainty, and asks us to be more patient and vulnerable than we're used to, the work that results is truer, better and bolder. Apple's approach to innovation derived from its founder's personal philosophy about discovery. Jobs famously said that customers don't know what they want until you show it to them. He said he never relied on market research, and believed that his team's task was to read things that were not yet on the page. That's the discovery. Because the nature of innovation is, it's an unexplored cave. It's the thrill of the hunt. Every creative endeavor begins by announcing to yourself and your team, okay everyone, now we're going to do something we've never done before. In short, you don't know what you're looking for until you find it. You don't know where you're going until you get there. Now, this might sound like a zen koan that a guru in a robe delivers to his students on mountaintop. It's frustrating as hell and can make your brain cramp. But it's exactly what innovating feels like. You have to trust the process to lead and teach you. What's more, you have to reassure all the people on your team, who may not even be able to conceptualize your idea in its nascent state, that it's still worth pursuing. It might not work, but it also might change everything. You never know until you start. Inception, the best film about innovation ever made, portrays a thief with the rare ability to enter people's dreams and steal their secrets from their subconscious. Nolan's film shows a form of innovation that is hard to achieve, but possible nonetheless. Here's the thief's speech from a memorable scene. They say we only use a fraction of the true potential of our brains. But they're talking about when we're awake. While we dream, the mind performs wonders. How do you imagine a building? You consciously create each aspect, puzzling over it in stages. But sometimes, when your imagination flies, you're discovering it. Genuine inspiration. And in a dream, your mind consciously does that. It creates and perceives a world simultaneously, so well, that you don't feel your brain doing the creating. Have you ever been doing your work and felt that way? It's deeply euphoric. What's more, it's dammed profitable. Organizations that are willing to transition from simply creating to really discovering, their innovations end up changing the world. Remember, when your job is to do things that haven't been done before, don't be surprised when you're surprised.

*How is your team trusting the process to lead and teach you?*

December 24

## **How sweet it is to be mugged by you.**

At the age of twenty-three, I had the audacious goal of writing a two hundred page business book about workplace communication. And my biggest roadblock as a young author was a complete and utter lack of any real world business experience. Apparently working for six weeks a bartender and getting fired for accidentally dropping shards of glass in the ice bin didn't count as relevant work experience. But as my mentor taught me, never let a little something like not knowing anything stand in your way of getting the project done. That's when the personal creativity management tool of reverse engineering strategy came into play. Turns out, anyone can find thousands upon thousands of studies, surveys and assessments that actual organizations use when evaluating how effectively their leaders and employees communicate in the workplace. Which means if you're writing a book on that topic, all you have to do is skip ahead to the answer key, look for patterns among the language, separate the insights into five or so categories, convert those ideas into actionable behaviors, and then pretend like it's the life philosophy you've already been practicing your whole life. It worked like a charm. Audiences slowly stopped questioning my expertise and simply assumed that my books were drawn from real life experience. Because people see what they need to see. Ultimately, that strategy resulted in my highest selling and most critically acclaimed book. To paraphrase my favorite folk songwriter, how sweet it is to be mugged by you. Fast forward to nearly twenty years later, now I actually know all the things that I pretended to be an expert about back then.

*What could you reverse engineer for your own benefit?*

December 25

## **Zippering down the road at top speed.**

What happens if you press the brake and the accelerator at the same time? For one, you might damage the automatic transmission's torque converter. You may also overheat and degrade the transmission fluid. Or spin your wheels and generate smoke like a racer about to launch. Then again, the engine might stall, or the car might not even move. But most likely, if your car is a more recent model, the manufacturer will have installed an override system that disables the throttle and cuts power to the wheels if the brake and gas pedals are depressed at the same time. Proving, there is zero benefit to pressing both pedals at the same time. And yet, in our creative lives, we do this every day. We sit down to make something new, but right as we lock into the groove of our creative flow, we cast our critical eye on everything we generate. This idea sucks, this design won't work, nobody on the team will use this thing, our clients will roll their eyes, and so on. It's the psychological version of pumping the brakes, while still attempting to accelerate. And it doesn't work. Doing so wilts and deadens our desire to make things and destroys our momentum. No wonder so few people ever ship anything. The lie they tell themselves is, if they criticize, they will be in control. But creativity is about surrendering. Losing ourselves. Letting that glorious vehicle zip down the road at top speed, enjoying the ride, and hopefully finding something useful when we arrive. That inner critical voice is quite helpful down the road, but not while we're still in third gear, gaining speed and building momentum and channeling our creative fuel in the service of arriving somewhere great. Look, most of us look for every reason to criticize ourselves to help keep the monster inside our heads alive. But if we can grow into the sort of people who can put criticism in its place, then our work will have the best chance to become what it needs to be. Whatever road you're traveling on, trust that it's best not to drive with one foot on the gas and one foot on the break. Let yourself flow for a bit before your critical eye comes crashing in. And you won't worry about winning the game of creativity, because you'll be having so much fun playing it.

*What process do you need to surrender to?*



December 26

## **Treat your dreams as starting places, not destinations.**

Dreams in and of themselves are meaningful, but only to the extent that we know why we have them in the first. That's the cleanest and truest fuel that drives us to move our story forward. Without it, we're just postponing our happiness until some imagined moment in the future when everything is just right. Except that time never comes. Just when we get there, there disappears. Think about how many people have seen their dreams come true, only to discover that it wasn't what they envisioned. Think about how many people have accomplished their goal, only to realize that it didn't live up to their hopes and hypes. All of a sudden, their heart is broken for no apparent reason. If we want to insure against the inevitable and crushing disappointment of being human, we have to treat our dreams more as starting places, not destinations. Because it is the system we follow along the dreaming path that secures our fulfillment. Not some item we wrote down on a list we keep in our wallet. That's the only thing guaranteed to evoke the gravity and joy of life right now. Looking back to the young age of seven, my only goal was to become a writer. Not a famous writer, not a successful writer, not a paid professional writer, not even a good writer. Just a writer. Somebody who made things. This was my special talent. It was highly useful to others and myself. Regardless of the whims and wills and ways of the world, if my ideas were being put on paper, then fulfillment was not far away. If this gift was being used to make a difference in every part of my life, then the destination was irrelevant. And so was the vehicle that carried me there. Who cares where we're going. Can we make stuff along the way? Awesome. Sign me up. What started out as my dream turned into my scheme. A system that guaranteed feelings of fulfillment and satisfaction anytime it was running. As opposed to sitting around with my thumb up my ass, waiting for happiness to drop from the sky. If you find yourself just barely outrunning hopelessness each day, find out what energies are behind your dream. Use them as fuel to get your system up to operating temperature. And every single day, instead of restricting your satisfaction to one specific dream, organize your life in a way that you become satisfied anytime your machine is running.

***How could you structure your time to let go of whether or not your dreams came true?***

December 27

## **An empty shell from defining ourselves by our outside life.**

It's never been easier to lose our center and seek to find it in things outside ourselves. Within seconds of picking up a device, we can desperately grab onto whatever digital anesthesia is available to help us feel more fulfilled and less alone. Isn't that what those perfectly targeted advertisements remind us of? That these objects can fill us up inside and become whatever is missing. The problem is, the half-life of this imitation medication is relatively short. It might work for a few hours, days or even months. But eventually we'll feel a loss of connection with self. The soul will howl in protest as we try to solve the project of meaning by attaching ourselves to one more outer experience in an attempt not to feel so alone and lost. A friend of mine once told me that we should use technology to greatly enhance our lives, but technology should not be our lives. That's a helpful distinction. We can check ourselves by honestly asking the following question. Is this tool meant to enhance my pleasure, or be the source of it? If too many of our answers point toward the latter, that's how we know the tool is a problem. In my songwriting process, for example, tools like streaming music, sound recorders and looping machines enhance my capacity to be inspired and create new music. But when the time comes to perform a concert, it's just me and the guitar. My identity as an artist isn't wrapped up in those digital objects outside myself. The show goes on whether there is internet access or not. Call me a purist, but my relationship with technology supports and enhances my overall experience of creativity. The music comes from within, not without, and that source of power will outlast anything plugged in outside of me. Wooten, the great bass player and music teacher, says that the music is inside of the player, not the instrument. The artist tells their story not with their instrument, but through it. Whether you think of yourself as an artist or not, stay away from reaching for objects outside yourself for a sense of grounding. Create meaningful rituals to help you identify a stable place within.

***If you abandoned the frantic pursuit of an external object of happiness, how might your daily routine change?***

December 28

## **The sweetness of meter and sound harmonize in the language of tragedy.**

My old advertising agency boss had a rule about copywriting for our clients. No rhyming. He told me on my first day, rhyming is corny and lacks credibility with audiences. Our ads can never sound like ditties, limericks or children's songs. No rhyming. Now, from a business strategy perspective, his point was well taken. Jose was the owner of the agency, and he knew our clients better than anyone. It was also my first day on the job. And he may not always be right, but he's always the boss. But his rule against rhyming always bothered me. Partly because I'm a songwriter and lyricist, and it's hard for me not to rhyme. It's just the way my brain has been trained. Everything is a song to me. But more importantly, from a communication standpoint, rhyming has been scientifically proven to work. Humans naturally pursue, learn from and enjoy patterns. Rhymes are easy to read, understand and can profoundly influence the way people think. Aristotle himself wrote, the sweetness of meter and sound harmony in the language of tragedy, specifically in its sung portions, is one of the reasons why we can take pleasure from it. It's funny, though. Some people are basically allergic to similar sounding words. What's behind that? One reason is that they're afraid rhymes will make dubious notions sound more believable. Smooth phrasing will lull people into assent immorally. The most commonly quoted example in popular culture being, if the glove fits, you must acquit. In that trial, despite a lack of evidence, rhyming allowed the beauty of the defense attorney's phrase to validate its truthfulness, even if it was false. It's the rhyme as reason phenomenon. Audiences perceive rhyming phrases as being more accurate descriptions of human behavior. And so, there is a certain level of distrust around rhyming that is valid. Rhyming, like any tool, could be weaponized as a psychological bias and tool for evil. But that doesn't mean it's not a powerful tool. If our job as creators is to communicate our ideas, then we should tap into the natural human tendency to prefer the rhyme as a pleasurable aesthetic. There's one group of cognitive psychologists who recently researched the hypothesis around rhyming. They believed meter and rhyme had an impact on aesthetic liking, emotional involvement and positive affect. In the study, participants listened to stanzas that were systematically modified with regard to meter and rhyme and rated them. Both rhyme and meter significantly influenced liking, intensity, perceived emotion, with rhyming stanzas leading to a more positive emotional evaluation. They also discovered that besides the potential effect on aesthetic experience, rhymes also claimed to influence recall and comprehension of the words themselves. How effectively do you use rhyming in your work? Personally, I do it all the time. Not only in my songs, but also on this very software platform as well. One article on the importance of conscientiousness states, if it's going to be painful either way, then why delay? Another piece on the creative person's struggle with loneliness and depression says, when you're feeling blue, you don't need more you. Then there's the post on writer's block that lovingly reminds you, if there comes a day when you have nothing to say, that's okay. And let's not forget my favorite zen productivity

mantra, the right choice is the one you make, the right path is the one you take. Hell, most of the fake inventions on my product development and innovation card game have rhyming taglines. It not only works, but it's fun. How else are writers supposed to stay sane during the day? Look, it may have been a long time since most of us were kids. But lest we forget, there's a good reason nursery rhymes are used for brain development. Because they work. Repetition of rhymes is good for the brain. They help kids with speech development, reading comprehension, language assimilation, creativity development, culture preservation, coordination improvement and humor. My suggestion is, if you have a message you want to convey, rhyming isn't something from which to run away.

*Do you believe rhyming makes dubious notions sound more believable, or makes people remember your ideas?*

December 29

## **Another graying prince of a shrinking kingdom.**

Ten years is the new fifteen minutes. Internet lightning in a bottle, strategically milked, can launch an entire career. We've seen it happen a thousand times, and we idealize and romanticize it every time it does. But we never think about what happens on the other side of that story. We forget that only a certain type of creature can live in the spotlight for so long. And they either shine or burn. Kobe talks about this very issue in his gorgeous love letter to basketball, which later became an award winning animated film. He writes that he never saw the end of the tunnel, he only saw himself running out of one. It's a cryptic allusion to some seriously dark and heavy themes, namely, time and death. That's what retirement feels like. In the absence of future opportunity and forward motion, we are confronted with the piercing grief of losing that core part of our identity. Having gone through a retirement of sorts myself, there are some key questions that come to mind. One that most people are afraid to confront. What happens when your fifteen minutes are almost over? What if the market shows that your golden goose is about to stop laying eggs? What happens when the trade on your fame loses most of its zeros? What if it's time to make peace with the fact that you had your moment, but now it's time to walk away? And what if life is whispering to you that it's time to quietly fade away and figure out something else to do? Roman generals expertly insulated themselves against this trap. While standing alone in their chariots, they would always have one servant who stood behind them throughout the tumultuous procession whispering, all fame is fleeting, all men are mortals. It's a crushing blow to our ego, and it's entirely necessary. Because without somebody whispering that over our shoulders, our egos will continue to try and convince us that nothing will help and nobody will understand. When the reality is, fulfillment depends on our willingness to look beyond the illusion the ego has created. The reality is, without all that fame, we still can be loved. First and foremost, by ourselves. Take from a graying prince of a shrinking kingdom. If you can find a way move away from the spotlight and work quietly, and still build your fountain of fulfillment from within, then you win.

*What if you weren't made for this scene, even though you were made in this scene?*

December 30

## **Get out of the inventory business and into the equity business.**

Sotheby's auction house reports that the most expensive paperweight in history was sold in the early nineties for nearly three hundred thousand dollars. The millefiori object is a decorated as a basket of flowers, and was originally produced back the eighteen hundreds by a famous glass factory. Now it sits on some millionaire's desk, gathering dust. This obscure piece of trivia is a perfect illustration of what can happen when we don't invest our time, energy and money wisely. We've all made this mistake before. Perhaps there is some object in our office, like a piece of equipment we bought or a prototype we produced, that required a large investment at its initial purchase, but is now unable to serve its intended purpose, except as a display item. It's the reason we have the trope affectionately called, the expensive paperweight. Authors are often guilty in this regard. We pour our heart and soul into writing our tome that nobody notices, buys, reads or cares about. And it just sits there. Collecting dust. Like an artifact of our literary failure. Laughing at us with every passing day. Wow, you spent thousands of dollars printing copies of this piece of crap, and for what? Because you like the décor of cardboard boxes? The number of times that exact scene happened in my career is downright embarrassing. We're talking entire closets worth of boxes. Basement storage units stacked with pallets of thousands of unsold books. Apparently nobody told me that being an author was a dumb way to make a living. Most writers end up freezing their assets in the form of excess inventory. Hoping and praying for the fateful day when some vice president at a huge company decides to buy a copy for all of their employees. That big purchase rarely happens. No wonder many of my books ended up on the dollar table at used book fairs. Lesson learned: don't spend your money on inventory; invest your money in equity. There's big difference between those two approaches, and honestly, it didn't occur to me until my early forties. Inventory is the physical goods and materials your business stocks for the ultimate goal of resale. Equity is ownership in an asset that grows in value daily and actually generates cash without your direct involvement. Which would you rather have? Have you ever purchased an expensive piece of technology that quickly became a paperweight? Have you ever invested thousands of dollars creating something that ultimately became a doorstop? Don't make the mistake too many businesspeople make, myself included. Get out of the inventory business and into the equity business. Stop exchanging time for money. Build automated assets. Tap into the profound power of compound interest. The world doesn't need another expensive paperweight.

*Are you still spending your most valuable resource to get something that isn't everything?*

December 31

## **Hardness may be true, but it's ultimately irrelevant.**

If your most common reason for not doing something is because it's hard, then you're setting yourself for a lifetime of dissatisfaction. Because everything is hard. Getting out of bed is hard. Going to work is hard. Being a good friend is hard. Eating healthy is hard. Staying married is hard. Living in a corrupt and immoral world is hard. Maintaining your sanity while everyone around you is losing their shit is hard. It's all hard. That which comes easy is unnoticeable and under appreciated. And the things we don't work for are but temporary affairs that pass quickly from the mind like storm clouds. Only the things that are hard to come by make us better. Only through the process of accepting and appreciating the extremely unpleasant but unavoidable is how we grow. And so, hardness may be true, but it's ultimately irrelevant. We can't allow this absurd reality to be the thing that continually knocks us out of the game. We've got to be stronger than that story. My yoga teacher used to say that the postures should be hard enough to make you stretch, but not hard enough to make you snap. That feels like a healthy balance. Now, if you're someone who isn't consistently able to do hard things, here's a tool that might help you. It's called forging, which is where you motivate your creativity by forcing yourself to overcome unpleasant but unavoidable challenges. My comedian friend, who performs at open mics almost every night of the week, turns forging into a game. His personal challenge for improving his comedy is, he tries to throw himself off a cliff once a night. Danny always has one joke, one moment, one movement or one expression that seems hard and terrifies him. Because it's risky. It's dancing on the edge of danger. The bit might bomb. Sometimes his joke might even be physically hard to pull off, based on his clothing, the type of microphone, the size of the stage, or the demographic of the audience. The club owner might ask him never to come back. But the reward is, the comic gets to feel like he's creating in a risky way. Forging is how he develops new ways of responding to things that scare him. What's your version of that? My recommendation is to practice forging at least three times a week. Even if only for a brief moment in each instance, it's a muscle worth building. The more you forge, the more you stretch your creativity, the more you're able to do things when you don't feel like doing them, and the more you will experience the satisfaction of achieving things that are hard to come by. Remember, everything is hard. But while hardness might be true, it's ultimately irrelevant. Don't let that be the reason you don't do something. Be bigger than that story and forge your way ahead.

*Are you developing new ways of responding to hard things that scare you?*

## About the Author



The founder of PCM is Scott Ginsberg, a TEDx speaker, internationally acclaimed author of 50 books, 10 albums, 3 music films, and numerous other creative works. He's been featured on CNN, MSNBC, The Today Show, NPR, Fast Company, COSMO, 20/20, WSJ and Entrepreneur and USA Today.

Scott has spent 20+ years executing award winning sticky ideas for himself, his clients and his employers. Scott is also the world record holder of wearing nametags.

Scott believes unequivocally that the methodology of personal creativity management will convincingly add new and important results to the field. His system will demonstrate that trying to innovate by the seat of your pants, constantly making things up as you go, isn't sustainable or scalable, for individuals or organizations.

Scott has done no clinical research. No peer reviewed scientific studies have been published in any academic journals. He is not a tenured professor with an acronym after his last name.

Just a prolific guy who has spent his life making things.

Learn more about his work at [www.nametagscott.com](http://www.nametagscott.com).



# Index: The Tools of Personal Creativity Management

At the heart of any new discipline, there often lies a simple underlying structure.

Prolific, our software as a service platform, was purpose built to give you more leverage with a comprehensive arsenal. Now you have a solution for every step of the ideation, organization and execution process.

- Each tool in your personal creativity management system may not be transformative in isolation.
- It's the magnitude of having hundreds of mindsets, approaches, behaviors and assets at your fingertips that gives you an unprecedented source of leverage as a creator.
- The more tools you have to work on a problem, the less likely you are to get stuck.
- Understanding this framework will make applying PCM easier. The tools are structured into four colored coded categories. They start strategic and become more tactical as you go down the model.

Whatever unwelcome situation needs to be dealt with and overcome, now you are equipped. Now you can go to work visualizing yourselves as always carrying a tool kit stocked with powerful and useful tools are unstoppable.

Below is a full index of all the tools in our system, by category.

To start using the tools for free, go to [www.getprolific.io](http://www.getprolific.io).

###

## **MINDSETS**

*A fixed disposition that determines responses to situations*

### **Types:**

Assumption: Accepted truth

Attitude: Way of thinking

Awareness: Perception of situation

Belief: Confidence in something

Decision: Resolution after consideration

Filter: Way of seeing reality

Intention: Spiritual aim

Language: System of communication

Lens: Way of interpreting reality

Mantra: Slogan repeated frequently

Meditation: Focusing on thoughts

Narrative: Story to understand situation

Perception: Seeing elements of environment

Permission: Formal consent

Philosophy: System of concepts

Question: Curious expression

**Tools:**

ANIMALISM — Invert the innovation process by leveraging the nonhuman world

ASPIRATIONAL AFFLUENCE — The ritual of reminding ourselves that the world is an extraordinary place where dreams are had and followed.

ATTENTIONAL ABUNDANCE — Building a narrative around mindfulness that supports and enhances your overall experience of fulfillment and calm

AWARENESS PLAN -- A metacognitive procedure or mental recipe for perceiving and thinking about the environment around you, a lens for interacting with the world

COMPARTMENTALIZATION — Make concessions about undesirable work to develop a sustainable relationship with ourselves

CONTEXTING — A filter for relating to reality that determines your creative responses to situations that are different, not just better

CREATIVISM — Philosophy of reinvesting their success into new tools to serve their inventive undertakings

DESIGNATING — Going out of your way to announce to yourself that something mundane is actually paramount

DISPROPORTIONING — Scaling one person's excessive moment of emotion and bring it to the world

DOWNHEADING — Using the placebo power of a focus filter in the face of distractions to get your work done

DOWNSTREAMING — Treating energy as the measurement of how much change might occur in a system

DUAL CITIZENSHIP — Securing a professional work opportunity that finances the rest of your artistic projects

EARLY WARNING SYSTEM — A personal seismograph that helps us take preemptive action against impending inner turmoil and anxiety

END FRAMING — Paint a compelling, detailed picture of the desired future so you can make meaningful strides toward it

EXCURSIONING -- Taking a short mental journey of creative fantasy

FICTIONING — Treating memory as an art form for the purposes of nourishing yourself

FREEDIUM — A permission slip to elevate our own tools

GIFTING — Framing our creative work as a gift of generosity, not an obligation of labor

GREED MODE — Aggressively exploiting opportunities and expanding assets when you're already in a position of strength

HYPERACTIVE LISTENING — Tuning into your creative flow with humility, curiosity and trust to discover what wants to be written

INCOMPLETIONISM — Extracting value without the burden of knowledge

INNOVATION ECONOMICS — Optimizing your creative process for quantity and speed before quality

KNOWLEDGE LEVER — Embracing and exploiting the economic potential of your team's intellectual capital

LIMITATION LANGUAGE -- Building a narrative about your weaknesses that gives you perspective and power

LONG GAMING — The willing to initiate risky projects and be misunderstood for extended periods of time

LUBRICATION — Making personal change easier to swallow by tailoring interventions to your unique context

MEANING MAKING FILTER — Conceptualize creative work through psychological and existential construct of meaning

MEDIUM AGNOSTIC — Instead of forcing our own expectations upon the work, you allow patterns to emerge and open our work to becoming more dimensionalized, in whatever form it needs to live.

MENTAL OMNIVORE — Allowing anything you think and everything you experience to become part of your creative reservoir.

MISFORTUNATION — Reframing aspects of our circumstances that we can view as gifts to be treasured

MOTIVATIONAL ECONOMICS — Either shifting our relationship with pain, or shifting our definition of gain.

NEXTING — Updating the story we tell ourselves about failure and rejection

OFFSPRINGING — Filtering the quality of new ideas by their ability to breed other ideas

OPPORTUNITY AGENDA — The inherent enterprise to notice and manufacture creative opportunities, apply force and propel them into interesting directions.

PASSION INVERSION — The intention of not following your passion, but finding ways to bring it with you everywhere you go

PERCEPTUAL DEMOCRACY — Deep democracy. Treat everything we encounter with fundamental affirmation and radical acceptance.

PERMISSION SLIP — Generating opportunities to express ourselves despite access, audience or affluence

PERMISSIONLESS POSTURE — The enabling of regular expressions of individual personality

POLYAMOROUS CREATION — Pursuing relationships with multiple creative projects, with a full knowledge and consent of all partners involved.

POSITIVITY FILTER — Increasing your field of vision to allow you to better notice the opportunities that lead to success

PUMP UP THE VOLUME — Using the power and practice of persistence to amplify creative performance

REAPPRAISAL — Pinpointing the vehicle of your creative uniqueness through reflective inquiry

RED LIGHTING — Making a different choice about how we experience our creative failures

REDUNDANSEE — Telling yourself a more productive story about your originality

REFUELING — Setting an intention for how you want to experience life and doing your best to thread that through creative endeavors.

REJECTION BUTTON — Responding to setbacks with an optimistic narrative that we can profitably channel

REPACKAGING — Forcing yourself to appraise negative circumstances in a forward thinking way

RESALE VALUE — Thinking of your organization as an asset that appreciates in economic value every day that you show up

SEASONALITY — Aligning yourself with nature's timing of creative inhaling, pausing and exhaling.

SHITSTORMING — Reorienting ourselves in our pain so that we aren't a victim of it

SPIRALING — Growing your creative life in an open ended, upward curve of new possibilities

STAIRCASING — Giving yourself permission to channel complicated emotions into useful results

STOREHOUSING — Exponentially increasing your overall asset of creativity by giving more of it away

SUBORDINATION — Make living a normal life job number one, so your art gets done as a matter of course

TEMPORAL ABUNDANCE — Building a narrative around time that supports and enhances your overall experience of fulfillment and calm

The cash value of the carcassing process is priceless. Have you ever used your creative powers to achieve that kind of result before?

THE WILLIES — Focusing on your capability to do something, rather than you emotion directed toward the attainment of something.

TRACKING — Monitoring our machinery of intuitive thought to figure out the next steps in our tasks

TRAJECTORY — The positive downstream effects of the innovation process, regardless of the outcome

TRIDENTITY— Going back to ground zero of your unique motivational system to start or stop behaviors

UNIQUENESS FILTERING — Focusing on and differentiating your work through the little worlds you investigate to a great, high level, something that fascinates and ignites you

UNRUSHING — Building a narrative around your priorities that supports and enhances an overall experience of fulfillment and calm

UPGRADING — Loving our creative work without relying on interpersonal or organizational approval

UPSHIFTING — Making an intentional transition from peripheral creation to principal creation

UPSIDING — Using the placebo power of an optimism filter during traumatic experiences to get more of what you want

WRITE MIND — Respecting yourself enough document your own ideas

ZOOMING IN — Elevating the power of a small solution by creating an extreme version of it

ZOOMING OUT — Widening your lens to get perspective on the complete picture of your situation

## **APPROACHES**

*A particular procedure for addressing or accomplishing something*

### **Types:**

Algorithm: Finite sequence of steps

Blueprint: Program of action

Boundary: Intentionally indicated limit

Checklist: Things to be done

Constraint: Restricting condition

Equation: Formal statement

Formula: Recipe to follow

Frame: Context setting device

Framework: Conceptual structure

Gauge: Estimation of contents

Hack: Inelegant but effective solution

Heuristic: Aid to learning

Lever: Tool that compels force

Model: Structure for visualization

Process: Series of actions

Strategy: Moves to achieve goal

Structure: Organization of parts

System: Interacting group of items

Technique: Way of achieving ends

Tension: Inner emotional unrest

Trick: Crafty way to get results

Trigger: Activating agent

### **Tools:**

**AGNOSTICISM** — Putting an end to the habitual anticipation of outcomes and listening for what wants to be created instead

**ARTIST ALLOTMENT** — A personal policy for managing compositional paralysis

**ASSOCIATIVE TRIGGER** — Personal patterns and physical objects that echo the habits of action and allow you to enter into your creative zone.

**AUDIENCE BRIDGE** — Keeping customers engaged with your work through the power of surprise

**BACKYARDING** — Stimulating innovative ideas by solving personal problems

**BACON** — A small collection of intrinsic triggers that stoke your creative fire regardless of circumstance

**BASELINING** — Figuring out where you're already been trusted for a history of delivering quality, and use that to your advantage.

**BLOOD GAUGE** — a personal filter for your own work that reinforces the importance of risk.

**BUFFALOING** — An integrative approach to identifying, understanding, exploiting and managing your own talent

**BULLSEYEING** — Reversing the target marketing process where customers aim at you

**CAPITAL CONSTRAINT** -- Using lack of cash as tension to exploit your intellectual capital and entrepreneurial energy in novel ways.

**CATCHALL**— The single high leverage creative activity that facilitates all the others

**CAVING** — Trusting the creative process to lead you toward profitable discoveries

**CLEARINGHOUSE** — A conceptual destination where you can unite all of her interesting elements, intermingling your interests and themes into a meaningful, cohesive whole

**COGNITIVE UNLOADING** — Outsource as many mental tasks as possible to other people, things and processes

**CONSCIOUS CONSUMPTION** — Applying a level discernment to the intellectual nourishment you ingest

**CONTINUUM OF POTENTIAL** — A visual breakdown of the relationship between raw talent versus learned skills

**CONVENIENCE FILTER** — Make it easier to do things by organizing your work in a way that minimizes unnecessary thinking

**CORNERING** — Creating positive predicaments for yourself in which only having a few or no outcomes was a forcing function for the better

**CREATIVE AUDIT** — The process of identifying, assessing and leveraging an organization's knowledge, and the brains behind it

**CREATIVE BOUNDARIES** — Locating your own sense of healthy creative rhythm to avoid passion burnout

**CREATIVE CLOSEOUT** — Taking your surplus intellectual inventories and remarketing them as opportunities



**CREATIVE COMMITMENT** — A theoretical constraint of treating your art as a daily practice, professionalizing your art and using daily momentum to keep yourself from feeling detached from the process.

**CREATIVE PRAGMATISM** — Focusing on the concrete, positive difference art making has in your actual experience of life

**CROP ROTATION** — Regularly changing and invigorating your creative ground in order to stay fertile over the long arc of your career

**DECONSTRUCTIVE LEARNING** — Attaching introspection to action to understand the full extent of your capabilities so you can replicate your success

**DICTIONARIAN** — Creating your own language to capture the nuance you're seeing that makes you good at what you do

**DIRTY WORK** — Turning one company's trash into another one's treasure

**DISGUST OF WIND** — Create real, lasting change through the power of positive tension.

**DOMESTIC OIL** — Reducing your dependency on optimal and external creative circumstances to thrive

**DOWNSHIFTING** — Creating the necessary whitespace to take a breath and decide what the next right action is

**ENERGY SIGNATURE** — Using personal energy as the primary organizing principle of your work

**EXECUTION RANKING** — A framework for determining the relative priority of your ideas

**EXISTENTIAL MACHINERY** — Taking control of the means of production, but also the production of meaning

**FEEDBACK FILTER** — A binary grounding question we ask ourselves to recalibrate and put criticism in perspective

**FORCED GRAVITY** — Creating an existence with more resistance

**FORESTATION** — A system for cultivating innovative ideas systematically rather than sporadically

**FORGING** — Motivating your creativity by forcing yourself to overcome unpleasant but unavoidable challenges

**FORMATTING** — Treating your creative work as a property that can be exploited into numerous mediums

**FRANCHISING** — Systemizing your creative work in such a way that it could be replicated and productized

**FRONTLOADING** — Maximize the potential for success by putting a greater proportion of the activity at the beginning of the process

**FRUSTRATION MONETIZATION** — Take the worst parts about your job and turn them into money

**FUTURE SELF** — Treat things you do as a compassionate investment in yourself that you recoup later on

**GO PERPENDICULAR** — Intentionally walking away from your current work to engage in something unrelated to the flow of activity

**GRADUALISM** — Rejecting the notion of the elusive eureka moment and practicing an existential and holistic approach to a creative life, living in a way that your art gets done over and over.

**GROUND ZERO** — The entry point into the creative processing workflow, the primary location for offloading raw materials into your idea factory, the central cockpit of creative control.

**HACQUISITIONING** — Making a list of everyone you ever served in the past and asking them to buy this new thing you just made

**HAYBARNING** — Declaring something done so your team can reap the benefits of their hard work

**IDEA THEATER** — Prime and frame people's brains so they're more receptive and willing to accept your reality

**IDENTITY BASED CREATION** — Tapping into your native endowments channeling them in the service of making your ideas happen.

**INNOVATION AUDIT** — Building a complete value ecosystem, including content, context, circumstance, consumer and circulation

**INNOVATION FRAME** — A system for pursuing invention systematically rather than sporadically

**INTENTION FRAMING** — Put boring but necessary tasks into the wider context of your cherished, personal priorities

**JUSTING** — Create external structure to match your internal motivational system

LABOR LIMIT — Setting boundaries on your generosity of providing unpaid service

LIMITATION LEVER — Turn your weaknesses into assets and tactical advantages

LOOKSEE — Pairing context and content to show clients your unique way of approaching their business problem

LUCKING OUT — A specific set of strategic moves that have to happen after a fortunate incident in order to carry the momentum forward

MACRO PACING — Giving yourself permission to work at your own healthy tempo, velocity and trajectory

MEANING MAKING MISSION — An existential blueprint for noticing, naming, taming and reframing negative moods into positive fulfillment

MICRO PACING — An elegantly balanced production effort between heating and cooling

MINIMUM VIABLE KNOWLEDGE — The lowest amount of information you need to know about a subject to operate effectively

MINIMUM VIABLE UTILITY — Your personal quota of problem solving for intellectual execution

MIRAGING — Deliberately choosing not to do something to see it simply goes away and nobody notices

MISTAKEOFF — Using humiliation to convert mistakes into lessons and lessons into habits.

NATURAL COLLABORATION — Creating a more visceral and spontaneous contact with your work by designing systems and structures that invite nature as your collaborator.

NEGATIVE INSPIRATION — Using the exposure of what we don't want as a powerful energy source

OFF BUTTONING — Deepening your personal recovery to match your professional intensity

ONE STARRING — Using negative reviews of work you love to gain perspective, humility and inspiration

OPPORTUNITY JUNKIE — A filter that evaluates the asset value of a potential new project or endeavor

**ORBITING** — Treating your entire body of work would as a standing sales pitch to imaginary benefactors

**ORGANIZING PRINCIPLE** — The core assumption, central reference point or guiding pole, which governs action and allows everything else in its proximity to derive value.

**OVER PREPARATION** — Creating twenty percent more content than necessary so it's easier to adjust on the fly

**PAPERING** — Contextualizing your problems in the larger ecosystem to see the structures that underlie complete situations

**PARALLEL PROCESSING** — Getting projects finished with minimal wasted effort by executing simultaneously on different tracks.

**PARANOIA SNOWBALL** — Working quietly and quickly to keep your idea contained until it's strong enough to roll on its own

**PARLAYING** — Exploiting your collection of talents into something of much greater value

**PROBLEM HUNTING** — A framework for flexing your intellectual muscles to add value to your organization

**PROCESS CALIBRATION** — Finding the middle ground that balances your team's need for predictability with its freedom to be creative

**PROJECT JUNKIE** — A brainstorming framework to decide which venture to tackle next

**PROLOGUING** — Illustrating the historical context to feather people's intellectual nests so your product has a smooth landing

**REALITY WATERFALL** — A chain of logic that reduces the probability of something negative happening to such a degree that it seems ridiculous

**REINS & BLINDERS** — Using restraint as the quiet backbone of your creative habit

**RELATIVE TIME VALUE** — Using a burst of generosity to save your team hours of work and tons of stress

**REPLICATION** — Doubling down on what's working to create new revenue opportunities in the future

**REQUIREMENTAL** — Approaching your creative process through the filter of utility value

REVALUATION — Motivating yourself by reframing tasks as expressions of your cherished values

REVERSE ENGINEERING — Start executing against where you're being evaluated to retrofit a successful recipe for your work

SCAFFOLDING — Information architecture that makes your message more actionable for audiences

SELECTIVE INDIFFERENCE — Being discerning enough not to dwell on meaningless matters, conserving your best energies for your creative efforts

SHIPYARDING — Getting the maximum level of fulfillment from the minimum viable execution of your ideas

SHORT CIRCUITING — Doing things before the fear has time to reach your mind

SLACKLINING — Using intentional parcels of time and technology and support to foster innovation

STARTING BLOCK — A framework to help teams adopt a more efficient starting posture and preload their creative brains in an enhanced manner

STEAMSHIPPING — Accessing the heat and energy by which your creative dream gets sparked and sustained

SUGARDADDYING — Constantly thinking about potential collaborations that can reduce your financial burden and reduce labor intensity

TAPPING — Questions to mine the emotional tension of your immediate past experiences as raw source material for creative expression

THE TOOLKIT — A robust arsenal of solutions custom fit for your unique personality, value system and life situation

THIN AIRING — Using emotional ingenuity to drive innovation seemingly out of nowhere

THREADING — Teasing out the historical context of an organization to give your work more leverage

THUMBPRINTING — The idiosyncratic process of making your work unique

TIME CONSTRAINT — Using a restricted production window to exploit your creative energy in novel ways.

TOURNIQUETTING — Creating a healthy sense of distance from your work by damming up the creative flow, compressing the circulation and applying pressure

TRYADS — Combining the concrete, abstract and absolute to have greater impact with your ideas

UNCONSCIOUS RUMINATION — Allowing your inner mind to get to work mulling over, sorting out, organizing and categorizing material that has been previously absorbed, ultimately generating an idea at a time when the mental spotlight isn't on it.

UNITS UP — Exponentially increasing your activity level to create a stronger baseline for yourself

UNLABELING — The reinvention process of peeling off your old identity and creating a new one that sticks

UPSTREAMING — Filtering projects based on labor intensity and the economy of effort

VALUE CONTINUUM — An employee contribution framework for tracking ideas, tools, connections and opportunities

VISIONEAR — Productively channeling tension to make dreams into realities

WAREHOUSING — Using basic knowledge management to overcome inspirational and executional blocks

WELL DIGGING — Accumulating an ongoing reference file for your brain to work on through a passive, unconscious process

WHALING — Filtering potential creative opportunities by their ability to multiply revenue without increasing labor

WHEREWITHAL — The larger equation of everything needed to buttress creative opportunity, including knowledge, resources and courage.

WHITESPACING — Defining your creative journey by the work you decline

WORKING MODULAR — Treating each idea as an uncategorized chunk of creative material, an objective, portable piece content that accumulates and categorizes into its own structure.

## **BEHAVIORS**

*A specific way in which you act or conduct yourself*

### **Types:**

Activity: Group of actions

Exercise: Skill building maneuver

Experiment: Testing an idea

Game: Field of gainful activity

Habit: Pattern learned through repetition

Interaction: Mutual or reciprocal action

Intervention: Act to improve situation

Moment: Important, influencing instance

Opportunity: Favorable juncture of circumstances

Practice: Positive, customary long term act

Ritual: Ceremonial action

Routine: Regular course of general action

Subroutine: Specific course of small action

**Tools:**

**ACTIONSTORMING** — Finding creative opportunities by getting out of your goddamn head and actually trying things

**AGGRESSIVE PONDERING** — Deliberately creating a situation or framed experience in order to have an arena in which to work out an unresolved issue

**APPRENTICING** — Finding opportunities to build your emotional and physical calluses

**AUDIENCE OF NONE** — Actively doing great work for no reason other than to feel the positive internal experience it provides

**BIOFEEDBACK** — Filtering the quality of your ideas through physical reactions, not subjective opinions

**BITTERSWEET SPOTTING** — Focusing on doing the things that nobody can do but you, and focusing on doing the things that anybody can do, but won't

**BORROWED HOPE** — Trusted voices to compensate for your low confidence in the beginning of a creative journey

**BUFFERING** — An alternative regulatory strategy to negative feedback about your work

**CAMPGROUNDING** — Leaving things at your company more organized than when you found them

**CANVASSING** — Using dedicated chunks of creative expression to explore, exhaust and exceed difficult feelings

**CENTERING** — Punctuating routine activities with a line of demarcation or microstructure that sets a boundary between peripheral and principle creative work

**CENTERING SEQUENCE** — A daily ritual that brings your brain up to operating temperature in order to run properly

**COBBLING** — The practice of shipping ideas for your own business that are up to the same scale as you would deliver for your customers

**CONTENT BRANDING** — Building, protecting and nurturing the symbolic, social and emotion capital around your work

**CREATIVE PROMISCUITY** — Providing more entry points for insight to occur through a compressed, high level of diverse input

**CROSSBREEDING** — Giving yourself permission to fantasize in both positive and negative directions

**DELETING** — Raising our frustration tolerance by remove extreme language from our vocabulary

**DEPRESSURIZING** — Consciously respond to panic a way that serves your creative efforts

**ENCODING** — The practice of processing experiences into insights and insights into habits

**ENLISTING** — Transferring the architecture behind your core talent to a mundane or overwhelming task

**EXCAVATING** — Clearing the surface level content out of your system to allow quality ideas to emerge

**EXTREME OWNERSHIP** — Create leverage through the attraction of working, not the arrogance of interruption

**FAITHFUL FORCES** — The custom universe can you count on to help inform your artistic spirit

**FINISH LINING** — Observing and avoiding whatever opposes or weakens forward motion in the final hour



**FLOWNERSHIP** — Purposely escape from the burdens of the world with a manageable, self contained activity.

**FORGETTING** — Using the creative process as tool for cleansing, lightening and liberating your heart and mind

**FRESH POWDER** — Professional opportunities where you can write your own ticket and set the standard, not just comply with it

**FUTURIZING** — Debating negative thinking by attaching the desired creative outcome to your identity

**GASKETING** — A daily ritual of emotional release where you metabolize your experiences, make serious mental headway into your ideas and get the creative faucet flowing.

**GERMINATION** — Starting small with your big ideas, letting the seed of organizational change sprout over time

**GOLD MINING** — Immortalizing key learnings that would otherwise just live inside one team member's brain

**GOOD LOW** — When life hands you a pile of shit, you strategically convert that experience into creative resources of energy, fertility and happiness

**GRAVITATIONAL ORDER** — Using motion to create equilibrium so your creative work finds its place in the universe

**GRITERATION** — Pushing forward incrementally to spiral up to an idea that has a real impact

**HABIT REDISTRIBUTION** — Finding a new value structure to support positive behavioral change

**IDEA SEEDING** — Grow the reach and legitimacy for your idea through constant, incremental exposure

**ILLUMINATION** — Giving people and their ideas clarification, validation and permission.

**IMPOSSIBILITY SUBROUTINE** — A ritual to help ramp up your energy and snap myself into appropriate state of mind to approach an overwhelming task

**INCONVENIENCE FILTER** — Make it easy for people to help you by not requiring them to change their usual pattern of behavior

**INNER LABOR** — Increasing your leverage by investing in yourself more consistently.

INNER OXYGENATION — Giving small ideas a fighting chance to breathe and grow inside your mind by nurturing them with encouragement, freedom and affirmation

INPUT EMBARGO — Setting limits on the level and frequency of team feedback during the creative process

INTERCEPTION — Lovingly stepping into your worry stream with a sense wonder to buffer against impulsive behavior

INTUITIVE LEADING — Deconstructing instincts into hard concepts that can be understood more technically

INVENTIVE MECHANISM — The natural constellation of creative entities we already possess and can access

IRON STRIKING — Doing as much as you can for as long as you can, until somebody else takes notice

JOY TRIGGERS — Embrace a diverse set of activities that form a complete identity.

JOYDRAGING — The ability to tolerate boring, repetitive, isolating tasks that don't have an immediate payoff

LANGUAGING — Wrapping your emotions into words so you have a handle for overcoming creative blocks effectively

LIFESAVING — A uniquely appealing activity or practice that enables you to give voice to that which has no words

LOVEME — Responding to a personal weakness or professional failure with compassion

MACRO OXYGENATION — Giving large projects a chance to grow on your team by nurturing them with encouragement, freedom and affirmation.

MEDIUMING — Consciously and proactively mixing up your creative vehicles

MENTAL OXYGENATION — Giving creative confidence room breathe and grow by nurturing it with encouragement, freedom and affirmation

METABOLIZING — Treating journaling as a psychological and physical accounting of your emotions

MEZZO STREAKING — Using the force multiplier of habit continuity to increase your motivational incentives

MICRO EXECUTION — The practice of creating incremental, meaningful work in a limited time frame.

**MICRO EXPRESSION** — Creating ideas in a piecemeal, nonlinear fashion, without the constraints of chronology, sequence, rational order and narrative.

**MICRO STREAKING** — Using the force multiplier of task continuity to increase your motivational incentives

**MOMENT OF CONCEPTION** — The single spark of life that signals an idea's movement value, almost screaming to you, something wants to be built here.

**MOTIFING** — Engaging in guilt free creative projects that are uniquely appealing to you

**NEGATIVE IDEATION** — Stretch your imagination through the positive power of bad ideas

**OFFLOADING** — Humbly accepting the limits of your own mind and trusting ideas to an external system instead

**ON RAMP** — A creative subroutine that brings up your energy and snaps you into the appropriate state of mind to do your work.

**OPERATING TEMPERATURE** — Making devices of your body and mind suitable for creative application

**PERMISSIONLESS PLATFORM** — Hiring yourself to create a local artist's residency

**PRICE OF ADMISSION** — Tracking and pinpointing when customers experience the aha moment of seeing your value

**PRIMING** — Reminding yourself of your accumulated track record to build faith in your creative capabilities

**PROCESS OXYGENATION** — Giving new ideas a fighting chance to breathe and grow by nurturing them with encouragement, freedom and affirmation

**PRODUCTIVE SELFISHNESS** — Saving some creativity for yourself to optimize the very process for which you are renowned

**PUNCHING OUT** — A ritual of leave taking at the end of your creative workday

**RAILROAD SWITCH** — Catching yourself in the act of making superfluous complaints and redirect that energy more usefully

**RECALIBRATION** — The practice of inspiring and reinspiring yourself based on each of your unique preferences and passions and predispositions.

**RELOCATION** — Reducing our exposure to the kinds of situations and surroundings that enable us in the wrong direction

REVERSE CURFEW — A time-based boundary to build discipline as a remote worker

RISING TIDE — Expanding your own value by elevating the whole team

SANITY TAX — Paying a minor cost for something that is disproportionate to the massive value you get in return for having it

SCRAPPING — Creating an intentional point of over-delivery.

SELFLESS SERVICE — A ritual of taking small, productive actions on our own behalf that create value in the world for at least one person besides ourselves.

SHADOWING — Channeling the dark, unconscious aspects of your personality in the service of your creative works

SHIT FILTER — Gauging the quality of your ideas through physical reactions, not subjective opinions

SHOWING UP — Playing the long term statistical averages of the creative process

SIGNATEUR — To become so identified with your work that nobody could steal it

SLIPSTREAMING — Achieve creative productivity through social proximity

SMOKING — Consuming your own work to give you solid faith in your creative capabilities

SNIFFING — The practice of converting your curiosity into everyone else's utility

SOLVITAS PERAMBULATOR — Using rhythmic, repetitive exercise or action to clear your mind, stabilize your emotions and increase the production and release of endorphins to pump the well of creativity.

SPARKING — The practice of accomplishing things that get you psyched to work even harder

STACKING — Layering value on top of existing creative habits to make them more enjoyable, rewarding and sustainable

STILETTO — Compressing your portfolio of talents into a tight little package that demonstrates the full firepower of your creative arsenal.

SUNLIGHTING — Using the forcing function of public accountability to bring a creative work into existence

SURPRISING — A system to call on yourself a little more with each project

TEAM OXYGENATION — Giving small ideas a fighting chance to breathe and grow in the organization by nurturing them with encouragement, freedom and affirmation

TRY SOFTER — Realizing the full potential of your project by walking away from it

UNFINISH LINE — Treating creativity as an imperfect and noncompetitive practice that never ends

UNGUNKING — Using a simple, binary evaluation to unclog the creative pipes and shepherd ideas through the system

VICTORY DANCE — The act of loving ourselves by acknowledging moments when we're proud of our completed work

WALK THE FACTORY FLOOR — Creating the ritual of an established parcel of structured curiosity, whereby you casually and thoughtfully peruse every idea you've recently accumulated.

WATERMARKING — Trusting your willingness to be true to yourself

## **ASSETS**

*A specific thing that can be intentionally used to produce value*

### **Types:**

Calendar: Register of time

Capital: Stock of accumulated goods

Conversation: Exchange of sentiments

Device: Piece of purposeful equipment

Ledger: Accounting of transactions

Material: Substantive artifact

Object: Viewable item that stirs emotion

Relationship: State of bonding of agents

Resource: Available support

Space: Area to assert identity & needs

### **Tools:**

**ACCIDENTAL PREPARATION** — The hardcore formative time that fosters dreams, acts as creative training and lays groundwork for the years to follow.

**ADAPTIVE OPPORTUNISM** — Creatively combining what you already have to make new things

**ARBITRARY SORTING MECHANISM** — An organizing principle, free of judgment and expectation, that allows ideas to find each other

**ARTIFACTING** — Capturing, organizing, merchandising and sharing moments that signal the collective spirit of your culture

**COMMENCEMENT DEVICE** — Intentionally enshrine the first iteration of your project, framing it with layers of thoughtfulness and professionalism

**COMMITMENT DEVICE** — A physical, simple, creative, intentional and memorable totem that keeps your dream in front of your face.

**CREATIVE CAPITAL** — Executing work for the joy of the process and the compound interest that pays dividends later

**CREATIVE RETIREMENT** — Writing a letter of resignation to yourself to bookend an important stage in your artistic life

**EMOTIONAL CAPITAL** — The human support structure that gives you power to pursue your dream

**ENERGETIC CAPITAL** — Using team energy as the primary organizing principle of your work

**FLOORING** — Corral the entirety of your project to be viewable in a single frame

**IDEA MARKETPLACES** — Regularly gathering people to sell and purchase intellectual effects, conceptual assets and creative goods

**IGNORANCE CAPITAL** — Intentionally not knowing your destination to give yourself speed, power and momentum

**LAUNCH MODE** — Acting in a way that earns you the privilege of making an announcement about your work

**MISSION CONTROL** — A snapshot of everything that's important to me, helping me understand the relationships between the various buckets of my life.

**MOMENTUM DEVICE** — A totem to validate your creative process with just enough sophistication to move the story forward

**OBSCURITY CAPITAL** — A level of psychological wealth built through the practice of private, creative freedom

**PROXY** — A contextual, conceptual or physical prototype that does a lot of the strategic heavy lifting for you

**SCRATCHING** — Identifying what you already possess in service of your creative vision so you don't have to start from zero

**SECURE BASE** — The human support system with love as its scaffolding help you process your artistic changes

**SHELVING** — Converting your creative area into a progress rich environment that stimulates focus and buoys my spirits

**SHIPPING LOG** — An accounting ledger of your personal creative contributions to the team

**STREAM STEPPING** — Faithfully partnering with the existing flow of innovative energy to carry your vision forward

**SUPPORT SURVEY** — A template for collecting data on people and processes that helps you prioritize creative projects

**TOTEM** — A power object that give your productive obsessions a physical expression

**TURFING** — Thoughtfully and intentionally creating a diversity of environments that are framed to support our individual pursuit of meaning

**UNLOCKING** — Creating an environment that forces people access new talents and skills

**UPFRONTING** — Giving more frontend raw material our creative collaborators so they can do more for us

**VICTORY LOG** — A small weekly calendar that you populate with any and all victories, large or small, that you achieve each day

**WAIT LOSS** — Find, focus and leverage the pockets of freedom you already have

**WALL WORK** — Leveraging the vertical plane as a safe haven where your new ideas can incubate