

LET ME SUGGEST THIS

**156
RANTS**

RIFFS AND

**REAL WORLD
STRATEGIES**

ON

**BUSINESS
BRANDING**

BELONGING

AND

BELIEVING

from the brain of
@nametagscott



Let Me Suggest This

**156 Rants, Riffs and Real World Strategies on Business,
Branding, Belonging and Believing**

Scott Ginsberg

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HELLO, my name is Scott!

MY HISTORY

I was born on Valentine's Day. That pretty much sums up my entire personality: A lover, a romantic and a touchy feely beta male who cries at everything.

MY ENGINE

I am motivated by a blank canvas, a captive audience, a daily ritual, an interesting problem and a meaningful contribution.

MY VALUES

Creativity is my gift. Commitment is my sword. Interaction is my fuel. Music is my religion. Sobriety is my drug. Laughter is my language. Love is my answer.

MY WORK

I wear a nametag 24-7. Just for fun. Been doing it since 2000. In fact, I even secured a world record in Ripley's Believe It Or Not. And yes, I got the [tattoo](#).

I wrote and published 25 books on human interaction, marketing and business strategy. You can download all of them for free, no strings, right [here](#), right now.

I performed my one-man show 600 times around the world. Never the same talk twice. Watch tons of clips [here](#).

I built an online television network. It's all about sticking yourself out there. Pun [intended](#).

I strategize with cool people and big companies. They pay me money to [rent](#) my brain.

I have an award-winning [blog](#).

I work at [POKE](#) New York.

I draw [thinkmaps](#).

MY PASSIONS

I am a [sentence](#) junkie. Words make me happy. I built a search [engine](#) of 33,000 phrases I've collected over the years.

I am a songwriter. Music was my first love. I recorded and released five [albums](#) under my own label.

I'm a yogi. I do Bikram every day. Greatest thing ever.

I'm a podcast nut. I listen to lots of them. I also [host](#) a few shows with my best friend.

Anyway, that's a snapshot of who I am, how I live and what I make.

If you need me, just google nametag.

— *Scott*

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Achievement.

Achievement used to mean something.

You wrote something worth reading. You built something worth noticing. You shipped something worth buying. You solved a problem that saved money. You discovered a compound that extended people's lives. You invented a gadget that overturned an entire industry.

All because you had the guts to risk, the willingness to fail and the desire to change the world for the better.

That's achievement.

But now, all you have to do is attract attention.

Simply accumulate the most hits, views, friends, followers, shares, likes or downloads, and you've reached the pinnacle of human achievement. You've ascended to the heights of greatness.

He who dies with the most eyeballs, wins.

That's not achievement, it's digital narcissism.

Acquisition.

We desperately need a modern approach to new client acquisition.

Instead of making a cold call to customers, we make a warm zone around them.

It's about courting. Instead of trying to make a sale to someone, earn the right to start a relationship with someone.

It's about anticipation. Instead of hanging your fortunes solely on chance, make friends before you make requests so you're not speaking from a deficit position.

It's about research. Instead of pretending to know everything, you study the ecosystem around their business and discover insight worth sharing.

It's about permission. Instead of darkening customer doorsteps, work creatively and respectfully to earn the privilege of following up.

It's about respecting. Instead of sending prospects an article of interest, publish content that turns their brand into the article of interest itself.

It's about generosity. Instead of being selfish with knowledge, obtain information of high value and help at a high level first.

It's about positioning. Instead of showing up as a service provider, come in as a strategist so you're treated as an equal partner.

It's about understanding. Instead of artificially squeezing your product into their overcrowded lives, help people become better at what's important to them.

It's about relaxing. Instead of being the hero who swoops in to solve the customer's problem, be the friend who stands as a fixture in the customer's life.

It's about prioritizing. Instead of trying to close everyone everywhere, place value on building the relationship over making the sale.

Sure beats cold calls, direct mail and print ads.

Advertising.

Some digital advertising feels too close for comfort.

Instead of a customized, helpful recommendation, it feels more like an alarming, creepy intrusion. Instead of an enthusiastic engagement between the brand and the customer, it's another opportunity for companies to use new technology to interrupt people more effectively. Instead of orientating the company around what the customer needs or wants, it's another online vanity exercise about what the company does. Instead of offering to change the world on behalf of the customer, it's a patronizing attempt to control what meaning consumers take from the brand. And instead of creating a brand that gives meaning to our experiences and communicates our thoughts and feelings with others, it's visual pollution on an already littered landscape.

Think of it as a litmus test.

If it's right for your business and not for your customer, it won't work. If customer frustration outweighs economic benefit, it won't work. If privacy violations overrule convenience, it won't work. And if it induces a shiver in the user, it won't work.

Think first, then market.

Afraid.

Fear is a significant factor in most people's lives.

And if your organization wants to matter to those people, you need a tool that helps customers feel less afraid. Some platform, some interaction or some mechanism that gets their jitters out and gives them something to face the world with.

Covestor is the world's largest online platform for investment management. It's a world of great investors that allows you to automatically mirror their strategies, trade for trade, all from the comfort and safety of your own account.

But that's still scary. *When money moves, we take notice.*

Covestor understands this fear, so their site let users try out the service with a hundred thousand virtual dollars, simulated functionality, account mirroring, performance tracking, for free, with no obligation and no payment details required.

It's a safe haven. An interesting place where people can interact. And a simple, smart and social platform, free from the constraints of regulation, that identifies the line between what financial companies can do and can't do, and lets people play right on top of it.

Most importantly, it's a compelling case for why investing doesn't have to be scary. And it's a reminder to people that they're all good investors, they just don't know it.

Are you letting fear boss your customers around?

Alone.

Loneliness is a permanent feature of the human condition.

If you can find a way to remind customers that they're not alone, that they're not the only ones having an experience, and that the roller coaster isn't as scary when you have other people to scream with, it will be hard to keep your name a secret.

Connecticut Working Moms wants the members of their community to feel more empowered, less guilty, less isolated and to realize that someone else feels the same way they do, so they built a digital confession booth. A destination where users can anonymously share the raw truth of their struggles, as their lives *really* are.

Dove Lewis Animal Hospital offers free support groups where owners can share stories to cope with the loss of a pet, along with art therapy workshops where first timers can learn from veteran members who have navigated, survived and even laughed about the grieving process.

Greenpoint Coworkers holds jellies, free coworking days where freelancers can leave their den of solitude and join a community of fellow independent professionals to work together for a day, bounce ideas off of, and have a structured, professional workday in a beautifully designed, naturally lit work environment.

How are you connecting the disconnected?

Amazon.

Amazon is the most profitable online retailer in the world.

Considering its massive catalog, absence of inventory, elegant user interface, speedy customer service, enticing product previews, free shipping, efficient logistics, recommendation algorithms, low prices, ongoing discounts, helpful reviews and simple return policy, it's no surprise they're the best.

But what most people don't know about Amazon is the is context in which it was created.

Twenty years ago, Jeff Bezos discovered a statistic that changed everything.

He learned that the Internet was growing at two thousand percent a year.

Two thousand percent. Nothing grows that fast. Not even bacteria.

But he recognized a good thing growing when he saw it. He built a business that made sense in the context of that growth. And he made a fortune off a phenomenon that nobody else noticed.

Not to mention, he completely transformed the way humans bought things.

Spot growth earlier.

The river of dividends runs deep.

Another.

Innovation begins with humility.

From a strategic perspective, it's always helpful to start from the assumption that the marketplace is crowded. That whatever product you're trying to sell, whatever message you're hoping to spread, the world doesn't need another one.

When you focus on that, you make sense, not noise. When you act from that place of humility, it's much easier to smash down the mysterious doors of the impossible and give people what they actually need, not just what you want them to want.

In reality, what the world needs is somebody, some organization, to invent new ways to use what's already successful. That's what innovative companies do. Instead of reinventing the wheel, they find a wheel that already works and make run better.

The point is, good things shouldn't have to end. What's good is of utmost importance to our culture, and should be discovered, respected, shared and enhanced.

If it ain't broke, don't fix it, but don't stop making it better.

Make it do things nobody's seen before.

App.

Access to information is free, but access to each other is priceless.

In a connection economy, if companies want to win loyalty beyond reason, they ought to create apps that help people meet each other, not just make them less bored on the subway. They ought to create products that help people become better at something they care about, not just help them bookmark something cool.

Humans are creatures who want to count. They are driven by the desire to create, connect and contribute. If organizations want to remain relevant and profitable, the secret is simple.

First, create a place, either online, offline or both, where humans get to talk with one another, in their voices, about what matters to them. Second, market around people's interests, not just around what they buy. And third, try actually caring about those people, all the time.

See what happens.

Attention.

If we plan to earn people's attention, we have to reward them for giving it to us.

After all, attention is the great commodity. It's an asset to be protected, not a resource to be depleted. And it's what every brand, every company, every organization, every website and every entrepreneur is killing themselves to obtain.

And because of that, because the chronic bombardment and high expectation for visual and visceral stimulation, customers are demanding that we justify their attention dollars every step of the way. That we repay them for participating in our brand.

But not in the typical way. This goes far beyond coupons, freebies and promos.

How are we helping people experience a joy that they don't have in any other areas of their lives? How are we offering one time, limited edition, never before, never again moment that actually captures their imagination? How can we provide true exclusivity that they can get nowhere else? How are we, in a very small way, nudging the world in a positive direction?

Those are the real rewards.

That's what brings people back.

Autotelic.

Nobody does things just to do things anymore.

Instead of enjoying the adventure of the moment, falling in love with the process and soaking in the stillness of the experience, everything is vehicle. Another opportunity to be a mercenary, always trying to get somewhere, never trying to do something great, only hoping to exit.

From startups to actors to authors to salespeople, wherever people are in the food chain, it seems like there's always somewhere else they need to get.

The point is, we don't always have to be digging for treasure.

Sometimes digging is the treasure.

Beast.

It's the battle for enoughness.

Once you've gotten the beast out of your system, filled all your ego holes and flushed all the selfishness away.

Once you've earned enough attention, approval, applause, respect, validation, celebrity and popularity to make you feel worthy.

Once you've achieved and produced and executed enough to prove to the world that you can do it on your own terms.

Once you've kicked your addiction to yourself and your body tells you that the buzz won't have the same effect anymore.

You can finally say, from a place of pure peace, honesty, gratitude and liberation, that you've done enough to be okay with yourself.

And from that place, the possibilities are goddamn beautiful.

Believe.

The problem is, they did not come away believers.

When your customers finally finish the transaction, sign off, shut down, wrap up, peace out, pay the check, walk out the door and go back to their busy lives, there's a powerful question that follows.

What did the experience you offer make people believe in again?

What did your company restore people's faith in? What idea, that customers were convinced was dead, did your brand bring back to life? What experience, that people avoided as a badge of honor, are they now obsessed with? What feeling, that people had lost contact with, did you reignite inside of them? What possibility, that people had long since given up on, did you made real once again?

Search a few review sites, and you'll find this question answered in spades.

A tortured soul who goes to hypnotherapy believes in herself again. A jaded couple who takes a romantic excursion believes in romance again. A cynical guest who stays at a bed and breakfast believes in the service industry again. A terminated employee who flawlessly relocates across the country believes in humanity again. A cooking snob who dines at an amazing restaurant believes in eating out again.

Sell that.

Because when people believe, it's really hard to leave.

Believer.

If you're the new guy, you have to believe that you belong.

The minute you walk in the door, you have to make the decision that you fit in, that you're part of the team, that your contribution matters, that you've earned the right to be there, that your voice is heard and that you're missed when you're gone.

And if that means showing up early and often, taking initiative on new projects, acting without permission to wow somebody, expending emotional labor on a moment's notice and treating people like you've been there since the beginning, so be it.

It's not entitlement. It's not arrogance. It's not walking around like you own the place.

It's confidence in your value. It's respect for the organization. It's treating yourself as you wish to be treated.

And what's interesting is, when you believe that you belong, nobody questions you.

Believing.

It's one thing to give tours of your office.

But the big question, the ultimate compliment in disguise is, have other companies taken an interest in what you believe in?

A riverboat casino in East St. Louis, who believes that health trumps all, provides the convenience of an onsite medical clinic. Free consultations, free medications, free disease management support groups, for every employee, and their families, forever.

And ten years into their innovative program, Dr. Ken Rybicki, who serves as the primary care doctor, says that other companies are starting to take an interest. They're starting to model their own healthcare programs after the Queen's.

Not just to emulate the casino's brand, but to echo the casino's belief.

Instead of the casino selling the world on the quality of their springs; they simply give others the chance to jump on the trampoline with them.

How many people are interested in what *you* believe in?

Belong.

If you look at the fastest growing companies and highest performing organizations in the world, they don't rise to the top because they're leveraging technology.

It's because they're learning new ways to fulfill the human desire to belong.

Do I stop by the same coffee shop each morning because of the espresso, or because of the feelings of familiarity and connection when I walk in the door? Do I practice yoga at the same studio every week because I enjoy torturing my body, or because I enjoy the camaraderie and community? Do I go to concerts to hear one song, or to speak in the universal love language that allows us to share our humanity with each other? Do I listen to podcasts nonstop because I need the information, or because I need to feel less alone while working in my apartment all day? Do I cherish my job because I love the work, or because I love seeing the look on people's faces when I tell them where I work?

Duh.

The desire to belong is a basic human need, an expression of our humanity and a powerful trigger for making decisions.

If you want the world to beat a path to your door, don't build a better mousetrap, build a friendlier welcome mat.

Bike.

Masterworks creates art you can ride.

They build gorgeous, fully functioning wooden bicycles, handcrafted from start to finish, each with its own unique look and feel, using the finest woods salvaged from condemned city trees, each of which takes hundreds of hours to build and thousands of dollars to buy.

It's a work of art that happens to be a bike.

And it's a bike people ride to be seen on.

Why?

Because the company owners are driven by quality, not money. They have a lifelong love affair with all things bicycle. They care more deeply about the value of their work than anyone else. And they put obsessive amounts of creativity, passion, personality and generosity into everything they do.

They create works of art that happen to be something else.

What's your something else?

Binge.

Netflix popularized binge viewing.

It's a consumption model in which every episode of a show is released at once. Fans are encouraged to catch up on their favorite programs by completely immersing themselves in the universe of the characters, plowing through entire seasons in marathon sessions.

It's cheap, easy, satisfying and completely reinvents the viewing experience. And as a result, Netflix now accounts for more than thirty percent of all web traffic during the week. That's more than any other website on the continent.

The genius of this strategy is, Netflix didn't just give more options to their customers, they instilled new habits in their customers, and then positioned their offerings in alignment with those habits.

The best way to predict the future is to create it.

Blogging.

Blogging is only dead if you want it to be.

Personally, I think it's more alive than ever before. In fact, I believe blogs work for a number reasons.

Blogs work because they drip. It's the continuum of output that has volume and gravity and narrative, all of which will carry your name to a wider pool of potential work. What did you write today?

Blogs work because they heal. It's the digital surfboard for riding the waves of life's anxiety, your very small way to nudge the world in a positive direction. How are you writing through the pain?

Blogs work because they insist. It's the dangling sword of obligation and its built in accountability of having to show up every day for readers that keeps you in the game. What's your publishing schedule?

Blogs work because they reinforce. It's the power of pressing the publish button that reminds your heart you've built up sufficient meaning capital to hold you over for another day. Have you decided to matter?

Blogs aren't going anywhere.

Not the good ones.

Boil.

Synthesizing is an underrated talent.

If you can become known as someone who boils down complex ideas to a bare, yet highly memorable minimum, creates labels for things that make it faster to classify and understand what's going on, packages truths as meaningful concrete nuggets that give meaning to human experiences, delivers micro masterpieces of clarity and brevity to help others structure and interpret reality, helps people make sense of life and bring order to a world that is confusing and scary, and someone who feels and says what most people can't express for themselves, if you can be that person, your voice will be requested in many places.

The hard part is, it is the synthesizer who listens the loudest, waits the longest, thinks the hardest and speaks the latest.

Are you up to the challenge?

Boost.

As an entrepreneur, it's always cheaper to hire yourself.

The only problem is, when you hire yourself to do the work, there's nobody left to get new clients, nobody left to do marketing and networking, nobody left to figure out strategy, nobody left to raise money and nobody left to grow the business.

Unlike a traditional company, your enterprise isn't boosted by a powerful machine working every angle.

It's just little old you. Doing everything.

Which works well if you're an incurable control freak and a consummate individualist, but after a while, especially if you want your enterprise to evolve, trying to wear every hat every day is unsustainable.

Bystander.

You can't be a bystander in your career.

Position yourself intelligently. Instead of showing up as a service provider, come in as a strategist so you're treated as an equal partner, not a day laborer.

Beat them to the punch. Instead of asking people what they want, show them you're already doing what they need more of.

Frame the context. Instead of selling an idea, sell people on the unique approach and philosophy behind the idea.

Stuff your sleeves with aces. Instead of talking, go do something, and then you'll have something to do the talking for you when you arrive.

Sure beats sitting around waiting for the miracle.

Capital.

Social capital is built through the hundreds of little actions we take every day.

Every encounter builds trust just a little bit more, contributes to our reserve of personal bonds, enables fellowship, enhances reciprocity, stimulates community, nurtures our connectedness and increases our supply of social opportunities.

Of course, that's face to face.

What happens when digital enters the equation?

A few years back, the Journal of Computer Mediated Communication conducted a study that examined if Facebook was related to attitudes and behaviors that enhance social capital. And although their research showed that online social networks were not the most effective solution for social disengagement, they still found small positive relationships between intensity of social media use and life satisfaction, social trust, civic engagement, and political participation.

Considering social capital affects everything from productivity to depression to suicide to juvenile delinquency to test scores to government response time to divorce rate, I'd say we're off to a pretty good start.

It might be digital, but it's better than nothing.

Care.

It's not about getting people to care about your brand.

It's about getting your brand to care about people.

Here's how.

Shift the focus. Instead of marketing around what people buy from you, market around their interests. Try not to take your brand so seriously. It's not because they like your brand, it's because they love their friends.

Enable personal expression. People almost don't know how to react when they are treated like human beings with ideas, feelings and dreams. Build a platform where people can share their emotions and win them forever.

Offer a welcome distraction. Instead of beating your chest, try keeping customers entertained. People just want to feel, laugh, cry, play, gasp and have their imagination captured, so they can forget about life, even if only for a moment.

Enough with the projecting. Instead of selling something that's important to you and disguising it as something that's important to them, listen to people in their natural habitat. Take advantage of ordinary conversations and normal discourse. They will tell you exactly what to sell to them.

Try caring.

Simulated compassion has a short shelf life.

Cartwheels.

The night I ended a four-year relationship, I slept like a dead rock.

I felt guilty. Like I should have been more devastated, more disturbed, busy counting dots on the ceiling, tossing and turning until the sun came up.

But when I woke up the next morning, rested and relieved for the first time in weeks, my body sent me a memo: *You made the right decision.*

Cartwheels should tell us something. Whether we quit a job, end a relationship or walk away from a lousy situation, if our legs are flailing like noodles, odds are, we're on the path of truth.

Guilty or not, we still have to appreciate the rightness of every experience.

Changed.

Almost everything has changed.

The technologies with which we innovate have changed. The processes by which we execute have changed. The ecosystems in which we do business have changed. The platforms that connect us have changed. The knowledge that we gain has changed. The way we document and store that knowledge has changed. The systems by which we spread our ideas have changed. And the structures through which we support and fund the execution of those ideas have changed.

But the one thing that hasn't changed, the one thing we can count on never changing, is human nature.

People are still people. People will always still be people.

And if we can stay in touch with that constant, forever thinking from the thesis of humanity, everything else will fall into place around it.

Changing.

Changing the world has never been easier.

We have the tools, we have the power, we have the resources, we have the connections, we have the initiative, we have the people and we certainly have enough problems that need to be solved.

What's missing is a beacon to guide us, give us hope and show the way forward.

A manifesto that serves as the poetry of a revolution.

It's the rally cry that inspires people to expand to their full capacity. It's the platform that signals the collective spirit of the culture. It's the calling card that demands something from people now. And it's the statement that tells the world who we are, what we believe, how we live, what we declare, what we denounce, and what the world would look like if everybody did exactly what we said.

Best of all, manifestos are free.

They cost nothing. They have power to change everything. They create a world more beautiful than the one we've dreamt up.

And they're the best way to understand, if only within our own hearts, who we are and what we believe in.

Chest.

Most brands are just beating their chests.

Bragging about their organic ingredients, posturing about their benevolent charity efforts, yammering about their innovative technology, posturing about their third round of funding and raving about their company culture.

Good for them.

But if they're so great, why don't they make their customers feel great?

Smart brands champion their causes through other people's feats and bravery.

Client.

Here's a generosity experiment worth trying.

Treat someone like a client, even before they become one.

No need to break the bank, give away the intellectual farm or collapse your entire agenda on moment's notice. You still have to be rational and realistic.

But just this once, just for fun, act as if the prospect you hope to land is already a paying client, someone who likes, trusts and believes in your value.

Not to create a sense of indebtedness. Not to create social pressure to reciprocate.

Just to see how powerful generosity really is.

And yes, there's always the possibility that potential clients will agree to meet with you, ask a thousand questions, take copious notes, act like they're going to hire you, then have a staff person do the work instead and never call you back because they might need to exploit you again in the future.

But it's also possible that prospects will be so floored by your ideas, so wowed by the generous spirit in which they were delivered, that they almost won't know how to react to such an act.

Might be worth trying.

Commodity.

When you sell a commodity, you differentiate through the uncommon.

Language, purpose, emotion, education, interaction, technology, leadership, narrative, culture, platform, design, connection, interactivity, community, service, soul, support, responsiveness, honesty and humanity.

These are the features that distinguish your organization, these are the real reasons customers do business with you. Since there is never a shortage of competence, what's scarce, and therefore valuable and remarkable, is this running imperative that drives your behavior, this nobility behind your work and the posture with which you approach your interactions.

Next time you're thinking about beating the competition on price, try raising the value of your uncommon service.

Add something that cannot be bought or measured with money.

Otherwise you'll just be another grain of sand lying on the beach.

Complain.

Anyone can make customers happy.

But if you really want to be a hero, if you want to wow people's pants off and get their mouths moving about your brand, you need a way to make the people who aren't your customers wish they were.

Here's one that pays.

Every day, people complain. Publicly. They tweet, blog, review or digitally kvetch about crappy service, disrespectful treatment, failed technology, lack of support, poor product quality, underwhelming shopping experiences and outrageous prices.

And nobody listens to them. Their complaints disappear into the digital ether.

This is the best thing that ever happened to you. Especially if these people are complaining about one of your competitors.

First, actively seek out negativity. In less than ten seconds, you can have your finger on the pulse of millions of frustrated customers. Social media isn't a sales tool, it's a hearing aid. And most search functions will tell you everything you need to know.

Second, do some light stalking. Get to know these people. Find out who they are, what they love and where they hang. Follow them. Search for kernels that give insight into their whole world.

Third, respond to people's emotions. Complainers just want to feel validated. Before launching into a solution, honor their humanity. Be fundamentally affirmative. Show some lighthearted personality to help the cause.

Fourth, apologize on behalf of your competitor. Tell customers they deserve better. Tell them that's no way to be treated. And tell them they're not in competition for the right to be treated decently.

Fifth, make it tangible. Take a picture. Send a card. Publish a video. Mail a delight item. Nothing fancy, nothing contrived. Just something that takes effort and care. Something completely unexpected that they'll never forget.

The point is, you can still make things right, even though you weren't the one who made it wrong.

You're not making war with the competitor, you're making love to the customer.

Concierge.

The biggest change in retail isn't online shopping, it's how online shopping has recalibrated the offline experience.

My uncle sells cars in Memphis. According to Tal, when his customers walk in the door, they have papers in their hands, pictures on their phones and prices in their minds. His philosophy is, "They've already sold themselves – I'm just the concierge."

When that's the case, the interaction changes.

Instead of selling, your job is to serve. To move heaven and earth to please the customer, regardless of how peculiar their request is.

Instead of asking, your job is to anticipate. To suggest unexpected ideas they may not have discovered in their initial research.

Instead of encouraging, your job is to empathize. To deliver peace of mind that confirms the decision they've already made.

Otherwise, customers will happily and hastily move on to the next desk.

Connection.

According to a recent report from the Cellular Telecommunications Industry Association, our country has 327 million mobile phone subscribers, but only 315 million people.

Proof positive that our insatiable desire for human connection will always outweigh our unstoppable desire for technological consumption.

Smartphones are awesome, but the fix we get when we use them to reach out and touch someone is the addiction.

It's physiological. As mammals, acts of human bonding cause our body to excrete *oxytocin*. This chemical reduces fear and anxiety, which increases empathy, trust and cooperation.

Who needs cocaine when we can get high on connection?

Constants.

A good life requires good constants.

Places to return to, rituals to abide by, people to confide in, rocks to anchor to, practices to rely on and structures to lean against. They're all part of our repertoire of faithful forces to keep life stable and meaningful when circumstances get a little too overwhelming.

When we first moved to New York, we started a podcast.

Nothing fancy. Nothing polished. Just two people on a journey, coming together each week for a ritual of reflection, rejoicing and ridiculousness.

In our first year, we recorded forty-one episodes. Had a blast every single time. And what's cool is, we don't know if they're any good. We don't know if people actually tune in. And that's fine with us. We're not trying to impress an audience, we're trying to keep ourselves sane.

And it's working.

Because without constants, there's nothing to wrap life's variables in.

Consume.

Your job isn't to be an entertainer, it's to be an enabler.

Instead of forcing consumers to consume your content, why not provide more power outlets and invite them to bring their own content?

In so doing, you preserve customer control by creating tools that put them in the driver's seat rather than in the back of the bus. In so doing, you stand out because the user experience of your brand is completely customized, enjoyable and memorable. In so doing, your customers find a place to hang their individuality at the center of their own digital lives.

That's what I would do.

Conversations.

Our priorities are way out of wack.

The assumption is that we need to make something better, sell something cheaper or ship something faster.

No, what we need is to have smarter conversations.

We might change the interaction model, by being unreasonably accessible where the rest of the world is hard to reach. *That's a smarter conversation.*

We might build our listening platform, by turning social media into a hearing aid while the rest of the world uses it as a sales tool. *That's a smarter conversation.*

We might position ourselves as teachers who solve expensive problems while the rest of the world is selfish with their knowledge. *That's a smarter conversation.*

We might create acts that make emotional connections while the rest of the world is bothering and interrupting people with advertisement. *That's a smarter conversation.*

Point being, customers already have everything they need.

Except us. In the flesh. Ready to listen to them.

Why don't we sell that?

Cost.

The web isn't just a connection machine, it's a cutting machine.

We've traded analog dollars for digital pennies, and the smart people and organizations who are taking advantage of this trend are seeing massive dividends.

We've lowered the cost of *gratitude*, which means saying thank you to people has never been easier. How are you using social media as a hearing aid to become a hero on a moment's notice?

We've lowered the cost of *sharing*, which means making our ideas spreadable through people has never been easier. How does your content give people bragging rights and increased status when they share it?

We've lowered the cost of *generosity*, which means giving ourselves away to people has never been easier. How are you delivering a daily gift to the world that builds up a huge surplus of goodwill?

We've lowered the cost of *communicating*, which means taking a risk and extending ourselves to people has never been easier. How can you quickly identify unsatisfied customers and reach out to help them?

We've lowered the cost of *collaborating*, which means taking a risk and extending ourselves to people has never been easier. How could you bring your humanity to the moment and find a new voice together?

We've lowered the cost of *production*, which means if you own a laptop, you own the factory. How will your organization come to power through its creations of code, not its construction of steel?

We've lowered the cost of *engagement*, which means the emotional labor of doing something difficult with people has never been easier. How can you appease problems and do marketing at the same time?

We've lowered the cost of *distributing*, which means making our work available to people has never been easier. How could you implement a pricing strategy that would make the competition want to come to your office and choke you?

He who cuts the most, wins.

Couple.

Every couple needs a common enemy.

Some force to fight against together, some adversity to triumph over together, and some experience, that's bigger and stronger than the couple itself, that forces them to stand at each other's shoulders, and with tears dropping like stars, bring their will to bear.

Whether it's moving across the country, starting a business together, having children, fighting illness or grieving the loss of a family member, every great partnership needs a good low. Something to call upon their resiliency, test their spirit and remind them that they're alive and real and human and imperfect, and by depending on one another, they will come out on the other side.

Otherwise they're just roommates.

Currency.

During a heated discussion on reward and recognition, my friend Julie, who works for a charitable art foundation, said something that captured my curiosity.

“I would rather get a holiday party than a holiday bonus.”

Her theory was, a check for a thousand bucks could buy a lot of cool stuff. But a night of celebration could deepen intimacy, create memories and build friendships that last forever. And to Julie, that was worth a lot more.

Of course, that’s just one person’s opinion. She values belonging and connection over money, but I imagine all of her coworkers wouldn’t automatically agree with her.

And they shouldn’t, either. They’re human beings. Each person speaks a different love language. And if we want them to stick around, people ought to be paid in their preferred currency.

Me, I would have taken the holiday party.

Date.

I'm a firm believer in the art of hiding the art.

Meeting people where they are, taking them back in time, helping clients forget they're clients and engaging people in a way that they lose track of time and disappear from the world in a puff of love smoke.

But the minute customers start struggling with the ambiguity of the situation, feeling unsure of the relationship roles and questioning your expectations, every interaction thereafter is stained.

If a woman doesn't know she's on a date until she comes home from one, somebody failed to communicate. If a hotel guest doesn't realize there's an extra fee until he sees one on the bill, somebody failed to communicate. If a customer doesn't know he's eating at a vegetarian restaurant until he breaks out in hives, somebody failed to communicate.

When in doubt, map it out.

If you want to knock the socks of the untrusting masses, go public early and often. Telegraph your intentions. Leave as little doubt in people's minds as possible. And never underestimate the power of observable candor.

Because there's a fine line between frictionless service and expectational clarity, and it can make the difference between a customer for life and an online review from hell.

Everyone has an agenda, why not be one of the few to lay yours bare?

Degree.

It all started with a sticker.

And now, with thirteen years of daily fieldwork and a half a million words of professionally published documentation behind it, wearing a nametag every day has earned me an advanced degree in social interaction.

Pretty cool. Try getting that at a traditional university.

The point is, who needs a degree when you have a superpower?

When you've been living the research, when all the information comes out of your existence, when you've accumulated enough specimens that the theory crystallizes on its own and when your curriculum comes from the classroom of the real world, nobody can argue with your body of experience.

If somebody hires you, it won't be because of the letters after your last name or a framed piece of paper on your wall.

They'll hire you for the special blend of magic you bring to the table.

Deliver.

Don't hand it over, deliver it.

Whether you're submitting a proposal, responding to a complaint, making a statement, giving an answer or telling a story, any time you can bring surprise and delight and love to the interactions that make up your day, it's worthwhile.

The servers at Sidney Street Café don't give you the menu, they perform it.

Each of their items, from apps to sides to desserts, are perfectly memorized by the server and delivered with more showmanship, more care and more excitement than any restaurant you've ever been to.

And that's why they're always on the short list of best restaurants in the city.

Because we live in an experience economy, and if you're not willing to invest a little effort in the art of showmanship, if you don't deliver things in a way that people would be happy to have repeated, you'll never burn the moment into people's brains.

Detective.

Insight doesn't come from expertise, it comes from doing detective work.

Approaching the problem in a holistic, intelligent, comprehensive and systematic way so that the solution presents itself.

Here's a snapshot of the strategic process I've been using for more than a decade:

Macro investigation. Issues including historical patterns, economic, social and cultural forces, the regulatory environment, any industry, distribution and technological concerns, and whatever other big picture trends will help identify the why behind the what and create context around the problem.

Micro investigation. Interrogate real human behavior, natural language, ordinary conversations and normal discourse, pouring over reams of content, streams of pictures, immersing yourself in the daily lives of relevant parties, asking smart people dumb questions, doing complaint case studies and sniffing for kernels that trigger entire worlds.

Connection analysis. Next, you overwhelm yourself with every possible input, spreading out everything you have front of your face, and start looking for natural relationships, patterns, inherent geometry, unconscious integrations, cross-pollinations, trends, categories, structures and thought bridges between seemingly unrelated ideas.

Insight extraction. Allow all the fragments to add up to a few unique, interesting, powerful and ownable opportunities where nobody else exists, and from that place, make a few insightful observations, ask a few what if questions and make a few why not recommendations, both of which help you move closer to a solution.

Hope that's helpful.

Sorry there's not a clearer explanation behind my process.

But if I could tell you exactly what to do, it wouldn't be art.

Dozen.

It started out as an insurance policy.

By adding one additional cookie to the order, bakers protected themselves against accidentally short weighting customers, paying severe government fines, losing a hand to an axe, having an ear nailed to their shop door and becoming known around town as a dishonest businessman.

Of course, that was seven hundred years ago.

Now they call it a baker's dozen because they care.

Because that one extra cookie, that one purposeful, tactile expression of effort, which only rounds out to about eight percent more dough, is worth giving away to the customer as a thank you for spending *their* dough on the first twelve.

What's your baker's dozen? What meaningful, memorable and meditated bonus do you offer at the end of every transaction?

It doesn't have to be about labor and time, just intention and attention.

That's the only insurance policy your brand needs.

Each.

Once you have email, you want everyone to have email.

That's why it works. It's a product designed to get better with use. As the idea grows, it becomes more valuable. The more of your friends who sign up, the better it works for everybody.

And as the web evolves, we're starting to see this trend in a number of industries.

Media streaming services get better the more they know about your interests. Gaming platforms unlock skills, levels and surprises the more you play. Search engines algorithms get more informed and accurate with every interaction. Social networking services are launching online art projects that grow more unique with every user interaction. Thermostats learn your schedule and program themselves the more you come and go. Speech recognition programs enhance language understanding with every word spoken. Adaptive learning technology better gauges student progress with every chapter.

It's like denim jeans and leather boots, but more social.

For your next marketing push, before hawking your product *to the users*, try harnessing the collective intelligence *of the users* to make your system better.

Effort.

The amplification of effort has never been greater.

The time of trial is always. Everything matters, everybody's watching and everything's a performance. And when we care, I mean really, really care, and do so with daily consistency, we will see greater residual value than ever before.

A single tweet sent out in a moment of caring can erase the memory of every review every written. A single response to an underappreciated user can earn hundreds of loyal fans in an instant. And a single interaction with an angry customer can turn a moment of empathy into a movement of millions.

Understand this wave, and you can ride it.

Encourage.

It costs nothing to encourage.

It's a gift we can give to anyone, anytime, anywhere, and change them forever. And it's our responsibility to be dispensaries of encouragement to everyone we meet.

Let us give people permission to do something great.
Let us throw people over the other side of the wall.

Let us provide the spark that grows into an inferno.
Let us take people's hands and push them into the fire.

Let us give people a front row seat to their own genius.
Let us believe in them more than they believe in themselves.

Let us help people fall in love with themselves all over again.
Let us leave people altered, refusing to let them stay where they are.

That's encouragement.

A gift that costs nothing, but changes everything.

Entrepreneur.

Society flourishes when people think entrepreneurially.

When a natural disaster devastates millions of people's livelihoods, the stories that touch my heart the most are the ones involving courageous people who don't need permission to take action, the ones who don't wait around for the green light from above to help those in need.

According to a recent article, The Red Hook Initiative was joined by about fifteen people from the Occupy movement who have set up infrastructure and logistics for running hot meal operations serving, hundreds of people every day, bringing in medics, gathering information and broadcasting calls for volunteers and supplies.

Real entrepreneurship isn't about running a business, it's about running the risk. In the words of Douglas Rushkoff, the biggest threat to the powers that be is anyone who occupies anything.

That's the exciting part about thinking like an entrepreneur.

You are the powers that be.

It is that initiative, that instigation capital, that human will, and that desire to move forward, that make the world better.

Equation.

Smart companies take something out of the equation for people.

Not immeasurable elements like friction, time, energy, work, risk, taboo, fear, embarrassment, inconvenience, complexity, stress, guesswork, legwork, hassle, frustration, pain and mystery.

They actually delete something measurable, visible and tangible. Something annoying and big enough that customers wouldn't just notice if it were gone, but would be delighted to find out it's gone, excited to tell people it's gone, and inspired to come back, again and again, just for the experience of not having to deal with it.

What if your bank took deposit envelopes out of the equation? What if your restaurant took ordering out of the equation? What if your store took waiting in line out of the equation? What if your product took instruction manuals out of the equation? What if your software took installation out of the equation?

Instead of wasting resources to marginally improve something that customers are always going to hate anyway, why not scrap it from the process entirely, then spend your money bragging about how you're the only company around who doesn't have it?

Cut through the tradition that's getting in the way of the product.

Shatter a cultural taboo and send some shockwaves through society.

Everybody.

Everybody is somebody's somebody.

It all depends on what we see when we see people.

When we sit down on a bus next to a complete stranger, we have a choice. We can take the easy way out, crack open a book, put in our ear buds and disappear into ourselves.

Or we can say hello. We can notice people. We can create an act of connection in a moment of silence.

It doesn't work every time, but there are a lot of times.

What's neat is, once we have a chance encounter with a stranger that changes everything, we start to see strangers differently. Our posture changes. What we see when we see people isn't what it used to be.

And that's when the real fun begins.

Not because we see somebody as a mark, but because we view every interaction as a chance to change somebody's world.

Maybe theirs, maybe ours, maybe both.

Evolve.

Every organism has to keep changing just to stay competitive.

If we're not ready to adapt and remake ourselves as the environment changes, the world will evolve and leave us behind.

Time waits for no man. Especially not the man addicted to what used to work because he's romantic about it. Technology is the obvious example. We can insulate ourselves for a while, but eventually, it will become harder and harder to say that we don't want to be part of it. And when we start to feel like it's the story of our time that we're not a part of, the fear of missing out will force us to evolve.

There's always a choice.

Negatively govern our growth by insisting we never diversify, or outgrow our old beliefs and open ourselves to the complete possibility of what might be.

Exit.

Most entrepreneurs go into business as a byproduct of beautiful timing.

Why should their exit be any different?

Here's how you know it's time:

When you feel like you've squeezed all of the juice of this lemon, and there's nothing left but rind and pulp.

When the drug you used to be addicted to, the one that served you well and was good to you, no longer has the same effect.

When you reach the point of diminishing returns, bloodying your knuckles on doors that have no intention of opening.

When you're executing without elevating, spending all your time just to make enough money to buy more time.

When you feel like you're just keeping your head above water, but never actually swimming anywhere.

When you're bored with the work, burned out by the hustle and no longer in love with the future.

When you're showing up faithfully, every day, shipping your face off, and still hearing nothing but crickets.

When you've hit your growth ceiling and have a hunch that your golden goose is probably done laying eggs.

And when you come to the sobering realization that you can't keep the fairy tale alive forever.

It's time to move on.

Face.

That's the beauty of face to face.

We don't need money, we don't need a degree, we don't need four bars, we don't need a password, we don't need a router, we don't need an outlet, we don't need a screen, we don't need a keyboard, we don't need a converter, we don't need an app, we don't need a headset, we don't need anything, really.

Real communication doesn't require props.

If we want to talk to people with our mouths, all we need is the will to communicate and the desire to connect.

Famous.

It's not a product, it's a platform.

When your brand builds something that makes people famous, recognized and part of something cool that matters to them, they will love you forever.

Threadless is the perfect example. They reward their designers with significant financial prizes, public kudos and coveted community awards. And as a result, their users are the most engaged in the world, their shirts are the most amazing in the world and their brand is the most beloved in the world.

How is your product a stage for customers to stand on?

Feelings.

Big companies have big hearts.

They're deeply and hopelessly in love with their own marketing, their own products, their own brand values, their own policies, their own language, their own ideas and their own technology.

Good.

What's important about this infatuation is, it creates an interesting opportunity for us, the outsiders, the objective observers, the arbiters of unconventional wisdom, to deliver a heroic dose of customer centric perspective by finding something the client would never think look for.

Personally, I gain the most insight by reading amateur online reviews, browsing sarcastic social media hashtags, searching for video parodies, looking at patterns in customer photo streams, poking around for controversy attached to the industry and googling the client's brand with emotional words attached to the search phrase.

By tapping into these ordinary conversations and normal discourses people are having in their daily world, we see things the client can't.

Because we don't follow the money, we follow the feelings.

Feelings aren't facts, but they do leave fingerprints. And when we listen loudly enough, we tend to pick up on the little things that can change everything.

Find the path that's already been laid out for you and start walking.

Finally.

I've always known who I was, but I've never known where I belonged.

And because that's such a fundamental human craving, because the longing for belonging is a such huge part of what it means to be alive, when you don't feel like you belong, you always feel like a piece of your life is missing.

It sucks.

Like an asterisk, there's always this subtle undercurrent of notenoughness that gnaws at your heart and clogs your full capacity for living.

Until we find home.

Not where we live, but where we're understood.

And right away, our soul opens up.

Because when we finally discover the person or the people or the community that gets us, that yesses us, that embraces the weirdness we have to offer, and that actually makes us feel normal for once in our goddamn life, we can finally stop wondering if there are any other people in the world like us.

There is no exhale more satisfying.

Forest.

In temperate rain forests, mosses, lichen and ferns cover most of the ground.

This creates a highly dense forest floor, which makes it hard for seedlings to grow.

Until a tree falls.

Then everything changes.

Known as *nursery logs*, these trees allow seedlings to germinate on their fallen, decaying trunks. They provide the foundation for the next generation. Thanks to their death, young plants can grow by sending their roots down the log to the ground.

To me, this is beautiful. It's a biological example that everything is connected, everything has a role, everything has a balance, everything has a reason, everything has a season and everything has a story.

To nature, it's just another day in the office.

Forget.

If you can help the client forget she's a client, everybody wins.

Try a few of these.

Instead of applying your rigid methodology, just sit down, look people in the eye, ask them what they want to do, and what would make them happy.

Instead of bludgeoning people with facts and theories, just talk like people talk, listen as loudly as you can, and remember that they're human just like you.

Instead of breathing deep sighs that make people feel like an inconvenience, make the daily chore of being a client more fun.

Instead of trying to minimize call time, hold a contest to see who can interact with clients on the phone for the longest duration.

Instead of waiting for permission to warm up to each other, just cut the crap and connect on a personal level that's unrelated to business.

Forget about service, try a little amnesia.

Freemium.

The freemium model is finally working.

Give the product away to your tribe for free, let them use it until they're blue in the face, then, once they realize the value of the product – and the increasingly important role it plays in their lives – you make money via micro transactions along the way like upgrades, paid subscriptions, cheat codes, level walkthroughs, feature unlocks, removing ad content, premium versions, more space, complementary products, technical support and connecting lonely users at live events.

Piece of cake.

But first, it all starts with making the free product great enough that everybody will take it and use it forever. That's the big secret of technology, it's not about what the product can do, but how enjoyable it is to use.

Because if you can make something people enjoy using, they'll use it more. And once you skyrocket the number of people aching to stay, eventually, enough of those people will be willing to pay.

In the words of Phil Libin, “The easiest way to get a million people to pay for non scarcity product is to make a hundred million people fall in love with it.”

Friction.

Companies can no longer get away with being hard to do business with.

If your business has inconvenient hours, long wait times, unaccommodating payment methods, low inventory, complex ordering procedures and outdated contact information, and when their employees are unresponsive to phone calls, unwilling to admit mistakes and unfriendly toward inexperienced customers, the accumulated friction will certainly destroy you.

Customers walk through the door hoping you would give some joy to them. They shouldn't have to work so hard to do business with you.

They work hard enough.

If you want your business to be a welcome oasis in the desert of corporate mediocrity, it's not enough to lower the barriers to entry, you have to lower the barriers to everything.

Funnel.

Toshi's has live music every night of the week.

Which isn't uncommon in a big city, except for one key difference.

The stage is catty cornered between two massive floor to ceiling glass walls.

This allows bystanders, tourists and other people passing by to get a perfect view of the stage. Some take pictures, some hang for a moment, some stand for a few songs, and some decide to come in to dance the night away.

But according to an interview with Toshi, his club has five or six hundred customers come through every night. Even on Mondays. That's way more than the industry average.

Because the act of running his business makes the funnel bigger.

Without the huge window, without the generosity of a free show to anyone who walks by, it would be difficult to convince people of the club's value. For all they know, it's just another one of the two thousand bars in the city.

I wonder how much business you're missing because future customers can't see you in your element, doing what you do, the way that only you can do it.

Gaming.

Games make dreams come true.

They give people a powerful and vicarious life. They let them do what they've always wanted to do, but were too afraid to try. And they create an interactive experience that doesn't try to persuade them of anything, but rather, creates a playroom that rewards and validates users.

On the business side of things, if a game can build a critical mass of users around it, then it can be leveraged to do something else.

By helping the customer take their eye off the ball and play with something that's unrelated, yet choreographed intelligently, you create a reason to believe. By encouraging users to actually do stuff, you imprint them with an idea more successfully.

Why show an advertisement about your cause when you could create a simulation that allows people to tackle it directly?

Healthy.

It's hard to be healthy alone.

When it's just you, there's no accountability. Nobody to keep you conscious of portion control. Nobody to meet you at the gym before work. Nobody to remind you that you don't need another drink.

When it's just you, there's no incentive. Nobody to motivate you to get better. Nobody to celebrate with when you reach your goal. Nobody to bust your chops when you fall short of the mark.

When it's just you, there's no relationship. Nobody to share the joy of cooking with. Nobody to experience the catharsis of exertion with. Nobody to build a sense of connection with.

When it's just you, there's no community. Nobody to share your humanity with. Nobody to face injustice with. Nobody to make you feel less alone about handling the ups and downs of life.

If want to be healthier people, we don't need more supplements.

We need more people.

Home.

To belong is to feel at home.

And home, physical or otherwise, is the place where you are remembered, met with accepting eyes, welcomed with wanting arms and cherished for what you contribute; the place that embraces the weirdness you have to offer and gives you the freedom to use talents you might never exercise anywhere else; the place that makes you feel part of something most people can only dream of.

In short, home is the place where you don't have to wonder if there are any other people in the world like you.

If you want to foster that sense of belonging with your employees, members, customers, users, or whoever else is conspiring to advance and influence your organizational ecosystem, here's a formula worth exploring.

Our organization is a second home where people just happen to _____.

The missing word is your company's primary service offering, whether it's work, practice, worship, relax, drink, watch, swim or sweat.

But the key to this equation is the phrase *just happen*.

Because what you physically do is irrelevant compared to what you symbolically do, which is create a home, a center of human belonging, that helps us feel less alone.

Homerun.

In baseball, just over a hundred players hit a homerun on their first at bat.

Makes sense. That's a lot of pressure without a lot of experience.

Most players are lucky enough to eek out single, barely get on first, maybe steal a base or two; then, with smart running, a solid lineup and little luck – score – then hustle back to the dugout in the hopes of having another at bat later in the game.

Artists and entrepreneurs work the same. We publish our first book, put on our first show, launch our first website, and we don't expect fireworks. We're just grateful for the chance to play. And we're hopeful that we might score enough to get into the game and prove to the world (and ourselves) that we're capable.

That way, we can start building a history that keeps our average up.

Still, every once in a while, a player comes along that doesn't just knock one out of the park – he knocks the cover off the ball.

Like Robert Redford in *The Natural*, he takes a swing and takes the world by surprise.

And we're never the same again.

When this happens, when we're privileged enough to witness somebody's homerun, it's our responsibility to show them the replay. It's our responsibility to grab them by the lapel and reveal what they can't see for themselves. And it's our responsibility to tell them what they've done, why it matters, and why they need to keep swinging, every day, forever, until it's all over.

We need to be a stand for these people's greatness.

Because without that brand of encouragement (which costs nothing, by the way) some people may never realize how bloody brilliant they really are.

Going. Going. *Gone.*

Hoodie.

If you read enough headlines, and it seems like every idiot with a hoodie and a half an idea is getting a million dollars to try it.

But the reality is, less than one percent of entrepreneurs secure funding. Most of them are scrappy as hell, building projects around not waiting for the miracle, spending time, not dimes, working their faces off until their idea gains traction.

Which is certainly a lot more work.

Then again, if you don't take anybody's money, nobody can tell you what to do.

Perhaps the price of freedom is measured in sweat.

House.

We don't even have to leave the house anymore.

Next time we want to watch movies, play video games, check out a book, do some shopping, attend a seminar, conduct a meeting, take a class, get a job, find a date, do some research, cast our vote, get in shape, eat a snack, start a business, prospect for clients, send a package, join a club or tune into the game, we just fire up our laptop, whip out the smart phone or slap down a tablet and make it happen.

Unbelievable.

And yet, despite the unparalleled possibility that technology can provide, I'm still kind of wondering when our hunger for life beyond the screen will swallow our addiction to convenience.

I've said it a million times, the purpose of online is to get offline.

If we never endeavor to communicate beyond digital, if we never connect to each other by more than just pixels, we fail to experience the truest, highest form of human interaction.

Get out of the house.

Humble.

To write something down is to humble ourselves.

That's why people rarely do it.

Writing things down means we don't know everything. Or can't remember everything. Or might learn something. Writing things down means we have to pause long enough to honor the moment and listen to people. Writing things down means we have to confront our own beliefs and drip a little blood on the paper. Writing things down means we might have been wrong about something, and god forbid, might have to be open to an idea that makes us squirm.

So we don't.

We convince ourselves that certain ideas aren't important, aren't worth remembering and aren't worth documenting. And we move on.

On the other hand, when we write things down, when we respect everything life has to offer and treat our ideas with deep democracy, even the ones that scare us, we start conversations that change the world.

It's not a pen, it's a lever.

Idea.

If your idea is everywhere, you win.

The hard part is, millions of people around the world are trying to make their ideas more popular than yours. And with the exception of the few that hit a run of dumb luck, most of the ideas you want to spread, won't. Most of your marketing attempts are reminders of just how deaf the world really is.

Even the big guys, the companies with the most brilliant and expensive marketing campaigns out there, fail to attract more than a modest amount of attention.

But don't let that be another excuse not to try.

If your ideas make you excited to get up in the morning, if they help you find a home for all of your talents, and if they make meaning in the world to the people who matter most, you win too

Ideas.

Ideas don't sell themselves.

If you're lucky enough to get a meeting with someone who can say yes to you, be ready to present more than just another high concept pitch.

After all, single assets in isolation don't have much value. But when you come through the door with an arsenal of weapons, your ideas will be very hard to resist.

Try a few of these.

Research is the new black. Smart people do their homework, but a genius works over an idea like a train hobo with a chicken bone. Don't feel compelled to present every thread of your research, but make sure people know you put in a hell of a lot of work when nobody was watching.

Give your idea a handle. Labels make it easier to classify and comprehend what's going on around us. And by putting something into words, you give people the ability to choose. Don't be afraid to name your ideas. If you do so correctly, people will comprehend them correctly.

Bring props. Instead of building a hype engine around your idea, physically make one. Build a prototype of your idea and have the dummy ready to go. Then, when the time is right, slap it down on the table. And instead of talking, you'll have something to do the talking for you. You'll be interesting before you open your mouth.

That's the secret of selling ideas.

High concept, high context, high content and high contact.

Impression.

First impressions are formed long before first encounters.

By the time people get to you, they've already verified your reputation from a variety of virtual sources. Thanks to online reviews, friend recommendations, price comparisons, smartphone apps, geolocating programs and social media conversations, curb appeal has been replaced by blurb appeal.

Consider the implications of this shift on your business.

Smarter buyers. Treating customers like idiots won't work anymore. It's not only disrespectful, it's expensive. And when it happens, people won't take it personally, they'll just walk away.

Greater accountability. If your service experience violates the expectations people already have, they're going to call you on the carpet. And when it happens, people will demand that you honor the online promises they came for.

Quicker transactions. When customers walk in the door toting papers, pictures and prices, they're not browsing – they're buying. And because they're already sold themselves, you're just the concierge.

It's kind of spooky.

First impressions used to form in the first ten seconds.

But now, the interaction has inverted.

If you're waiting until they walk in the door to make a first impression, it's too late.

Incestuous.

When an industry starts to become cannibalistic and incestuous, it might be a good time to walk away.

We've seen it in a number of fields, from comedy to publishing to consulting to entertainment. People start feeding off and breeding with their own kind, inhaling each other's fumes, building business models around each other, sharing the same stories, being guests on each other's shows, living in each other's pockets, swapping customers and saturating the market. And because these folks meet most of their needs inside the boundaries of their own family, playing nothing but inside ball, they eventually isolate themselves from the outside world and retreat into an effortless, airless, echo chamber stroke fest.

The result is an infinite regression, a dull blanket of sameness draped over an entire industry, where people's willingness to listen and stretch and expand is muted.

That's when it's time to move on.

Industry.

Physics isn't about the solution.

It's about approaching the problem in a sound, positive, intelligent and systematic way so that the solution presents itself.

Interestingly, the same could be said for business.

It's not about selling a product, it's about approaching an industry in an entirely new way so that the product sells itself.

Woolley, a law firm in Stradford, conducts most of their correspondence online by calling attorneys based in different parts of the country.

Aced, an online gambling community, has secret features, bonus codes and free invitations to live poker junkets embedded into their table designs.

Zack Borer, a singer and songwriter, released a new digital single every month throughout the year, leading up to the release of his new record.

Nature Works, a textile material company, holds annual roundtable discussions to involve all levels of their supply chain in the conversation.

These people aren't exactly changing the world, but at least they have the guts to speak out against the system try something innovative.

That's way more interesting than marching in lockstep with the culture.

And isn't that why physics is all about?

Influence.

The best way to reach future customers is through existing customers.

That's the chain of influence. Now that people have replaced their trust in traditional authorities with trust in each other, they don't want to hear from the companies who make the products, and certainly not the experts who review them, they want to hear from the amateurs, the real people, who actually use the products.

Rotten Tomatoes, the world's best film review aggregator, is a fascinating example. For every movie listed, they post two kinds of reviews. First, the ones from approved critics, usually certified members of writing guilds or film associations, who review movies for a living. And second, the reviews from registered users, usually film fanatics and regular people, who simply love going to the movies and sharing their experience.

Who are we more likely to trust?

Well, if I'm going to leave the house and part with my precious time and money, personally, I care less about critical acclaim and more about casual approval.

The balance of power has shifted.

Intangible.

When you sell a commodity, you differentiate through language, purpose, emotion, education, interaction, technology, leadership, narrative, culture, connection, service, support, responsiveness, honesty and humanity.

That way, instead of lowering your price, you're raising your value.

And you won't have to feel like a grain of sand lying on a beach.

A smart strategy for doing so is to make the intangible inescapable.

To take the service you provide for customers and find a unique, personal and creative way to visually substantiate the process, facilitate a graphical understanding of the milestones along the way and amplify the care and effort you put into your work.

If you design web applications, send clients screen captures with demos of the new features. If you install residential landscaping, send families daily progress videos of the project. If you create digital marketing campaigns, send clients panoramic shots of the team working on office whiteboards. If you run an auto repair shop, text customers pictures of technicians hard at work on their cards. If you manage a pet daycare, upload pictures of owners' dogs romping around with their canine friends. If you design custom wedding bands, send couples time lapse videos of comps and concepts of their rings.

The point is, in an increasingly commoditized world, credibility is a function of process, not product. And a little extra intention and attention goes a long way.

Memorialize the method, brand the service and publicize the how behind the what.

You will communicate all three dimensions of your value.

Integrate.

People will always value a brand if the experience of it adds something to their lives.

The problem is, too many companies fail to actually consider people's lives when they make decisions. And as a result, their marketing is tolerated at best and loathed at worst.

Turns out, it's not about starting with the customer in mind, it's about actually starting with the customer. It's not about how they fit into your marketing plan, it's about how you fit into their lives. It's not about observing their behavior, it's about becoming part of their society. And it's not about you beating your chest about your product, it's about people celebrating how your product fits into their world and how you enable them to use it better.

If you want to integrate your brand to fit into people's lives, ask these questions.

How does this precisely complement people's way of life? How do we put the product in the context of people's daily world? How does this turn a painful process into a pleasurable practice? How is this an excuse to spend more time doing something mundane? How can we let technology enhance an experience from start to finish?

What idea, that people are convinced is dead, can we bring back to life? How do we create an experience that makes people believe in something again? How does this reward people for everyday interactions that they're already having? What experience, that people avoided as a badge of honor, are they now obsessed with? What stories are people telling about themselves and how our product fits into it?

Think of it as developing a better conception of humankind.

Interaction.

Interaction is the agent of human decision.

If someone decides to pay attention to, press the like button for, buy something from, become a follower of, or tell others about your brand, it's likely because of an interaction they had with another human being.

Namely, not you.

Because real marketing isn't about what you do to people, it's about what you enable people to do to each other. It's about creating social meaning above and beyond your product or service.

If your brand is the instrument that connects the disconnected, gets them joyfully interacting with each other, persuading each other to step out on the dance floor, influencing each other on your behalf, telling each other about what you do, and ultimately treating each other as the final authority of trust, you're the hero.

Because it's not who you know. It's not who knows you. It's whose life is better connected to other people because they know you.

I wonder what would happen if, in addition to selling a great product, your brand helped satisfy the underlying social need within each of us to belong.

Interesting.

Interesting ideas are the cornerstone of progress.

Frankly, if the idea isn't interesting, we're not interested.

Boring stuff never goes anywhere. It just sits there and laps up time, money and attention, traveling in a circle, never arriving at its destination, never quite succeeding, never quite failing.

And when innovation is the code, when outright invention is the future, there's a certain responsibility to take the boring ideas, grab the by the lapel and figure out what would make them more interesting.

A few helpful questions to ask:

What about the fright factor? Ideas become interesting the moment they start to scare us. Think about what would make the idea riskier and more provocative. Set aside your stylistic inclinations try disrupting to the status quo.

What about the arc? Story satisfies our human need for narrative. Think about the metaphorical thinking behind the idea. Map out the idea in terms of characters, conflict, journey and resolution.

The point is, everything has the potential be interesting.

We just have to apply the right filter.

Ironic.

A few months ago, the woman behind the counter at a grocery store asked me if I was wearing a nametag for any particular reason, or just to be ironic.

“Actually, I always wear it,” I smiled. “Makes people friendlier.”

She shrugged and handed me my receipt.

And on the walk home, I thought to myself, “Ironic? Why would wearing a nametag be ironic? And if so, does that make me a hipster?”

Confused, I did some research. And I came across a fascinating article from *The New York Times* that mapped out the cultural and psychological meaning of hipsterism, once and for all:

“If irony is the ethos of our age, then the hipster is our archetype of ironic living. The hipster is a scholar of social forms, a student of cool. He tries to negotiate the age-old problem of individuality, not with concepts, but with material things. His irony is the most self-defensive mode, as it allows him to dodge responsibility for his choices, aesthetic and otherwise. To live ironically is to hide in public.”

So the more I thought about it, the more I realized, wearing a nametag is the exact opposite of being a hipster.

It’s not cool, it’s vulnerable. It allows me to be affected by the world around me. By standing out, I risk being rejected. It’s not hiding, it’s transparent. There’s no backstage. Instead, the nametag creates a social construct that enables accountability through attribution. It’s not nostalgic, it’s mindful. The nametag keeps me present. Instead of trudging along in a diminished state of awareness, it snaps me into the magic of the moment.

It’s not posturing, it’s personal. On a micro level, it builds social capital. The nametag teaches me the art of conversation, the joy of listening and the power of interaction. It’s not sarcastic, it’s earnest. The nametag is a simple, sincere expression. It’s a statement about what’s meaningful to me, and declares it without suppression. It’s not referential, it’s direct. I’m not pointing to anything other than the nametag. Not even Seinfeld. There’s no explanation behind it. I just love wearing it.

What’s ironic about that?

Join.

Good brands are bought, great brands are joined.

Over the last few months, I've interviewed fifteen presidents of fifteen organizations with amazing culture. And upon revisiting each of those conversations, I've realized a key insight about belonging.

If you want more people to join your brand, you have to understand the human implications of why we join things in the first place.

People join where they can belong, make meaning and enjoy the company of others. They join to participate in a venture, a crusade that accomplishes much more than they ever could individually. They join to come alive in the role that was designed for them. And they join to do what they love in an environment that wants them to do it.

People join where their craziness and uniqueness will be embraced. They join where they will be understood. They join where they can pillage the playground of their minds and put their fingerprints on the things they love. And they join where reality is as big as their imaginations allow it to be.

People join where their real self can exist. They join where what they do is what makes them feel most beautiful. They join where they can use their own creativity to solve problems. They join where they're not in competition for the right to be treated decently.

And they join where they can be serious about their talent and their obligation to use it.

Build that, and they will come.

Language.

Language is the packaging of your brand.

It's the single most underleveraged marketing hotspot, crucial to your company culture, essential to the way people experience your service and an ideal strategy for making the mundane memorable.

Photojojo, a website dedicated to insanely great photography projects, uses engaging, playful and memorable language on their website, newsletters, shipping materials, warning labels and product receipts. In fact, most of their language is dinosaur related. And according to a host of online reviews, customers can't help but experience feelings of elation and whimsy every time they read the words outside and inside of the box.

Costs nothing, changes everything.

To identify your brand's trademark language, consider asking a few questions.

What words govern your questions? What are your favorite phrases to put in emails? What are your best questions to ask customers? What sentence would prompt someone to tweet a screen shot of your website? What words do you own in the minds of the people you serve? What phrases do you use that nobody else uses? What's the one word the world will never think about the same way after buying from you? What language invites customers to share pictures of your packaging with their friends?

Talk doesn't have to be cheap.

Brand your language intelligently, and it can be priceless.

Loneliness.

I was flying to Denver when it happened.

I was preparing my notes for a speech called, “The Entrepreneur’s Dilemma.” The focus of the presentation was how loneliness was an inevitable landmark of the entrepreneurial landscape, and how to manage it. A topic near and dear to my heart.

The guy next to me couldn’t help but notice my screen. After about twenty minutes of sneaking glances, he finally asked, “So, Scott, are you writing a book?”

Headphones still in, I said yes.

Next, he asked about the topic of the book. And I said something vague like “communication.” Being on a roll with my work, I didn’t want to give an answer that garnered too many follow up questions.

Couldn’t this guy see that I was busy trying to write about loneliness?

I went back to my work.

About thirty seconds later, he asked another question. Then another. And another. Apparently he had never met an author before and was curious about the publishing process.

Seriously. This guy really needs to leave me alone. How am I supposed to finish writing this piece about how lonely I am if –

Oh. Right.

Standing on a whale, fishing for minnows.

Smacked in the face with a healthy dose of irony. I wised up, unplugged and started talking to him.

Nice guy, actually. He was an entrepreneur himself.

And I asked him, “What takes you out to Denver?”

“My father’s funeral.”

Oh.

And I thought I was lonely.

How many people did you go out of your way to ignore last week?

Lose.

Entrepreneurs secretly want to lose it all.

To burn everything down, salt the earth and see if we can do it again. To throw a curveball and test how much faith we have in ourselves. To start from scratch, letting go of everything we've tried and built and accomplished, except for the person we've become, recognize that we are the only thing we have to offer, and reinvest that into something brand new.

It sucks to be wired this way.

But for entrepreneurs, not unlike gamblers, the thrill is in the bet. We're addicted to the rush. If we can't get in trouble, it's not an adventure. And if it's not an adventure, we're not fulfilling our whole capacity for living.

Our hearts simply don't understand settling.

Love.

It happens to all of us.

We meet someone, hear something, go somewhere, buy something, use something, find something or join something, and after a short while, after falling madly in love with this new thing or person or place, that we can't imagine living without, we start to forget what life was like before.

Love affects the head, not just the heart.

It's the ultimate delete button.

Because it is the response to what represents our highest values, and *because* it is the song that reminds us what we most cherish in life, when it hits us, when love casts its magic spell, it does this spooky thing where it erases the memory of the past.

What did I *do* before I had _____?

And so the goal, either organizationally or personally, either digitally or physically, is to fill in that blank. To deliver so much value through our work that, once people have been bitten by our bug, once the venom of our value starts coursing through their veins, there's no turning back.

Even if they did turn back, they wouldn't remember the past anyway.

Magic.

It's not a nametag, it's a magic trick.

Think about it. In the past thirteen years, I built a successful publishing and consulting enterprise out of nothing. *Nothing*. I authored dozens of books, did hundreds of interviews, published thousands of articles and got paid big money by big companies to travel around the world and share my story with millions of people, despite having no job experience, no resume, no credentials, and no legitimate expertise whatsoever.

And I can honestly say that, at any given point, I never knew what I was doing.

But nobody noticed. They were too busy looking at the nametag.

That's magic. It's the art of choreographing attention.

It's not about deceiving people, it's about distracting them. It's not about duping the audience, it's about misdirecting them. It's not about dishonesty, it's about capturing people's imagination through selective perception. It's not about sneaking up on people, it's about transforming them through the power of the unexpected. And it's not about manipulating people, it's about wielding power through the advantage of being underestimated.

Master that, and you can get away with anything.

Make.

I've been an inventor my whole life.

Making things has always been the most natural way for me to engage with the world. When I get up in the morning, there's this mechanism inside me that wonders what I'm supposed to make next. And it's relentless. Like the junkie who walks thirty miles to get twenty dollars, the mechanism doesn't shut up until it finally gets its daily fix.

That's why, if I don't spend at least a little time each day, tinkering away, I grow restless. I don't feel like myself. And I won't feel like myself until I make something.

But that's just me.

Or is it?

Maybe it's not a personality thing. Maybe it's a person thing.

Human beings, by their very nature, are builders. We make art to capture our feelings, we make tools to amplify our potential, we make games to express our playfulness and we make rituals to celebrate our experiences.

We're created to create.

And we should never stop. No matter how good, how popular, how useful or how meaningful our creations are, we should never stop inventing. Ever. Because when we stop making things, we lose our innovative edge. And when we lose our innovative edge, we fail to serve the progress of humanity.

Fear not innovation. Fear only that which dims your capacity to innovate.

Stay calm and carry on?

More like get excited and make things.

Manifesto.

If you want to start a movement, you have to write a manifesto.

A short, concise, inspiring declaration, written in your brand's trademark language, that gives your values a voice, becomes a powerful social object and paints a compelling, detailed picture of the desired future you want people to join you in creating.

Once you put that on wax, everything changes.

Holstee never intended for their manifesto to go viral, become an iconic example of office art and inspire millions of people around the world to claim a mindful and purposeful existence. The owners of the company just wanted to sit down and create a cool, visual reminder of what they live for, what they want from life and why they go into work every day.

But because of this document, this bloody, heartfelt statement that connected and infected so many of us, their brand became more followable, their organization became more joinable, their philosophy became more spreadable and, best yet, their bottom line became more profitable.

And yet, there are *still* organizations out there who haven't written theirs yet. Not because they don't care, but because they don't know where to begin.

Fortunately, this happens to be my superpower.

I might not be able to change a flat, but I will melt your face off with my skills as a strategist. Ask anyone who's spent more than five minutes with me, and they will testify to my talents as a noticer, translator, interpreter, wordsmith, synthesizer, imaginator and visionary.

Not because it's my job, not because it's my calling, but because this is who I am.

This is what I do.

And if your organization wants help crafting your manifesto, email me. And if you write the word "manifesto" in the subject line, I'll ping you back with the question you need to ask yourself to get started.

Media.

Social media isn't the answer.

With every marketer in the world clamoring to make their message heard, social media has gone from the golden child to the pool filled with golden water. The place is so crowded, nobody goes there anymore. And the days of buying likes, tricking people into consuming content and bothering customers into doing business are over.

Ten years ago, when the web was just a baby, and when we didn't know any better, the set it and forget approach to marketing might have worked.

But we're big boys now.

And if companies were smart, instead of drinking the pee water like everybody else, they would do the bold thing, initiate brave conversations about something bigger and create a whole new pool.

That way, they could be everywhere the competition isn't.

Memorability.

Memorable doesn't mean profitable.

Just because your new ad campaign is witty, quotable and plays hip music in the background, doesn't mean your brand is going to see sales lift.

That's the problem with mainstream marketing.

Customers won't forget it, but they won't buy it either.

They may remember commercials from ten years ago, but ask them what the actual product was, and they'll draw a blank.

At its core, the purpose of marketing is to sell stuff. We can hyperbolize all we want, but at the end of the day, if you have millions of eyeballs that don't give a shit, you lose.

Memorable.

Anything worth doing is worth making memorable.

Considering how absurd and transient life really is, there's no good reason not to add personality and surprise and bounce to the interactions that make up our days. That's what gives our moments weight. That's how we make each other feel alive.

Think of it as an exercise in creative mindfulness. A mental recipe. An awareness plan for perceiving, experiencing and thinking about the world around us. *What could we do to make this moment, right now, a more humane, pleasant passing of time?*

The more we ask that question, the more connected and colorful the world becomes.

The point is, if all the world's a stage, why not put on a show for each other? Why not take a moment to make a memory? Why not invest a few extra minutes or a few extra bucks to do something people will remember forever?

That's why we're here anyway.

To turn life into one big round the clock transcontinental flash mob.

Memory.

If your word of mouth marketing plan is to put street canvassers at busy intersections to interrupt passerbys, verbally spam them with annoying questions about the cause and hand out pamphlets people are going to throw away ten seconds later, you missed.

Mindshare is a neutral entity.

Like tofu, it takes on the flavor of whatever sauce it's immersed in.

And yet, organizations spend thousands of hours and millions of dollars generating word of mouth about their brand, when what they should be deciding is *what kind of words* they want coming out of people's mouths.

Because when most customers think of brands, all they think of is how crappy they are.

What good is being memorable for the wrong reasons?

Micro.

We are seeing the death of traditional career paths.

Now, micro business is the new small business.

Instead of building a hulking beast of an enterprise, we start by building something simple, like an app or a website or a piece of software. Then, instead of searching for some magical distribution channel, we just ship it. We make it available, and other people come and get it. Then, if it takes off, if we amass enough attention and permission and momentum, we build the actual business around those assets with a small core team serving tons of users, customers and cocreators. And if we're lucky, make some money and change the world.

Pretty sweet model.

Simple. Fast. Cheap. Low risk. No employees. No permission. No debt. Home based. Completely manageable. Tons of fun. And one amazing learning experience.

Where do we sign?

Middleman.

A good chef doesn't just cook the food, he connects the people who consume it.

My friend Jonathan, a chef who only makes things he hasn't cooked yet, develops new recipes every week. Then, on the weekends he performs cooking demonstrations at his local farmers market. And not only is the food delicious, but his ingredients are available right there at the market, from his vendor partners, along with free samples and recipe cards for the guests.

The customers love it because of the healthy dish ideas, the vendors love it because it highlights their products, the farmers market loves it because of the community building, the bystanders love it because of the entertainment value, and the chef loves it because he has the opportunity to do what he loves.

And the food is only the beginning.

If you step back at see the genius behind this strategy, it's all about the social function of Jonathan's work. He is the glue that connects disconnected people, the knot that ties together all the parties of the supply chain and the middleman that helps all the relevant players get business out of the equation.

Food truly is life's binding agent.

Are you cooking for your customers or connecting them to each other?

Moment.

Let's travel back in time.

Fifty years ago, everyday activities like landing on the runway, shopping for clothes, taking bread out of the oven or receiving a package from a friend, were just ordinary, fleeting experiences.

And then the world flipped.

Now, thanks to the beauty of technology, thanks to the connection economy and thanks to the new social norm of digital sharing, the *concept* of the moment hasn't changed, but the *shelf life* of the moment has completely inverted.

What once disappeared like a fart in the wind now lasts forever.

And if we were smart, we'd dip our toes into that stream and ask one brave question.

What moment do we want to own?

In the daily life of our customer, what is the specific microexperience – be it emotionally, physically, mentally or spiritually – where our brand intersects with the customer's need and somehow improves their condition?

If we can pinpoint and own that moment, checkmate.

Brands that momentize, monetize.

Momentum.

If you want to be selected, you have to be strategic.

Whether you're transitioning into a new job, new clients, a new partnership or a new work opportunity, consider these tools for your professional arsenal.

Forget about your resume. No matter how great on the phone, solid on paper, credible online or brilliant in person you are, the only real questions companies want an answer to are as follows. What will be the impact of their acquisition of your value? What are you offering that's both rare and valuable? What do you have that's hard to come by?

You can't gamify the process. Instead of looking for a shortcut on the racetrack, build better tires. Put a structure in place that tips the odds heavily in your favor. Place yourself in a market with natural momentum, where your existing assets shine brighter than the competition, and compete in the races where you can win the gold.

Evolution is natural. We all remake ourselves as we grow and as the world changes. And you have to allow yourself the freedom to change as you discover. Don't be afraid to evaluate new opportunities as they present themselves. Taking into consideration your evolving skill set, stay willing to change direction based on what you've learned.

Strategy isn't everything, it's the only thing.

Monopoly.

The Islands is a hole in the wall you hope no one else discovers.

Not just because the portions are huge, the dishes are amazing and the prices are affordable, but with only five tables, an alarmingly low ceiling and a dining room the size of your grandma's attic, you're basically on top of each other the whole time. And with only two ladies doing all the ordering, cooking, serving, delivering and cleaning, the pace is so chill, you actually feel like you're having a meal in the islands.

Yes mon.

The point is, there is never a shortage of competence. Customers can order delicious oxtail anywhere. What's scarce, and therefore valuable and remarkable, is the running imperative that drives this restaurant's behavior, the nobility behind their work and the posture with which they approach their interactions.

Just another remind that we're not in business to sell a product, but to create a monopoly on a story and a set of expectations, to push an overarching narrative that's worth remembering and spreading.

Respect.

Motion.

Motion organizes and creates order.

Once you start moving, creating and poking around at the problem, all things tend to their equilibrium, find their perfect place in the universe and conspire towards some unifying geometrical situation.

Or so says the quantum physics theory of gravitational order.

Innovators have no choice but to make up everything, because most of what they're doing has never been done before. So they jolt themselves into the middle of the problem. And after a few days of complete immersion in a new world, they start to notice some pretty interesting things.

Turns out, when you commit to the frightening work of flying blind, believing with unshakeable faith that there will always be something in the box, the universe doesn't disappoint. Life rewards action, not ideas.

Because it's not about getting things right.

It's about getting things moving in the right direction.

Motivation.

The secret to creating value is answering one question, honestly and deeply.

Why do I do what I do?

Once we know that, anything is possible. Once we dig down through the many levels of why and find a way to activate our own internal generators, there's no reason we can't make a contribution wherever we go.

As human beings, each of us is motivated by a small collection of intrinsic means. Recently, I sat down and fleshed out the drivers that motivate me. I hope this list inspires you to create your own.

A blank canvas. Making things has always been the most natural way for me to engage with the world. When I get up in the morning, there's a mechanism inside me that says what I'm supposed to make next. I am motivated by the freedom to express myself.

A personal ritual. I can motivate myself to do just about anything, as long as there's a ritual attached to it. Ritual is an intentional, purposeful experience I layer on top of an activity to make it more worthwhile. And I have one for everything I do. I am motivated by a repeatable process.

A captive audience. I believe human interaction is a divine transaction. Engaging with people, even for a moment at a time, fuels me more than anything. And every time I go out of my way to earn people's attention, I reward them for giving it to me. I am motivated by a chance to perform.

A challenging situation. Creativity is my gift. As a lifelong thinker, the moment something activates the problem solving impetus of my brain, my body has a physical reaction. I start obsessing, imagining and zealously deconstructing everything in my path until the internal monologue stops. I am motivated by solving problems.

A meaningful contribution. I'm genetically wired for hard work. It's just my nature. I'm happier when I'm being productive and prolific. And there is a place in me that starves if I go more than a few days without nudging the world in a positive direction. I am motivated by the chance to work.

Why do you do what you do?

Mouth.

Word of mouth drives most of our country's economy.

Not because traditional marketing sucks, but because human beings, a species whose prime feature is its social nature, rarely do what they do by their own volition. The agent of decision making is interaction, not interruption. If we're going to buy something, it's because somebody we know already bought it.

The catch is, few silver bullet solutions exist for getting people's mouths moving. All we can do is create environments in which word of mouth is most likely to occur.

Try these.

Start with virality in mind. Marketing needs to stop being the last step in the process. As early as possible, build a base of people who want you, and only you, and are willing to pay for your product. Otherwise, if evangelism isn't built into the process from day one, you'll never reach critical mass.

Keep it short. Long form content is heavier to share. Be sure to keep your ideas brief. When necessary, break up larger pieces of content into a series with multiple parts. This encourages people to come for more, or, better yet, miss you in their past. Otherwise, it will be too much work to share your work.

Reduce the friction of participation. No matter how excited people are about your idea, if it's awkward to talk about, they will hesitate to bring it up in conversation. Make sure your names, websites and other branded properties are pronounceable, understandable and don't remind people of something goofy or embarrassing.

Divorce your ego. People like talking about cool stuff because it increases their status. Period. It's not because they like your brand, it's because they like their friends. It's not because of their handy plastic card, it's because they want bragging rights for being the first one to discover something awesome.

The point is, before you sell your wares, you have to serve the underlying social needs within the people who buy it.

The goal is to spark a conversation, not have the last word.

Music.

It's easier than ever to do it, but it's harder than ever to make a living doing it.

For example, there is more music being created than ever before, says editor Paul Resnikoff, but paradoxically, musicians are making less than ever before, thanks to a deflated ecosystem once primed by traditional major labels, massive changes in recording technology, trends in pricing structures, cultural shifts in taste, evolutions in genre and nonexistent barriers to entry.

And it's not just music.

The same goes for publishing, performing, photographing, blogging, designing, consulting, coaching, crafting and coding.

When anyone can do anything, they will.

And when they do, when scarcity goes the way of the dodo, the value of the product plummets, and profitability becomes harder and harder to achieve.

Personally, this scares the shit out of me.

What should we do?

Is this the end of the world, or the beginning of a new one?

Negativity.

Negativity is highly underrated.

Instead of insulating your business against it, consider these ways to leverage it.

Own the hate, mitigate the sting. What if, instead of getting defensive when customers leave negative online reviews, you printed those nasty comments on employee shirts, carry out menus and other marketing materials?

Turn feedback into inspiration. What if, instead of ignoring negative mentions of your product, you offered refunds as a necessary cost of defending the reputation of your business?

Gamify the complaint process. What if, instead of posting prewritten, preapproved responses to negative tweets, you held a contest for the employee who issued the funniest, most creative apology?

Treat crisis as an outreach opportunity. What if, instead of issuing another impersonal, corporate apology, you designed custom apology postcards for situations in which you let customers down?

Say sorry in three dimensions. What if, instead of sending a laughable mass email that takes ten minutes to write, you created a splash page where negative feedback was converted into song parodies?

Introduce a cinematic element. What if, instead of pretending poor reviews didn't hurt your feelings, you personally contacted your haters, hired a camera crew, interviewed them about their experience and published the videos online?

Leverage complaints from non-buyers. What if, instead of standing mute as complaints mounted, you approached your competitor's unhappy customers with a delight item to wow their hearts and win their loyalty?

Maybe your company needs a negativity department.

Nerd.

The point isn't to consume the content.

The point is to be the first to comment on it. The point is to be the best at publicly deconstructing it. And to the point is to outdo everyone else in making fun of it.

That's why the volume of comments far exceeds the volume of content.

Because that's what nerds do, they obsess. They have hyperactive internal monologues passionately deconstruct everything they encounter. And the only way for a nerd to be more into something than others, is to hate it.

Knowing this, the goal shouldn't be to deliver content that's perfect, unarguable and safe.

The goal is to be pliable. People want to be able to do remixes that enhance or ridicule what the mass market is giving them. They want to tap into their creative flair and achieve whatever microfame they can muster. Let them.

The goal is to be open. Great art is never finished anyway. Kick out the parameters of your vision by trusting people to have their own experience. People like talking about cool stuff they made because it increases their status. Let them.

The content is only the beginning.

The real trick is not to boil the water, it's to keep it hot.

Because when you boil it, it evaporates.

Norm.

Every company wants to create a new social norm.

They want to change the way people do something, for better and for always.

Wii's groundbreaking console didn't just look cool, it got people up off the sofa, broke down the walls that separated players and spectators and turned a video game into a communication tool that family members, both young and old, could socialize around, instead of disappearing into their digital worlds in a state of separate togetherness.

To do this, to create a social norm, to make a lasting impression with something of cultural meaning above and beyond the product, there are several questions worth asking at the onset of a project:

How can we approach an industry in an entirely new way? How does our idea take an activity to a scale never before achieved? How does our work revolutionize the way people do or think about something? How do we instill new habits in people and align our brand with them? What if we gave people access to ownership instead of ownership itself? What idea, that people are convinced is dead, can we bring back to life? What used to be impossible that we can make easier for people?

Focus on that, and you won't just make money, you might just make history.

Notes.

Any idiot can take notes.

But if you want your voice to reverberate through people's bones, if you want to make an impression that matters, you have to be more than a listener.

Be a translator, a courageous interpreter of the world's vagaries, adding facets, angles, new dimensions and refractions of light.

Be a craftsman, using the source code as inspiration to create your own form of art that fires inspiration into people.

Be an imaginator, going beyond the literal to add insight that has meaning that lives on after the moment.

Be a visionary, metaphorically disorganizing the common sense of ideas and reorganizing them into uncommon combinations.

Be a noticer, discerning recurring motifs and unspoken patterns that reveal the invisible curriculum of the conversation.

You will be missed when you're gone.

Offline.

The purpose of online is to get offline.

Every time we email, tweet, retweet, direct message, instant message, write somebody's walls, upload pictures, publish videos, post reviews, chime in on message boards, write blog posts, leave comments, press like buttons and share links, our goal is to get one one step closer to interacting with other human beings, face to face, in person.

The proof is everywhere.

In the *political* realm, we've watched oppressive governments crumble, horrifying laws disappear and war criminals meet their demise.

In the *music* realm, we've watched performers leverage digital media to create live events that bring joy to change the lives of fans forever.

In the *movie* realm, we've watched online microfinancing enable the dreams of a generation of hopeful filmmakers, whose ideas finally have a chance to make a difference.

In the *business* realm, we've watched entrepreneurs use the power of mobile technology to hire themselves, do work that matters and deliver value to their people.

In the *social* realm, we've watched outcasts tap into the bandwidth of social networking portals to meet other people just like them, making them feeling less alone in the world.

All thanks to bold people who used online to get offline.

It's not the future, it's the present.

But if we never endeavor to communicate beyond digital, if we never connect to each other by more than just pixels, we fail to experience the truest, highest form of human interaction.

Online is the journey, offline is the destination.

Okay.

There's nothing more painful than knowing you have to break someone's heart.

Whether it's the end of a relationship, the termination of an employee, the delivery of a verdict, the cutting of a player, the dismissing of a volunteer, the rejection of a candidate, the reporting of a diagnosis or the conveyance of bad news, at some point in life, we all have to put on a pair of heartbreaker's shoes.

I've done it a few times before. Both right and wrong, both coldly and compassionately, both personally and professionally. And I learned that I could insure myself from the devastating guilt and self-torture that accompanies the process of severance if I asked (and kept asking) one question:

How will I need to feel when this is done to still be okay with myself?

That's the filter. That's what I need to answer before delivering the death stroke.

Otherwise it will be very hard to sleep.

Years ago, I reached a point in my relationship where I knew I had to end it. I couldn't take it any longer. My stomach was tied in knots, and I knew that if I waited another day, terrible things would happen. Plus the dog was seriously onto me.

And in the eleventh hour, I remember sitting in my car, clutching the wheel like a life preserver, refusing to go upstairs and end my broken relationship. Because at that point, no matter what I said, it would break her heart. No matter what I said, she would hate me for it. And there was nothing I could do to change that.

But I also knew that I could live with myself if I communicated in a way that was kind, honest and clear.

Those were my parameters. *Kind, honest and clear.* Do that, and you're not an asshole.

Ten minutes later, I dragged myself out of the garage, walked upstairs, took a few deep breaths and dropped the biggest bomb of my life.

She vomited for twenty minutes.

It was the lowest moment of my life. Sitting on the floor of the bathroom, rubbing her shoulder, pretending to cry, wondering how long I was supposed to fake it until she took the dog and walked out the door. Horrible.

Okay. *(con't)*

But there was nothing left to say. The bomb had dropped, the bell had rung and the relationship was dead.

As soon as her car was out of sight, I immediately called my best friend and said, “I need you to tell me that I’m not an asshole.”

You’re not, he said.

I thanked him, hung up and crashed.

Slept like a log that night. Ten straight hours. No dreams.

And when I woke up, part of me wondered if I should have felt more devastated, more disturbed, busy counting dots on the ceiling, tossing and turning until the sun came up.

But then I remembered the promise I made to myself: *Kind, honest and clear*.

That’s how I needed to feel when this was done to still be okay with myself.

And I did. I made the right decision.

The point is, the only person you’re truly with forever is yourself.

And if you can’t go to sleep feeling okay with that person, you’re in trouble.

Omit.

The opposite of honesty isn't lying.

It's omitting.

Instead of saying how we really feel, we say nothing. Instead of telling the truth, we tell ourselves to keep quiet. And the result is a very dangerous form of dishonesty.

For most of my life, I was an ommitter: Happy to share my feelings when asked, but hesitant to volunteer my feelings the rest of the time.

I had girlfriends who never knew how unfulfilled I was until the relationship was over. I had roommates who never knew how miserable I was until I transferred. I had parents who didn't know how religious I was until they found a book in my room. I had professors who never knew how lost I was until I failed the final. I had neighbors who never knew how unhappy I was until I moved away. I had friends who never knew how lonely I was until I had anxiety attacks. I had coworkers who never knew how frustrated I was until I got fired. I had mentors who never knew how scared I was until they saw my art. I had colleagues who never knew how burnt out I was until they read it online. I had family members who never knew how stressed out I was until I ended up in the hospital.

That's what happens when we omit: The people closest to us feel forever in the dark, fail to understand our full experience and simply assume that everything is fine.

When in reality, our heart is ready to explode.

Eventually, enough was enough. I was tired of being an ommitter. I was tired of people being surprised every time I told them what was going on in my life.

So I started being prolific in my communication. I practiced telling everybody everything, all the time, everywhere. I even started writing letters to my girlfriend and parents every Sunday. Just to tell them what was going on at that moment in my life, good and bad and in between.

And these days, I feel a lot more honest.

Not because I'm telling the truth, but because I'm simply telling.

Outlet.

The real beauty is when we can be ugly together.

When we can join each other in a safe space of honesty and imperfection and give voice to the darkest, most perverse sides of ourselves. Somewhere we can set shame aside and let vulnerability meet vulgarity, without the fear of being judged.

We might do coffee with friends. Have dinner club with colleagues. Share at storytelling open mic nights. Attend quarterly meetup groups. Write weekly letters to family members or post on online message boards with digital pals.

All are good options.

The point is, it's less important where, how or with whom we do it – and more important that we do it. *Regularly*. Because without this emotional release, without this outlet for our most primitive hostilities and human tendencies, we fail to acknowledge, appease and articulate our shadow.

And if we don't go crazy, we might go crazy.

The goal is to pursue wholeness, not perfection. To admit that, despite our best efforts to keep our hands clean, humans can't hide their hideousness forever. To decide that, eventually, the ugly has to come out. And to believe that, when we're willing to share what's most appalling about our lives, we're always better because of it.

Past.

“Where has this place been my whole life?”

That’s the ultimate. To make people miss you in their past. To deliver such an amazing experience, such a phenomenal product, that not only do they rave and regale and recommend you to the world, they regret not meeting you sooner. They can’t believe they’re just now finding out about you.

Finally, a company who gets it. A company who gets them.

Because prior to today, interacting with an company who does what you do, has been a chore at best and a nightmare at worst. Certainly not something people could enjoy or, god forbid, look forward to.

But now that they’ve found you, they may never leave.

Nourish is the perfect example. If you’re a health conscious person with allergies or dietary restrictions, this place is your mecca. Your health food paradise. Your safe zone for not feeling like the freak at the table.

If you want to become a regular part of people’s lives, if you want them to make time in their busy schedule to visit the world you’ve created, put yourself in their future by making them miss you in their past.

Permission.

The greatest gift we can give people is permission.

An invitation to reach deep down inside themselves and express what is there, without reserve and without regret.

To do so, we don't need the adjectives of our language, but the audacity of our lives. We inspire people to believe in themselves when we first throw *ourselves* boldly and joyfully into the life adventure, never looking over our shoulder to see who's laughing.

The Velvet Underground only sold ten thousand copies of their debut album, but everyone who bought it went out and formed their own band.

That's permission.

And people need it, every day of their lives.

Perpendicular.

Staring harder won't help.

When your brain crashes into a creative wall, the smart thing to do is to get irrelevant on purpose, then come back to the work.

By walking away, going perpendicular to the flow of the current activity and mentally and physically displacing yourself, you invite unexpected inputs that change your perspective for the moment, delivering new insights that the work so badly needs.

Take a walk, solve a problem.

Person.

When in doubt, show up in person.

Once you've made all the calls, sent all the emails, left all the messages, ordered all the flowers and used every social media touchpoint known to man, and you still haven't heard back from the person you're trying to reach, your best bet is to just go there.

Just show up. Physically. In person. At their door.

The power of magically appearing in the flesh, with a real smile on your face, with a real value prop in your hand, and then looking people in the eye and talking to them with your mouth, is vastly underrated.

Who does that?

Exactly. Nobody does. Not anymore. And that's why people remember it.

Because the reality is, when you do show up, you might get ignored, stared at, rejected, kicked out, told to come back later, or even told not to come back at all.

But at least you exerted the emotional labor of doing something difficult, took a risk and showed up when most people would chicken out.

Sounds like the kind of person clients would want to hire.

Perspective.

Information used to have a supply and demand issue.

But now that it's free, ubiquitous and accessible, its value has plummeted. If you're a generalist, your competitors are Google and Wikipedia.

If you want move people's eyebrows and catapult their thinking into profitable new directions, your job is to deliver perspective.

Here are my latest examples:

Las Vegas wasn't built on winners. Are you smart enough to see the evidence when the odds are stacked against you?

Howard Schultz visited five hundred espresso bars in Italy. Are you willing to out research the competition?

The founder of JetBlue flew his own airline at least once a week and blogged about his experience. Are you willing to be your own customer?

Liverpool had a lot of good bands. Have you accepted the face that talent isn't as important as timing?

Obama's speech had four times as many tweets per minute as Romney's. Is your brand betting against the web by not believing in social media?

Facebook pays programmers thousands of dollars to hack into their site. What will you invest to uncover your company's vulnerabilities?

Platform.

God bless the app store.

It's fast to download, seamless to install, easy to use, convenient to have, fun to explore, simple to navigate and priceless to own.

But what's truly amazing, what most companies probably overlook, is that the app store has created nearly a half million new jobs since its inception.

That's a platform, not a product.

And once more organizations accept that there's no market for their scarcity, once they give people the privilege to become part of their history, and once they build a platform that makes it seamless for those people to express their truest selves, their brand will become a source of infinite opportunity for the people who matter most.

Next time you sit down with your team, ask a few of these platform questions:

How does this give people another reason to stop by? How can visitors browse an entire collection of experiences? How can we directly wire this into an existing online ecosystem? How do we make an event happen beyond the walls of the venue? How do we curate situations that bring discovery of cool new things? How can we give people a huge digital sandbox to play in?

How can we let people engage with the project as it's being produced? How do we create a system that makes audiences equal members of the stage? How does this give users an addictive reason to keep revisiting and refreshing? How can we build a soapbox open to anyone and everyone as a place to speak their minds? How can we create a project that grows incrementally with each online interaction and reaction?

Surrender is the new control.

Let people express the magic in their hearts, not just spend the money in their wallets, and you'll feel people power as wind at your back.

Pleasurable.

Riddle me this.

What do doctor's appointments, getting haircuts, working out, tech support, taking pets to the vet, visiting the hospital, filling out forms, buying a car, sitting in waiting rooms and going to confessionals all have in common?

These are experiences that most people have always hated.

And in every business, there's a parallel experience. Some transaction, some activity, some part of the process that customers usually view as a hassle.

This is the golden opportunity.

Paddi Lund, a renowned dentist from down under, has completely redefined the patient experience. In his office, there's no reception desk, cappuccino machines, fresh baked buns for clients, thirty varieties of tea in fine china, and an overall vibe of happiness unmatched by any dentist on the planet. His team members never leave and his customers are clamoring to buy his services.

He turned a painful process into a pleasurable practice. He gave people an excuse to spend more time doing something mundane. And he proved that the dental experience doesn't have to be torture after all.

What if you found the activity that people previously avoided as a badge of honor and used your brand to make them obsessed with it?

Policies.

Most company policies coincidentally favor the company.

Instead of respecting customers, they're more about making excuses, creating insurance, inhibiting creativity, controlling costs, avoiding accountability, building deniability, protecting executive egos, appeasing shareholders and covering corporate asses.

But what if, once a year, companies held an open forum for customers to submit ideas for new company policies? What if, instead of operating solely inside their own heads, organizations let the people who know their product best (and the problems thereof) to shed light on smarter ways of doing business?

Hell, companies outsource everything else. Why stop there?

Consider the implications of letting customers design your policies:

Ownership. People want to put their fingerprints on the things they love. If customers had a real role in shaping the way they were treated, loyalty would skyrocket.

Engagement. Social media isn't a sales tool, it's a hearing aid. If customers could voice their ideas through those listening platforms, brand engagement would skyrocket.

Loyalty. When you help paint a fence, you don't stand mute while punks spray graffiti. If customers had a greater stake in the company's architecture, belonging would skyrocket.

Reputation. Flexibility is a policy worth having. If customers saw that the company had a disposable mindset, goodwill would skyrocket.

Look, policies suck. And everyone knows it. Especially the customers.

But if companies outsourced that function to the people who matter most, perhaps there would be less friction in their daily interactions.

Popular.

Every customer is the most popular girl in high school.

She's smart, she's pretty, she's pursued relentlessly, she has high standards, she has low patience, she has a busy schedule, she has a voice, she has a camera, she has a platform, she has an audience, she has serious influence over her friends and she's used to getting what she wants, when she wants it, the way she wants it.

How might that change the way your company interacts with her?

Position.

When I decided to leave home and relocate across the country, my parents were enthusiastic, empathetic and encouraging.

But they were also concerned.

They knew I had a history of omitting feelings, withholding emotions and concealing the contents my inner life. And if I planned to live a thousand miles away, that lack of communication wasn't going to cut it anymore.

You have to talk to us, they said.

Not just updates. Not just fill the in the blanks. Not just curt answers that end the conversation as quickly as possible. But real talk.

What position did I need to put myself in to commit to this?

The first answer was ritual. The conscious practice of mindfulness, the ceremonial acknowledgment of importance and the purposeful experience layered on top of an activity to focus my intention. I knew that if I could create a sacred container around an act of communication, I would stick with it.

The second answer was writing. My first love, my first language. The one thing in my life I couldn't remember not doing. And the only place I could always go to figure out what mattered to me. I knew that if I could find a way to make writing a part of this, I would stick with it.

So I did.

Combining the two, I began a weekly ritual of writing letters to my parents. Nothing fancy. Nothing structured. Just a simple email to purge my heart and render my truth, until there was nothing left.

Everything that was going on in my life, I shared. Good and bad. Feelings, desires, fears and questions, nothing was off limits.

The folks loved it. It gave them a window into my heart and a snapshot of my life. And now, every week, they can't wait to get that email.

More importantly, I loved it too. It cleansed me. It was a form of meditation. By writing what I felt, I learned what I knew. And now, every week, I can't wait to send that email.

That's how we make commitment stick.

By putting ourselves in a position that taps into the best, highest version of ourselves.

Presence.

Presence is a powerful motivator.

If we want to inspire the people around us to do great work, the smartest thing we can do is dig in our heels and start cranking out great work of our own.

That way, we lead by example.

That way, we influence through infection.

That way, we demonstrate trust in each other's sovereignty.

That way, we create a space that supports a mutual commitment to individual passion.

Eventually, through our quiet energy, through our focused action and through our unquestionable commitment, we make other people more productive by virtue of our very presence.

Because the reality is, anybody can get things done.

But only a true leader can sit down next to us, not say a word, do what they need to do – and then somehow, at the end of the day, our work gets done too.

Problem.

It's not enough to show up and deliver a resume.

You have to walk in and create a problem.

A dangerous question that makes people shift in their seats, a radical idea that changes the complexion of the room, an innovative process with the power to change everything, whatever it takes to make people slam their fists down at the table, look at each other with eyes of panic and wonder what the hell they're going to do now that they've interacted with you.

Instead of trying to change people's minds, create a problem that leaves them no choice but to change their minds on their own.

Product.

The product is only the beginning.

What's evolved is the ecosystem around the product.

Now, it's not just the product.

It's joining the community that the product is a badge for. It's redefining the industry the product is part of. It's shaping the generation the product is a symbol of. It's building the tribe the product is the symbol for. It's listening to the voice the product is an amplifier of. It's personalizing the user experience the product is part of. It's building a platform that the product is the impetus for. It's responding to the culture the product is an artifact of. It's enhancing the sociability the product is the center of. It's amplifying the human potential the product is an enabler of.

Sell that.

Promise.

It's easy to do the right thing when people are watching.

But keeping a promise when you could have gotten away with breaking it, taking the blame when you could have gotten away with shifting it, and telling the truth when you could have gotten away with hiding it?

That's class.

Gearbox, a software developer, is one of the rare companies that painstakingly maps out detailed audio soundtracks to enhance their users' virtual experience. Tons of love and attention go into creating their games, and if you read any of their online forums or message boards, you'll quickly learn how ecstatic their users are. According to one thread, the sonic architecture is so real, it sends chills down your spine.

The best part is, Gearbox doesn't put in this extra effort to get ink or to justify charging more for the game. They do it because they're craftspeople, pure artists, who care deeply about the value of their work, who put obsessive amounts effort into the art they do, because they love their users and they're proud to see them enjoying the game they worked so hard on.

The point is, if you become known as someone who puts in a hell of a lot of hard work when nobody's listening, watching or expecting, all in the name of service, all in the name of the people who matter most, towards a promise that's big and useful enough, it will impossible to keep your name a secret.

Publicized.

The best way to get more business from your customers is by intelligently interacting with them.

For example, one fourth of all Bonobo's customer service is publicized.

Consider the implications of this.

First, it multiplies their reach. Exponentially more people can experience and benefit from a single act of service. Even if they're not customers. Second, it creates an apparatus of accountability. Each interaction requires thoughtful consideration on the behalf of the employees. Even if they're engaging with critics. Third, it builds their listening platform. Direct engagement with customers leaves behind a trail of potentially valuable data. Even if they're just saying hello. And fourth, it delivers social proof. Potential customers see their amazing service in action. Even if they know nothing about the product yet.

It's the perfect storm.

Combine amazing customer service with public social media and you've got a winning equation for converting interactions into income.

Punch.

Paying retail is so last century.

Now that customers have instant and infinite access to flash buying, social shopping, online couponing, special incentives, daily deals, free shipping, loyalty programs, promo codes, online auctions, digital classifieds and hyperlocal discounts, there's no reason not to find every advantage, and take it.

And companies can grumble all they want about the customer expectation of collective bargaining, but if they really wanted to blow customers away, if they really wanted to leverage this trend, they would reverse their trajectory.

They would befriend the current.

What if your company launched an application that was an aggregator for codes, discounts and coupons of its own products? Imagine a platform, branded by the company itself, which curated, in real time, all the savings offers from the web, then arranged it as a search engine to help customers never pay retail again.

The website could be promoted as a digital love letter, a secret menu, a remarkable pricing strategy, to be personally delivered to your best customers as a massive thank you for their business.

They're already not paying retail anyway. Why not beat them to the punch?

That's something worth talking about.

Because when you meet the closed heart of the world with kindness, when you create an act of generosity in a moment of scarcity, customers can't resist.

Purpose.

Purpose is easy to overcomplicate.

Organizations spend thousands of dollars and hundreds of hours creating purpose statements full of expensive, opaque, altruistic, exaggerated jumbles of corporate buzzwords that, in the end, mean nothing and inspire nothing.

When the reality is, purpose is best stated when it's simple, specific and meaningful to the people who matter most. That's enough.

We make our clients look like heroes. We bring fun to the daily chore of being a consumer. We positively ruin the rest of the software world for people. We entertain society by using our clients' products. We help users become better at things they care about. We make patients feel less along in their misery. We buy other company's mistakes. We build a circle of trust through a circus of pranks.

Don't make it any harder than it already is.

Just talk like people talk.

And when you organize your company around a clear idea of how you plan to change the world for the better, you will create a center of gravity, a heart, a reason to be, that draws employees, partners, and customers toward it.

Questions.

The last place customers go when they have questions is to the actual company.

Instead of wading through the pages of some boring, bloated, antiquated, vain, salesy, marginally helpful corporate website, they're clicking elsewhere. Since they're accustomed to instant informational gratification, they're off to the message boards, online forums, review sites, search engines, video tutorials, social media platforms and user blogs, to answer all their burning questions, right now, for free. They're using their own devices to help each another with or without the help of the business.

In fact, customers would talk to each other all day long if they could.

They just don't want to hear from you.

Because more often than not, those kinds of interactions involve too many inane hoops, too many repetitive interactions and too many unhelpful responses, the sum of which destroys customer value.

Can you blame them?

Radiohead.

The problem with Radiohead's model is, it only works if you're Radiohead.

Without the coefficients of skill, smarts, fame, fans, time, money, history, resources, labor, luck, leverage and platform, their distribution equation doesn't yield much for us lay folk.

Most artists are, for the most part, winking in the dark. Even if we *do* offer our work for free, that doesn't guarantee a spike in sales, an avalanche of new fans or a flood of social media buzz.

As an artist, I've experimented with dozens of models over the years, with varying level of success. Sometimes it went like gangbusters. Sometimes it failed miserably. And sometimes it was marginally effective.

But I kept slogging, I stayed positive and I remained kind to myself when I fell short.

Ramp.

Everybody needs a good on ramp.

A ritual that prompts a work mindset to start our day. A process that merges us into the real world and ensures our days have a cadence and rhythm. A routine that gets us in the mood, in the flow and in the zone so that by the time we actually hit the highway of life, we're traveling at the same speed as traffic, and can navigate the road effectively.

In the past decade, I've tried a heap of helpful practices including morning pages, spiritual devotionals, daily appointments with myself, self-hypnosis, mindfulness incantations, pregame breathing exercises, hot yoga, meditation, and my recent favorite, subway karaoke, as variations of my on ramp.

Whatever works.

It's less important what you do, and more important that you do it.

Not just for your own sanity, but for the sanity of the people you work with.

Set a tone that says *work happens here*, and let it ring.

Raw.

Why give up freelancing and work for someone else?

I know. I never thought I'd do it either.

But in addition to being bored with the work, tired of running my own business, burned out by an incestuous industry, sick of sitting at home all day, sick of waiting for that one email that changes everything, done bloodying my knuckles knocking on a door that was never going to open, finished with my first career and finally okay with who I am as a person, here's the other big reason I recently made a job transition.

Less talkey, more doey.

If I don't go get raw and engage in the real world, if I'm not constantly tested in the crucible of everyday life, then my ideas will only exist in my own head.

If I don't step outside of the echo chamber, get out into the cold and hostile world, then I'm stuck in a fantasy land with no basis in objective reality.

If I try to make it solely on personality, spending all my time pontificating on the stage and on the page without actually executing, I'll just annoy people.

If I continue resting on my laurels, solely milking work I've shipped in the past, I'm just another blowhard who has lost credence.

Feels pretty amazing.

Receipt.

A receipt is a written acknowledgment that money has been collected for the purchase of goods or service.

And originally, the function of the receipt was largely managerial. After a sale was made, the receipt established time of customer arrival, kept record of the inventory, enhanced fraud protection, helped reconciled financial statements and stopped employees from pilfering company profits.

But that was over a hundred years ago.

Now, the receipt is less of a static record and more of a sharing device.

When our favorite band releases a new album, we don't just go to iTunes, pay our ten bucks, download the files, stick our ear buds in and start rocking out.

We share.

And the receipt, the record of that purchase – a picture, a link, a tweet, a status update, a wall post or a check in – becomes the social object that tells our relevant network, hey everybody, I'm listening to this music right now and I want to share it with you so we can experience this moment together.

The receipt becomes, as Brian Solis suggests, a platform for extending experiences.

Paying is just the beginning. Transactions are becoming social objects.

It won't work for every product. And it won't work for every customer. But for the brands that dare to expand their definition of what a receipt can become, look out.

Refresh.

We press the refresh button dozens of times a day.

From smartphones to tablets to laptops to personal computers, the purpose of the refresh button is to dump the old page, clean out junk files, trigger a metadata update and access the most current information, reflecting any recent changes.

It's how we stay up to date with the digital world.

And yet, when it comes to our beliefs, we fiercely refuse to press the button.

Even when we place our faith in something that fails us, even when we outgrow some of our beliefs, even when we discover overwhelming evidence to the contrary, we still choose not to rebuild our understanding.

Because that would mean changing, and changing means admitting we were wrong.

As I get older, I seem to be pressing the mental refresh button more and more. What once felt like a necessity has become a nicety. What once defined me has started to derail me. And what once got me high now gets me meh.

But despite my internal kicking and screaming, every time I refresh, it provides vigor and energy. It breathes new life into my world. And it opens doors I didn't even know there were keys for.

I am one constant rebeginning.

Reincarnation.

Not every startup dies.

Many come back reincarnated as something else.

Flickr started out as as a multiplayer online game, but evolved into a photo management and sharing application. Amazon started out as a bookseller, but evolved into the planet's biggest and best ecommerce retailer. Myspace started out as a social network, but evolved into an entertainment destination for performers. Nintendo started out as a playing card company, but evolved into the world's largest video gaming company. And Twitter started out as way to make announcements, but evolved into a news and content sharing platform.

Just when we think we're going to die, we evolve into something different, something bigger and something better than we ever could have imagined.

Reinvent.

Reinventing yourself isn't about changing everything.

It's about springing yourself past a frontier and letting the constellation of your identity expand so you can see the beginning of a different and more courageous dream.

It's about letting go of everything you've tried and built and accomplished and accumulated so far, except for the person you've become, and using *that* as the raw material for whatever comes next.

It's about interrogating what it is that you're intrinsically the best in the world at, that you have been put on this earth to do, that you've already been doing your whole life, that nobody can take away from you, and that people will value and pay money for.

It's about evolving your work strategy based on market feedback, changing your path to get somewhere new based on what you've learned along the way, keeping your career in permanent beta and remaking yourself as the world changes.

But how will you know if you've done a good job reinventing yourself?

When you feel like a whole new person, and yet, more like yourself than ever.

Resume.

What's a resume?

In a digital world where anything is possible and everything is available, smart people aren't going to waste their time playing that game.

The next generation of professionals are more interested in hiring themselves, starting their own companies, spreading their ideas, building bodies of work, establishing reputations that precede them, creating sketches of things worth completing, witnessing the birth of new media and new industries overnight, executing projects that completely change the way people do something forever and having adventures that embody their hopes and dreams.

It's that, versus a piece of paper.

Tough choice.

Reviews.

The wheels of online commerce run on positive reviews.

But there's a shift.

In the past, online reviews were *evaluations*. How accessible is the place? How long is the wait? How crowded is the bar? How tasty is the food? How speedy is the service? How affordable is the price?

But now, online reviews vouch for *credibility*. Is the place sketchy? Is the experience worth our time and money? Do people even go there anymore? Are there better dining options available right down the street?

The lesson is, customers value context before content.

Before you start adding bacon to every item on the menu, start by changing the soft tissue about what you make, how you deliver it and where you promote it.

Ring.

A wedding ring is the ultimate form of social proof.

It tells people that someone else wanted you, that you're worth pursuing, worth having and worth committing to. The ring sticks its sparkly tongue out at the world, letting potential mates know that they had their chance, but you've been chosen, and now you're off the market for good. Their window of opportunity has come and gone. Suckers.

If I were a jewelry store, that's how I'd sell it.

Ruin.

Your job is to ruin the rest of the real world for people.

To interact with them in a manner that is so respectful, so joyful, so honest, so helpful, so loving and so positively memorable, that for the rest of their lives, any time those people interact with anyone else, it's just not as good. It's just not the same. Compared to the awesomeness you deliver, the rest of the world falls short. They're all just *hacksimiles* of the real thing. And even the mere thought of switching causes pangs of regret.

I've said it a million times.

You're not in business to sell a product or provide a service, you're in business to become known for a unique way of interacting with the world.

Southwest ruined customer service for the rest of the real world. Fairytale ruined brownies for the rest of the real world. Rackspace ruined tech support for the rest of the real world. Bonobos ruined men's clothes for the rest of the real world. Jones ruined soft drinks for the rest of the real world. Zappos ruined company culture for the rest of the real world.

What are you going to ruin for people?

Scratch.

Human beings are driven by a desire to create.

To contribute to the world's intellectual and artistic commons, to express their individuality and vibrancy, to come alive through the pursuit of their ideas, to satisfy the biological compulsion to render their feelings and to use their imaginative endowments to make cool stuff.

The question companies should be asking is, how can we help people use our products to scratch that creative itch?

Earlier this year, I was a passenger on the maiden voyage of the Disney Fantasy. And without a doubt, the highlight of the trip was dinner in the Animator's Lounge. At our tables, the placemats doubled as drawing templates. And servers instructed us to use markers to draw faces and bodies inside the pattern.

One hour later, after we'd handed in our drawings to the staff, our table's artwork showed up on the big screen and started dancing across the wall. We were spellbound. The experience of seeing our own drawings come to life, right in front of our eyes, was the most satisfying creative feeling anyone could imagine. We went from amateur doodlers to professional animators in a matter of minutes, and we would remember that experience for the rest of our lives.

Consider my creative itch scratched.

At the heart of what it means to be a person is the act of dreaming, doing and finishing, and if your organization's products can help facilitate that process, everybody wins.

Slick.

The goal of most websites is changing.

It's no longer about pages that look slick, it's about creating new kinds of online interactions.

Coursera offers free, interactive online classes from elite universities. Anyone in the world can participate as a student, get homework, take assessments, post in forums, engage and collaborate with other students, leave course and instructor reviews, even talk to teacher assistants for help.

It's higher education that overcomes the boundaries of geography, time and money.

With an amazing value proposition, nobody cares how slick the pages look.

Spec.

Living life on spec corrodes your spirit.

Low and erratic income, sporadic employment, feast or famine cycles, fear of the work drying up, lack of job security, essentially, tossing coins in the wishing well and hoping bills float to the surface.

It's murder out there.

But that's the brutal truth about working for yourself. You're always trying to resolve the economic problem of livelihood. Having to live and die by every gig you get, you're basically out of a job every week. Or every month. Or every few months.

And yet, some people thrive on it. They love the hustle, the hunger and the pressure. They crave the sword of obligation dangling over their head, and they use the continuous tension to fuel their work.

Eventually, though, we all have to ourselves if this lifestyle and business model is truly sustainable over the long haul.

Stores.

Stores are temples to belief systems.

They're places to enter into a fantasy world, practice your religion, worship objects of devotion, experience products that inspire fervor, humbly walk in reverie, soak up the ambience, kibbutz with people who share your worldview, take refuge from everyday life, seek shelter from the winds of the world and to feel something closer to love than simple convenience.

Which sounds like hyperbole, until you walk into a place like Trader Joe's.

For the past thirty years, they've mastered the art of creating an atmosphere worth coming to, a second home where customers just happen to shop, an entire universe that people can become a part of, a place that feeds the heart and soul of everyone who comes into contact with it.

Is it any surprise that they have the highest sales per square foot of any grocer in the country? Is it any surprise that they have the friendliest, happiest and most helpful employees on the planet? Is it any surprise that their customers are so loyal that many routinely travel to other cities to shop there?

Not in the slightest.

Because they're not just a store that displays and sells groceries to people, they're a temple that creates and holds a whole meaning system for people.

Story.

Storytelling isn't everything, it's the only thing.

And you can buy all the books, read all the articles, go to all the seminars, take all the classes and hire all the coaches, but unless you tell a story that people enjoy believing, none of that matters.

People enjoy believing a story that validates their worldview, makes them feel powerful and frees them from something.

People enjoy believing a story in which they recognize themselves and that expresses what they can't do, think, say, find and feel on their own.

People enjoy believing a story that serves a purpose, stands as a truthful metaphor for life and gives them hope about what they can be.

People enjoy believing a story that offers evidence of what they doubt and makes them proud to take the first step.

People enjoy believing a story that gives them the power to march forward and convinces them that their life is worth living.

People enjoy believing a story that lets them unconsciously process their own life, put their own nature into accord discover the journey they're on.

People enjoy believing a story that they can lose themselves in, superimpose their own meaning onto and spread to the people they care about.

People enjoy believing a story that sucks them in, takes them to a place they don't want to leave and makes them a necessary part of the narrative.

Before you start telling yours, make sure it's enjoyable to believe.

Otherwise the story is nothing more than another annoying interruption.

Strategy.

Strategy is a series of moves to get what you want.

It's about approaching a task, project or situation in a logical, holistic, intelligent, creative and comprehensive way, understanding the why behind the what, taking into account all the relevant variables and asking tons of hard questions.

It's about working every possible angle like a train hobo with a chicken bone, taking the world apart and putting it back together again, putting the process on a pedestal and knocking and knocking until the doors of ignorance have no choice but to open.

The hard part is, strategy takes time, commitment, endurance and grit. The word itself comes from the Greek *stratos*, or "expedition."

And if we're not willing to pay that price, all we're left with is a pile of tactics and a few short-term victories.

Surveys.

Customers aren't going to take the time to tell you what they like.

At least, not directly.

The problem with focus groups, feedback forms, customer satisfaction surveys, digital suggestion boxes and online questionnaires – besides the fact that they're tedious and inane and most people only participate out of guilt or bribery – is that the data isn't organic.

People tend to act better when they know they're being watched, so when answering questions about their experience, most will just give you fives across the board, take their free cookie and get on with their lives.

But if the goal is to deliver more personalized service, you have to reverse the interaction.

Instead of artificially squeezing customers into your marketing plan, you have to join them first, participate in their world and celebrate how you fit into their lives. Not the other way around. You meet them where they are, then move them where we want to go.

Pinterest is the ultimate example. Through the process of social sharing, sensational imagery, joyful discovery and indulgence curation, aka, *pinning stuff they like*, customers are telling companies everything they need to know.

And that's the greatest advantage of social media. The ability to listen to your customers in their natural habitat. It's not about numbers and data but real human feelings.

Pinterest might be housewife porn, but it's also the wish list of the web. And it's certainly cheaper and more effective than asking customers to fill out some stupid online survey for the chance to win a free cruise.

Instead of conducting a market survey, talk to people.

Have conversations with humans, not numbers.

Target.

Target has offered nearly two thousand design options for its gift cards.

And as a result, they're more just plain piece of plastic, they're symbols of smart design, badges of technological innovation, high touch collector's items, engaging social objects, artifacts of the holiday season, collaborative employee projects, exemplars of corporate sustainability, patented parts of the company brand, and even some cards are presents themselves, offering the shoppers entertainment, candy, games, sound, interactivity and personalized messages.

Not to mention, the cards have no expiration dates or finance charges.

Bravo.

Target sees value in the discarded. Literally. They capitalize on the content others neglect, make the mundane memorable, spot opportunities overlooked by their rivals, fall in love with what other companies are turned off by, specialize in an experience most companies take for granted and, fueled by the very things most companies fear, they make something cool that engages the world.

Find a way to swipe that idea for your organization.

Texture.

People are yearning for texture.

When we deliver things that are tactile and usable in the everyday world, they're satisfying in a way that pure pixels are not. And in the battle of bits versus atoms, in our hyper accelerated culture where we all hunger for life beyond the screen, anything we can do to promise people a moment of slowing down is worthwhile.

Firecracker is the master of texture. They're a letterpress printer and design studio that makes cards, posters, tags, books, pamphlets, brandtags and a ton of other works of utmost artistry.

What's astounding is, it's all done by hand. They combine antique printing technology with new thinking to design and produce objects that people enjoy seeing and feeling. Even though they used computer design software to conceive ideas, they still carve the woodblocks and do the printing by hand.

And when customers walk in their store, not only is it hard not to slow down and touch everything they see, it's even harder not to take out their wallets and buy everything they touch.

That's texture.

Physical is starting to earn as much traction as digital, because it breaks through the screen and comes through the door.

There.

It's okay to ask people to be there for us.

In those moments when fury of the tempest leaves us tossed and tattered, we should never hesitate to call in the cavalry.

They love it. People want nothing more than the opportunity to show up for someone they care about. That's why they became our friends in the first place. Not because we have the same shoe size – although that's certainly a nice perk (have you seen those fabulous red boots?)

No, they're our friends because they want us to call on them.

The human longing to be useful, to be asked, to be necessary to at least one other person in the world, runs deeper than anything. And when we rob people of the chance to hit their daily quota of usefulness, to validate their existence – if only for five minutes on the phone – we commit an act of selfishness.

But if we're fortunate enough to have a savings account of human healing, we should never feel guilty about making a withdrawal request.

Tricking.

Tricking is a shortcut that erodes trust and stains your industry.

And it's everywhere.

Creators are tricking people into consuming their content. Movie trailers intercut dialogue from different scenes, use music that isn't on the soundtrack and show action sequences that don't make the final cut. But by the time you've paid for and watched the film, it's too late.

Companies are tricking customers into buying. Credit cards lead you to believe certain services are free and mandatory. And you end up paying for costly, unnecessary amenities like payment protection and credit monitoring. But by the time you've shelled out for the hidden fees, it's too late.

Websites are tricking users into oversharing. Applications coerce you into signing misleading agreements, bypassing privacy settings and revealing personal information. And before you know it, they're tracking and predicting your every move. But by the time you've updated your status, it's too late.

What's scary is, the culprits of this trickery aren't the typical scammers, spammers and hacks. Nigerian Prince Emeka Umtoku? I expect trickery from him.

These examples come from real companies. Big ones. Public ones.

That's their strategy for reaching you – a digital ruse.

The irony is, if you have to trick people into buying, using, viewing or sharing your product; you don't deserve to be selling it in the first place.

Truth.

The truth is powerful because nobody expects it.

In a world where most people have been duped, fooled, conned, scammed, spammed and screwed over too many times, if you can just be completely honest where most people would say nothing, communicate more than people think is needed, give more than people think is fair and care more than people think is expected, you will not be forgotten.

What if, next time you turned down new business, you sent customers a comprehensive list of your competition's locations, services and prices? What if, next time you redesign your website, you included a public disclosure page of every single relationship you maintained? What if, next time somebody comes in for a tune up, you teach them how to test on their own first to prevent unnecessary repairs and replacements? What if, next time you're making a pitch, you tell the client about a cheaper option that presumably means less money in your own pocket? What if, next time your company had a failure, you bragged about it as a public badge of lessons learned? What if, next time a prospect comes in for a free consultation, you explain what procedures and services are actually extraneous?

Sometimes all we have to do is be radically candid with people.

To let truth suddenly stare them in the face and change them forever.

How are you branding your honesty?

Try.

The weird thing about the web is, nothing happens if we try.

Only when our guard is down, when our intentions are neutral and when we're operating out of our purest, most instinctual nature, do we see the greatest results.

Last year, I wrote my manifesto.

I've never worked harder on anything in my life. From researching to drafting to editing to marketing, the amount of sweat that went into that project dwarfed anything I'd done before.

And when it was done, I couldn't have been prouder. The project challenged my creativity as a human, exploded my growth as a writer and reconnected me to my idealistic roots that had long since been buried under the burden of business obligations.

Good for me, I thought.

So I decided to publish it.

Not for money. Not for attention. Not to prove anything. And not to make my way to the top of some bullshit bestseller list.

Just because.

And to my delight, the manifesto blew up. It gained tons of traction, got insane amounts of traffic and even won a few awards. Apparently, more than any other book, speech, video or interview I'd published in the past, there was something about this particular piece of work that hit a nerve.

Which is interesting to me.

Because if I would have tried, it wouldn't have happened.

Waiting.

Wait time is the single most important factor in customer satisfaction.

And yet, it seems no matter how fast we work, how hard we try, how much we promise, how big we smile, how friendly we act and far we reach, customers always find ways to complain about how long it's taking.

But if we can't make more time, we can always try to bend it.

We can change the customer experience of time so that its passage is more enjoyable. We can keep customers happy by keeping them company. And we can employ a few artistic measures to influence the mood, modify the energy, enhance the environment and up the vibe, thereby changing the dismal experience of waiting into something more interesting.

What if you commissioned local cartoonists to create work for your walls that started conversations, offered hope and delivered inspiration?

What if you hired a team of local magicians to work the room and entertain so guests lose track of time while they wait for their table?

What if you projected on a screen that aggregated a stream of pictures, tweets, reviews and other mobile updates from customers who used branded hashtags?

What if you had live cigar rolling demonstrations to authenticate the evening and leave patrons with an artifact they could keep forever?

What if you stationed a glass blower in the lobby to create small sculptures on demand for people while they stood in line?

That way, people won't look at their watch, they'll forget that they're wearing one.

Way.

Everyone needs an interesting way of interacting with the world.

Some creative lens, personal filter, permanent fixture or unique coefficient, that we carry with us at all times, that affords us the opportunity to navigate and meet and understand the world with a slightly skewed perspective on just about everything.

Think of it as your ongoing micro experiment.

For me, it's the nametag.

Wearing one all day, everyday for the past thirteen years has been my passport to interestingness, my mechanism for making sense of my existence and the source against which I bounce what I see.

Not sure what yours is? Try the following exercise:

Everything I need to know, I learned from my _____.

The point is, this ongoing micro experiment doesn't define you. It's not your whole identity. And it's certainly not the only thing you're known for.

But for anyone who wants to live a more interesting life, all it takes is one simple, powerful portal to change our perspective on everything.

Whole.

We don't need scare tactics, we need care tactics.

Organizations brave enough to interact and connect with customers holistically, in a way that actually engages the whole self, and not just the small part of it the company finds interesting and important.

The perfect venue for this type of innovation is your company's signup process.

What if registering for your product involved much more than simply submitting your name, age and social security number? What if you let customers pick from a collection of lifestyle images to express their whole personas? What if the signup process was a canvas for people to talk about their futures, goals and dreams? And what if the data from the registrations was aggregated anonymously to help the company listen loudly and give people more of what they want?

That's care.

Nothing overly personal, just something with more personality. Nothing too private, just something that commends people for engaging in the journey of life.

Like the doctor who treats you beyond the disease, it's a chance for organizations to treat customers beyond the niceties, beyond the pleasantries and beyond the techniques, and more like a whole person.

It's a chance to actually start with the customer, not just with the customer in mind.

Tell people you care about the whole self, and then do something to prove it.

Women.

The universal archetype of mainstream masculinity is over.

And it's time for men to woman up.

After all, we live in a post industrial, high touch, high context, service economy that rewards openness, intimacy, emotional intelligence, communication, focus, patience, listening and relationship building.

And considering women do all of those things better than men, I think it's time men finally got over themselves and crossed a few gender lines.

No operations necessary, just a willingness to adopt behaviors typically reserved for the gentler sex.

Work.

Twelve million of us are unemployed.

And in addition to the obvious downsides like financial hardship, fear of the future, loss of control, boredom, lack of momentum, feelings of humiliation, decline in motivation and lack of human contact, perhaps the hardest part about looking for work is the devastating affect it has on the human psyche.

Offices are where we do some of our most important existing. Work informs our identity more than most things, so it's a primary means to express our sense of who we are. And if we lose our daily expression of that, if we don't have a consistent platform for being creative, passionate and personal in our interactions with other human beings, there's a noticeable emptiness that starts to grow.

Eric Maisel calls this a *meaning crisis*, in which meaning has leaked out and unhappiness has leaked in.

The secret is to take action on something meaningful. Anything. By deciding to bite into something and do it really well, by making the most of our talents and inner resources, we feel more alive. It's a form of living our principles and values.

Even if it's a tiny step, as long as it helps us create meaning in our lives, at the end of the day, it feels like we've met our quota of usefulness. Besides, it's only one part of a larger repertoire of activities that are pretty much guaranteed to provide us with the experience of meaning.

The point is, without asking ourselves what tiny steps we can take, today, that will help us create meaning in our lives, it's going to be an empty journey.

We can only cut the grass so many times in a week.

Working.

Work is more than a job.

It's a daily routine that ensures our days have a cadence and rhythm of movement. It's a center of belonging where we connect to the collective human heart. It's a contribution to the world where we become productive members of society. It's the prime means to express our sense of who we are.

It's an outlet for coming alive through the pursuit of our ideas. It's the thing we do to build a stable life. It's a platform we use to do art, hone skills, build a reputation and make our mark on other people. It's a holy arena for our highest self and a home for all of our talents. It is our necessity, our pleasure and our playground.

It's where we channel our ambition and satisfy the most primal and sacred fundament of our being. It's where we practice the act of dreaming, doing and finishing, getting straight to the heart of what it means to be a person. It's what informs our sense of self and contributes to our identity.

What's interesting is, a hundred years ago, almost nobody on the planet had a job.

But they still worked.

Because as human beings, work is the organizing principle of life. It's the iron rod in the center. It's the validation of our existence.

And while it's not the only thing there is to life, without it, we definitely feel like a big piece of our life is missing.

Work isn't our plight, it's our purpose.

Wrestler.

If you want to become a famous professional wrestler, it's not about lifting more weights so you can beat the other guy.

It's about getting Vince McMahon to like you.

Instead of hanging your fortunes solely on chance, you make friends before you make requests. That way, when the time comes to make your move, you're not speaking from a deficit position.

You're talking to people with a voice that's anticipated, personal and relevant.

You're not making a sale, you're working to earn the privilege of a follow up conversation and the opportunity to reconnect over time.

Ding ding!