

HELLO, MY NAME IS SCOTT'S...

WHEN IN DOUBT, CREATE

DAILY STRATEGIES FOR BECOMING PROLIFIC

BY  GINSBERG

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BOOK TWO OF *THE PROLIFIC SERIES*

INTRODUCTION

All creativity begins with the moment of conception.

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

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

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

Now go be prolific!

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

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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

Since 1999, Scott has authored 30 books, released six albums on his own record label, published an award winning blog, created NametagTV.com, given a TEDx talk and delivered presentations and corporate training programs worldwide. He also wrote, produced, directed and scored an independent concert

documentary, *Tunnel of Love*. Scott is the only person in the world who wears a nametag 24-7. Even to bed. He was also inducted into Ripley's Believe It Or Not as the world record holder of wearing nametags.

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

Or just google the word "nametag."

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001 -- THE ROOFTOP FROM COYOTE UGLY

She physically displaces herself. Violet's ratty old apartment has paper thin walls. In the scene before this one, when she tries to play music indoors, her next door neighbors yell at her to stop. That's why she resigns to the rooftop to rehearse. And as a result, the change of scenery serves the process. It alters her routines and patterns, which stimulates creativity. It forces her out of her physical comfort zone, which literally gives her new perspective. And it provides her with a purposeful and private songwriting sanctuary, free of the existential torrents and demands of life, where she can reconnect to herself.

She stops resisting and starts investigating. Violet honors the unintentional music from her uninvited collaborator. Rather than ignoring or eradicating the dancer's song, she loves and accepts it. She makes herself entirely open and vulnerable to every shred of stimuli that crosses her path. Instead of seeing disturbing or unwanted sounds as resistance to her creativity, she transforms the distraction into a thing of beauty. The competing artist's becomes a bell of awareness, not a threat to her work.

She steals properly. Violet has a well toned thievery muscle. Although the hip hop song has a completely different tempo, genre and attitude than her singer songwriter acoustic pop stylings, it doesn't stop her from merging with the dancer. That guy's song is fair game. It's hers for the plucking. And so, she superimposes her own meaning onto his story. She makes it her own. She **turns a seed into a forest**. And thanks to her uninvited collaborator, about ending up somewhere else, somewhere different, somewhere better.

002 -- THE STATUS FROM THE SOCIAL NETWORK

Creativity is the highest form of active listening. Mark could almost taste the urgency and desperation and hormonal longing in his roommate's request. But instead of dismissing his friend's desire as an inconvenient interruption to his busy day, he said yes to the moment. He kept the ball in play. And the instant he envisioned an absurd world where college students broadcast their relationship statuses like a badge, he knew he was onto something real, practical and interesting. Because he wasn't just listening to the voice of a user, but the voice of a generation.

Get the idea to ground zero. Mark didn't take notes, he took action. Socially awkward as it may have been to stop himself mid sentence, walk out on his friend's conversation without saying goodbye, stumble down a flight of stairs and trudge through the snow in wearing cargo shorts and flip flops, he did what he had to do to capture his thinking before it vaporized. Mark knew that if he doesn't write it down, it never happened. Or, if he *did* write it down, but failed to take action on it, somebody else would make it happen.

Usefulness leads to importance. Mark realized that relationship status was what drove life at college. Students want to get laid. *Period.* All signs point to that objective. And so, because he understood that fundamental attribute of the people in his community, he exploited it to his advantage. He put humanity at the center of design. And as a result, his idea forever changed the way human beings thought about relationship statuses. Proving, that if you design something useful, you're ninety percent of the way.

003 -- THE MANIFESTO FROM JERRY MAGUIRE

Follow that vibe and see where it takes you. Jerry awakes in the middle of the night, trembling. He can't sleep. He can't breathe. And when he stumbles out of bed, he can't even walk straight. *This is a new feeling*, he thinks to himself. But why? Is it because he's stuck at some crappy hotel at his annual corporate conference? Is because he's at a crossroads of his career, about to have the breakthrough of a lifetime? Doesn't matter. His brain has to take cues from his body. He has to listen to what wants to be written. He has to purge and exhale until there's nothing left. *So, to the laptop he goes.* And within a few minutes, he activates the creative subroutine in his head, brings up his energy level and snaps himself into the appropriate state of mind to do his work. Now he's in flow. Plunging into action and building momentum. And there's no stopping him until that vein is out. The lightning struck and he was there to channel it.

Find a portable home for your creativity. Jerry doesn't have the home field advantage. This isn't his bliss station, his personalized workspace that makes him feel in control. He's trapped inside a stale, claustrophobic, uninspiring hotel room. He doesn't even have a desk, just a tiny coffee table over which to squat like a rookie catcher. And yet, he manages to convert this space into his transportable lightning rod. Maguire makes the most of his creative environment. Look closely, and you'll see snacks and coffee cups and legal pads and sticky notes and crumpled papers scattered across the floor. This environment is exactly what Jerry needed to launch his trajectory of thinking and writing and crafting and expressing, in a way that feels meaningful. He even brings himself to tears, which signifies to him that he's onto something, because finally telling the truth. As it reads in the original screenplay, "There is a direct line from the deepest part of him to the words he's typing. His fingers fly."

Memorialize your process with a product. Jerry doesn't *walk* down the stairs, he dances. He runs through the pouring rain to the nearest copy shop to print out a hundred copies, one for every employee in the firm. But here's why. First, if you don't write it down, it never happened. *Ever*. The brain is a terrible office, and everything you know needs to be written down somewhere. Secondly, hard copies are devices for building commitment, confidence and competence. Any prototype, crude and imperfect as it may be, adds energy to the system and moves the creative ball forward. And, it gives the creator the psychological pat on the back that saturates their consciousness with victory. Lastly, Jerry's mental obsession now has a physical expression. Shit just got real. And nothing beats that little dancing smile of satisfaction. I especially love when the copy clerk validates Jerry's work by reminding him, "That's how you become great, man, by hanging your balls out there."

004 -- THE CLASSROOM FROM DEAD POETS SOCIETY

Learn to love what's good for you. Schulman writes in the original screenplay, "Todd is dying inside. All eyes are on him. He stands and walks slowly to the front of the class like a condemned man on his way to his execution." There isn't an artist alive who hasn't had that experience. It's the kind of fear claws around in your chest like a trapped animal trying to get out. After all, the acceptance of having our work counted as the real, the approval of having people like it, these are the things we crave. And so, Todd perfectly portrays a kid who's paralyzed by the risk of rejection. Now that he's watched his friend recite an original poem in front of the group, only to be met with crickets and wind, the last thing he wants to do is stand up next. Keating, however, spots Todd's resignation as an indication of artistic potential. And he pounces on him in the best way possible.

Get the creative faucet flowing. Keating doesn't just gives his pupil the stage, he gives him the freedom and encouragement to follow his most impractical curiosities. We should all be so lucky to have a mentor like that. Someone who loves us enough to shove us. Because in that moment of free association, where Keating tells him to answer instead of think, where he forces him to create without the burden of perfection, to capture every syllable of delirium that floats into his mind and kick it back out into the world, Todd sends a shockwave through everyone in the room, including himself. And his poem elicits a physiological response from the audience in the form of gasps and smiles and nods and claps. Proving, that there's nothing like being tossed into necessity to help you figure out who you are.

You can't wink in the dark forever. It's a cold and hostile world when you step outside of the echo chamber. Audiences bring pressure and feedback and perspective and judgment. And the minute you stand up in front of them, you realize that you're no longer the tree in the forest. Todd, face to face with his peers *and* his fears, becomes completely naked. And when his friends start to laugh at the words he says, his face swells and turns red. Humiliation unearths his raw anger. But even though he struggles to spit it out, he finally utters the words: *From the moment we enter crying, to the moment we leave dying, it will cover just your head as you wail and cry and scream.* Stunning. Todd produces a magical and defiant moment that nobody in that room will ever forget.

005 -- THE MOUSE FROM THE PIRATES OF SILICON VALLEY

Good artists copy, great artists steal. According to the bestselling biography *Steve Jobs*, the Xerox agreement was sometimes described as one of the biggest heists in the chronicles of history. But the subtext is, it's not because Jobs stumbled across some random fragment of an idea and casually incorporated it into his own strategy. He was ruthless, shameless and intentional. Apple knew *whom* they wanted to steal from, *what* they wanted to steal, and most importantly, *how* to persuade them to let them steal it. And, like any successful car thief, once they brought the stolen hotrod back to the garage, within twenty four hours, it had a new paint job, new rims, new tires, a convertible top and a better designed dice in the mirror. That's not theft, that's theater. Proving, that it doesn't matter if you steal something, it only matters what you do with it once you've stolen it.

Ideas are free, only execution is priceless. Xerox's technologies of the mouse, the graphic interface and the programming language were genius. But they were also ahead of their time. And because their team lacked the taste and design and finesse when it came to prototyping, presenting and the persuading their board of directions, they failed to realize their concepts. Steve, on the other hand, was five moves ahead. And as anyone in the startup world will tell you, he who ships first, wins. Ultimately", with the help of his trademark reality distortion field, he convinced Xerox to open the kimono and share their new concepts in exchange for an equity investment. Who do you think got the short end of that digital stick? Jobs out executed the competition. He didn't have an *idea*, he had an *I did*. To quote the *Steve Jobs* biography once again, "The mark of an innovative company is not only that it comes up with new ideas first, but also that it knows how to leapfrog when it finds itself behind."

Everything is prey. This scene perfectly points out the astonishing short sightedness and lack of imagination of top corporate executives. Steve knew the Xerox was sitting on a goldmine, and yet, he couldn't believe they hadn't yet commercialized their technology. And so, his philosophy was, if these dolts are so dense that they can't realize the economic and cultural value of this software, *that they, themselves, have developed*, then they don't deserve to have it. Xerox wasn't worthy of their own innovation. And in the words of my favorite country song, "I could love you better than that, I know how to make you forget her, all I'm asking is for one little chance, baby I can love you better." Jobs was right. It comes down to trying to expose yourself to the best things that humans have done, and then try to bring those things into what you're doing.

006 -- THE BAR FROM A BEAUTIFUL MIND

Environment is the user interface for your brain. Nash is working on math problems in a bar. *A bar*. Not exactly the most academic environment. And yet, this location is important for several reasons. First, changes in physical surroundings stimulate our senses and enhance our ability to generate new ideas. It's a problem solving technique called *displacement*, whereby working in unusual settings helps you see patterns you wouldn't have noticed otherwise. Nash never would have had his epiphany sitting in a library. Second, solving math problems in a bar gave him a more visceral and spontaneous contact with his work. By inviting nature as his creative collaborator, he visualized an application of governing dynamics from a real world perspective everyone could relate to. Lastly, the bar scene is foreshadowing. If you read the **original screenplay** of *A Beautiful Mind*, right before the girls enter the room, the math students are discussing the communist regimes of Soviet Europe, North Korea and Germany. Which is interesting, considering The Nash Equilibrium has been used to analyze hostile situations like war, arms races and the prisoner's dilemma.

Respond with the right organ. Nash's friends are reacting to the situation emotionally, hormonally and egoically. They're drunk and horny and ready to pounce. John reacts to the situation economically, strategically and logically. He's focused and inspired and ready to work. And because of this temperamental distinction, it's clear who the better man is. Nash could have taken the girl home that night. Easily. But a Jedi craves not these things. The man was an artist and a genius and a schizophrenic. He was less interested in bedding and more interested in *embedding*. That's why he thanked the blonde before running out of the bar. She wasn't his conquest, she was his muse. She enabled the moment of conception, which solidified a theorem that would eventually create historic ripples in the fields currency crises, education processes, legislation, network traffic, game theory, even rock paper scissors. Who needs one night of carnal bliss when you could have a lifetime of mathematical immortality? There are ten million blondes in the world, but there's only one Nobel Prize.

Carve your own path. Nash's friends, like all good mathematicians of the day, were groomed and conditioned to follow Adam's Smith's sacred theory of competition, in which individual ambition serves the common good. Nash, on the other hand, followed his instinct, not his textbook. He was confident enough to question the standard, bold enough to suffer the ridicule of his friends, and presumptuous enough to execute on his idea. Even if did fly in the face of a hundred years of economic theory. Emerson famously said that we should not follow where the path may lead, but instead to go where there was no path and leave a trail. Nash exemplifies this remark. He literally creates a new path by running out of the bar, going straight home and fleshing out his new theory. He works through the night and through the seasons and doesn't stop until he gets it right. Nash turns a **seed into a forest** before anyone else even realizes it's raining. And he changes the world for the better.

007 -- THE CAFETERIA FROM THE RAINMAKER

Every creator needs a good low. Rudy finds himself on the verge of bankruptcy, living out of his car, working out of a hospital cafeteria, reduced to the corrupt world of ambulance chasing and fighting against a competing firm of experienced and devious lawyers who would stop at nothing to crush him. Talk about necessity being the mother of invention. Rudy's situation forces him to marshal his creative resources and persist in the face of incredible odds. But this isn't uncommon for most creative professional. I remember watching this movie when I first started my publishing business. At the time, my life situation was in desperate need of a change. I was making zero money and still living with my parents. Interestingly, this very scene inspired me to start taking my laptop to the neighborhood grocery store to put in a few extra hours of work on the weeknights. The environment was perfect. The store had a twenty four hour café with free wifi, tons of great signs, snacks and smells, and plenty of interesting people to interact with. I even wrote a popular [article](#) about my experience. Proving, that creativity doesn't just come from getting high, it comes from getting low. Lesson learned, next time life hands you a pile of shit, try to grow something.

Go fishing for inspiration. Rudy could have studied for the bar exam anywhere. But his mentor helped him understand that best way to increase the probability of success was by putting yourself in the way of it. To find your pool of prospects and start swimming there regularly. Of course, this is useful advice for rainmakers of any professional services firms. But it's also an intelligent strategy for collectors, creators and communicators of ideas. Inspiration, after all, isn't something you find, it's something you *beguile*. And part of that creative process is being strategic about your physical surroundings. Because the exciting part is, when you put yourself in the way of finding what you seek, you often discover more and better than what you sought. Rudy was merely hoping to sign up a few new prospects for his personal injury practice. But through the magic of proximity and serendipity, he encountered Kelly, who kicked open the door to the world of civil litigation. Rudy caught a bigger, truer and more beautiful fish than he ever anticipated. All because he showed up at the right pond every night.

Those who lose their virginity, win. Rudy, fresh out of law school, naively believes criminals are entitled to a defense and have a right to their day in court. But when he encounters Kelly, the battered wife whose husband savagely attacked her with baseball bat to the point of hospitalization, his perspective starts to shift. Not because he read some hypothetical case study in a textbook, but because he sat down with a devastated soul in hospital cafeteria on a dark night and listened to a real story from a real person. In this moment, Rudy loses his professional virginity. He enters into a new level of awareness and maturity about himself and the world in which he lives. Yes, it's the end of innocence, but it's also the beginning of opportunity. This crucial conversation sends his character on a trajectory, one that ultimately allows him to win his one and only case as a trial lawyer. And after that experience, Rudy abandons his law practice and pursues a teaching career with a focus on ethical legal behavior. Interesting, considering he initially imagined spending his days in a courtroom. Perhaps creative careers come with their own agenda.

008 -- THE DINER FROM TOMMY BOY

Anger is the ember of initiative. Tommy nearly destroys his partner's prized classic hotrod. Richard, overwhelmed with anger and adrenaline, finally lashes out and calls him an ungrateful, moronic, worthless, no selling waste of space, which leads to one of the greatest fight scenes in comedy history. And yet, the outcome is much more than a facial bruise the size of a pork chop. It's an epiphany that changes everything. Tommy, fueled by the fire of frustration and rejection, launches into a hysterical, overdramatic outburst about his pathetic sales abilities. The waitress looks at him like he's just escaped from the psych ward. Ironically, this performance taps into a business capability he didn't know he possessed. *Selling.* He may not be able to sell a ketchup popsicle to a woman with white gloves, but Tommy does know how to captivate and entertain and connect with a complete stranger. And since sales is nothing more than transferring emotion to another person, we realize he's not as worthless as we once thought. The point is, he didn't take things personally, he channeled them productively. Proving, that emotion is oxygen for the creative fire.

To shove people is to love people. Richard is, as one customer suggests, a smug, unhappy little man who treats people like they were idiots. But he's not immune to teachable moments. At the restaurant, he recognizes Tommy's chicken wing epiphany. But instead of shrugging it off, he pauses to recount the moment, probes to discover the motivation behind the moment and assures that his partner understands the significance of the moment. Turns out, Tommy actually possess tremendous business acumen. He just needed someone to hold up a mirror to his abilities. Maslow dubbed this phenomenon a our *unconscious competence*, wherein we has so much practice with a skill that it becomes second nature and can be performed easily. The challenge is, we're always the last ones to recognize our own value. We're simply too close to ourselves. We rarely have the eyes to see our highest talents. That's why we need people in our life to be mirrors and witnesses and encouragers. To make sure our potential doesn't go to waste. Otherwise we're just eating sugar packets in the dark.

Ain't no thing but a chicken wing. Tommy's interaction with the waitress comes back into play a later in the movie. The phrase *chicken wings* becomes a neurolinguistic anchor—a stimulus that calls forth certain thoughts and emotions—that he can later use to produce the appropriate state of mind needed for a given situation. Richard knows this intuitively. And so, a few scenes later, when the time comes to make a sale, he whispers the phrase *chicken wings* into his Tommy's ear. And that anchor activates the sales subroutine in his head, snapping him into appropriate state of mind to sell brake pads. This is a huge lesson in personal motivation. Whether you're running a business, writing a book or performing a concert, part of your job is to build an arsenal of associative triggers, aka anchors, which allow you to enter into your creative zone. Personalized workspaces, curated playlists, sacred objects, daily meditation rituals, these are your chicken wings. And once you tailor make these triggers to your obsessions, compulsions, preferences and idiosyncrasies, there's no stopping you.

009 -- THE BATHTUB FROM AS GOOD AS IT GETS

Listen for what wants to be written. Simon is down on his luck. Assaulted and nearly killed during a robbery, bankrupt from accumulating medical bills, estranged from his disapproving parents and devoid of creative inspiration. It's no wonder he hasn't created in weeks. Simon is a starving artist in every sense of the word. Until one evening, the muse, with her trademark divine timing, materializes in the form of a woman. I love the way it's written in the [original screenplay](#), "Instinct, sound and the faint glow of hope turns Simon over so that he faces the bathroom, where we have sitting at tub's edge, a bathing beauty exposing a better than perfect breast." In this moment, the tortured artist comes alive for the first time in the film. Carol's spirit infects him with vigor and imagination. His face and posture and voice and attitude shift with the speed of a cool wind's turn. And before he knows it, his hand starts moving across the canvas. Because the muse was hammering on a pane of glassing yelling, *can you hear me?* And the artist answered the call.

Don't take your lightning for granted. Simon makes the crucial creative transition from inspiration to momentum. He doesn't just register the moment, he rides it. Because he's smart enough to know, if he doesn't write it down, it never happened. He's humble enough to know, art comes through people, not from them. And he's mindful enough to know, inspiration comes unannounced, and you have to capture it before it vaporizes. Meaning, in this moment, Simon's job is to take dictation. To stay with the muse, stay focused on the work, stay engaged with the subject, and mine the vein until it's out. Because moments like these don't come around all that often. That's the price of admission. That's the cover charge he pays to plug into this immense power source. And he respectfully reimburses the muse with his time, talents and tenacity, lest she never darken his doorstep again. It's a helpful reminder to all creators, don't stop while you're ahead, stop when your muse tells you the power source is dead.

Inspiration is a reciprocal transaction. Collaboration built the world. Collaboration is how most of our ancestors used to work and live. And the work of an artist is no different. Carol claims that what she needed, he gave her. But let's not forget, what *he* needed, she gave him too. It's the third law of motion. We cannot hold a torch to light another's path without brightening our own. And that's the delightful irony of this scene. Simon is gay. Melvin even asks him earlier in the film, "Do you ever get an erection for a woman?" to which Simon patiently shakes his head no. Meanwhile, this moment of conception, this energy exchange, this highly sexual yet wholly plutonic exchange between two consenting adults, is the hottest, most memorable scene of the whole movie. Proving, that if we want to influence the people around us, we ought to pay attention not only to what we do that gives us energy, but what we do that gives others energy. Oh, and Helen Hunt is one foxy mama.

010 -- THE DESIGN SCENE FROM JOBS

Let your why drive. Apple stood for taste, humanity, heart and design. But somewhere along the way, somewhere in the bloated space between the cubicle farms and copy machines and shareholder meetings, that original vision got lost. Jobs realized his company wasn't a garage anymore. That's why he asked his team the crucial question. *Why are you still here?* He understood that what we create is just as important as why we create it. That the depth of meaning connected to the idea is just as important as the idea itself. Armed with that vision, that running imperative, that underlying nobility, the design team took on a new posture in their work. Ive's result was the iMac, a product that paved the way for many other designs including the iPod, which changed the way we listen to music; the iPhone, which changed the way we live and communicate; and the iPad, which changed the way we work and learn. All because they remembered why.

Creativity is a function of caring. Jobs was a man on a mission. He cared more than anyone. That was his ideal. That was the objective definition of his values. That was the hallmark of his passionate craftsmanship. And he personally embraced and internalized it to the highest order. Jobs famously commented in his bestselling postmortem biography, "The idealistic wind of the sixties is still at my back, and most of the people I know who are my age have that ingrained in them forever." Unfortunately, nobody changes the world by caring in a corner. Values aren't taught, they're caught. And so, when Jobs returned to the company as de facto chief in the late nineties, he started putting some calories behind his caring. He walked the factory floors, infected his team with his vision, and together they gave visual expression to his sense of life. Proving, that when sheer obsessive caring about what you do drives you, there's no ceiling on what you can create.

Restructure the system around constraints. In one of my favorite books, *The Art of Looking Sideways*, famed visual designer Alan Fletcher wrote that the first move in any creative process is to introduce constraints. And not just lines and borders and shapes and colors and physical space and time, but also conceptual constraints. In this scene, Jobs tells his team to forget about whatever they're working on. To design something new. Something useful. Something they cared about. Even if it's technology. *That was the constraint.* The catapult that set them free. Their job was to chase the ugliness away. And what was the result? Packaging became theater. Computers became friendly. Technology became nondisposable. Innovation became human. Customers became evangelists. Apple became iconic. Jobs became immortal.

011 -- THE SKATER SCENE FROM HIGH FIDELITY

Know those in the know. The skate punks stole, of all things, a tattered old book from the bargain box on home recording. And what's interesting is, if you read the original screenplay, the characters actually have a short conversation on the physical process of recording an album. Rob, always the underappreciated expert, tells the skate punks exactly how to do it. *Make the tracks. Deliver them to the pressing plant. Cut a master. Dub the submasters. Press the records. Design your cover art. That's it.* Unfortunately, that conversation was cut out of the final version of the movie. Too bad. Because at the time of the film's release, home recording hadn't been democratized by the digital revolution yet. Making your own album was still a mystery to most. And so, back then, if you were lucky enough to encounter someone who had a grasp of the process, along with the resources to execute it, you stayed close. Just like Vincent and Justin. Had the skate punks never loitered and looted, they never would have gotten their big break.

Mentorship is an inheritance. Rob's face is priceless. The moment we hear Justin and Vincent's music for the first time, their whole skate punk culture comes out barefoot. We don't just hear their instruments, we hear their intentions. And that closes the loop on the shoplifting incident. They weren't stealing obscure imported punk records for fun, they were for *inspiration*. Justin and Vincent may have been a couple of underage criminals causing trouble, but they were also a couple of budding musicians demonstrating initiative and promise. Yes, they broke the law, but only to break into the music business. *How punk rock of them.* And so, for the first time in the movie, Rob realizes he was wrong about someone. Perhaps image doesn't necessarily preclude taste. Perhaps youth isn't always a liability. Turns out, the skate punks embodied an indie spirit in which Rob saw a reflection of himself. So he took action on his intuitive lead and signed them to his record label.

Originality is your only currency. Rob's couldn't believe his ears. As much as he loathed those two skate punks, he had to admit, *their music was really good*. They were rough, but they were original. They were business crippling nazi youth shoplifters, but they developed a sound that was their own. And considering their influences, aka, the obscure foreign music they stole from the record store, it's no surprise. Justin and Vincent created a unique, unreplicable inspiration pool. They built a lexicon for what set their hearts on fire. And they earned the currency of originality. Barry, on the other hand, despite his vast knowledge of music history, never earned Rob's attention as an innovator. He was a hacksimile who created derivative, unimaginative work. And because he never wrote all those pseudo impressions out of his system, he couldn't compete in clear air. Proving, that there are no cover bands in the rock and roll hall of fame. If you want to make a name for yourself, you have to make your own music.

012 -- THE BEACH SCENE FROM THE DOORS

Fresh ideas demand fresh fuel. Jim was burned out on making movies. Nobody in the film world understood his artistic vision. And everyone, including himself, knew that he didn't belong with the squares, he belonged with the hippies. Morrison needed to find his own kind. To connect with kindred spirits through a shared culture. That's why he quit film school. Because life took him out of himself, and he needed to carve a path back to himself. And that's why went out into the desert, got lost, got high, got reconnected and got inspired. He took trip to another world, unlocked a creative valve, and the steam came pouring out. And as a result, he crafted new and interesting art through different forms expression, leading to one of the great rock bands of all time. Morrison fired inspiration into himself through physical displacement, connected to his subconscious through intoxication and created a sense of home and community through a new romance. That's what's possible when you recalibrate the soul.

To shove people is to love people. Morrison is new to the world of music. He even admits his shortcomings as songwriter. *He's shy and he can't sing.* But Ray doesn't care. When did extroversion and talent become prerequisites to artistic success? Dylan sings like he eats sandpaper for breakfast. What matters is writing. What matters is soul. What matters is saying something. That's how you make history. And so, this moment on the beach becomes the shove. The permission slip. The provocation of a decision. Ray responds to his friend's art with attention, patience, respect, encouragement and affirmation. He helps him see something he's too close to himself to see. He even believes in him more than he believes in himself. That response elevates Jim's hope. It's enough to send his creative rocket into the sky. And the best part is, that was just one song. He's got a whole concert in his head. All they have to do is yank it out and put it on wax. As it goes in the original screenplay, "Ray looks at him a long beat. Intense eyes, the manner of a man who knows what he wants and cannot be stopped."

Timing isn't everything, it's the only thing. Ray's sermon about how the world is screaming for change and that it's their time to take the planet back, reinvent the gods and make new myths, is inspirational. Makes me wish I went to college in the sixties. What's interesting is, when you consider the trajectory of the band's career, time was very much on their side. They weren't better or more deserving than any of the other bands, they just had the right people, in the right place, at the right time, with the right product, in front of the right audience, and with the right leverage. It's a powerful lesson for any artist trying to make it: *Success doesn't have a line.* There's no rational system of advancement and no standard set of rules that determines when it's your time to shine. You simply have to accept that it might be a long time before what you do catches on. And you have to be ready to hop on the board when your wave comes. It's like my mentor once asked me, will you still be around when the world is ready for you?

013 -- THE LYRIC SCENE FROM EIGHT MILE

The user interface of your brain. Jimmy's bus commute is a fixture in his writing process. It's a trusted, consistent structure that triggers his creative focus. A portable creative environment that helps him snap into work mode and make the word flesh. Because all he really needs is a pen, paper, headphones—and a landscape of pain, poverty and hard times—to inspire his work. It's not the most glamorous of workspaces. Detroit busses aren't known as exemplars of cleanliness, productivity and relaxation. But then again, Jimmy is writing rap lyrics. Considering hip hop is musical genre historically rooted in suffering and struggle, the scenery is actually quite perfect. And so, the scratch paper he pulls out of his pocket, along with the music pumping through his ears, become the associative triggers that give him a sense of control and stability and comfort. He's in harmony with the small slice of the universe in which he finds himself. And by convening day after day in the same space at the same time, a powerful energy builds up around him. Because he loses himself in the music, the moment, he owns it, and he never lets it go.

Become an idea foreman. *Lose Yourself* is one of my favorite songs of all time. I used to rock out to it in the bathroom before giving speeches. That's why I love this scene. It's not just an inspiring tune, it's an honest depiction of the songwriting process. I've been writing music for twenty years, and in my experience, this is almost exactly how it happens. There's a specific melody and rhythm thumping through your head, and you just keep replaying it over and over and over until the words finally match up. It's frustrating, time consuming and the people around you think you're insane. But it's all part of the process. Jimmy is walking the factory floor. He's taking a casual, curious and thoughtful sweep of every idea he's recently accumulated. He's managing his inventory. And over time, his lyrical ideas slowly arise from combining many disparate words and phrases and concepts from his notes. His creative inventory may appear raw and disorganized, but it's actually quite brilliant.

Creating a self to express. Jimmy is man of grit, determination and anger. But in the presence of his adorable kid sister, he's also a man of tenderness. A man who seeks a better life for the next generation. A man who's loyal to those who look up to him. And so, he crafts his song next to his sister's crib for several reasons. First, out of motivation. Because what he's creating isn't as important as *why* he's creating it and *whom* he's creating it for. Second, out of inspiration. Because in the child's eyes, he sees a purity and innocence he lost long ago. Third, out of recalibration. Because his sister's room is joyful, human space that brings coherence back to his life. And finally, out of obligation. Because he lives in an inner city trailer park with alcoholic and abusive parents. Jimmy's there to protect his sister. His muse. His purpose. Ultimately, these emotions, environments and experiences are the very ingredients that inform his music.

014 -- THE FINGER SCENE FROM PATCH ADAMS

Sniffing out resonant identifies. Patch's simple remedy for the leaking coffee cup is a symbolic moment. He demonstrates that a true ninja uses his surroundings to survive. And by being open and vulnerable to every shred of stimuli that crosses his path, he uses whatever tool is at his disposal to solve the problem. In this case, a sticker stuck to the side of a desk. Arthur, a man who doesn't waste time mingling with mediocre minds, recognizes this moment as a sign of lucidity, creativity and connection. The scrap of paper is the tiny detail that triggers a whole world. It acts as shorthand for a shared culture, captures where these two men have landed and encapsulates their edges. They're not mentally unstable, they're kindred spirits who have found each other. Proving, that the act of creating isn't just discovering your own kind, but deepening the relationships with your own kind to make the world a better place.

Soften and enrich the ground. Patch Adams is a movie about questioning the soulless, institutional approach to medical care. Treating people as people, using compassion and humor to heal them. In other words, *what do you see when you see people?* That's the driving question of daily life. And the answer, the awareness plan with which you experience the world, is what informs your creative abilities. Patch, unlike the other patients in the mental institution, doesn't see a bitter man, he sees a brilliant one. This interaction changes the entire dynamic of the relationship. Arthur is beside himself. As a man with a hardened heart, he's not used to this type of kindness. But Patch wins him over. And from that moment on, their relationship blossoms. Arthur even lets Patch use his acreage to construct the Gesundheit Institute. Yet another reason to treat people with compassion. You never know who has millions of dollars and mountains of land.

We see what we can afford to see. I'm reminded of the first time I saw the award winning musical *Once*. At time, the show hadn't won any awards yet. Nobody was talking about it. But we bought tickets anyway. And to my delight, not only was I crying my eyes out during the whole show, but watching the actors inspired me to start playing guitar standing up. And that single change completely transformed my singing, songwriting and performing style. Proving, that innovation is born out of unexpected inputs that change or perspective forever. And the more of these moments we have, the more we can create, and the more we can create, the more we can push this world forward. The challenge, then, is subverting resistance, which typically manifests as fear and conformity and laziness. Tom Robbins tells a [story](#) about attending a rock concert in the sixties that jimmied the lock on his language box and smashed the last of his literary inhibitions. When was the last time you had an experience like that?

015 -- THE NIKE SCENE FROM WHAT WOMEN WANT

Finished is the new perfect. Both executives agree the advertising copy needs work. Good. That's the point of a brainstorming session. Not to have ideas that are complete, but to have ideas that are catapults. Now, if you look closely, the phrase on the storyboard reads, *find the time*. Which is insightful and interesting, but wrong. And that's okay. It's supposed to be wrong. It's a *placeholder idea*. A surrogate. A dummy. Songwriters are famous for using this technique when writing lyrics. In fact, Paul McCartney famously used the phrase **scrambled eggs** as the placeholder lyric for the song Yesterday, until he found an appropriate title. And so, whether you're writing songs or writing ads, the goal is to budget time so it's not all sucked up by one step of the process. To prevent yourself from getting stuck on one particular idea, lest it holds up production for too long. For now, it's not about thinking something up, it's about getting something down. Order comes later.

Leave people's campsites better. Darcy, the high powered executive man eater, the infamous bitch on wheels, speaks from a place of honesty and maybe even a little sexual frustration. She casually mentions the phrase *no games* in reference to the customer's mindset. Nick's radar senses that, not only because he can read her mind, but also because he's equally infamous for being a player himself. What he does right, though, is unearth a valuable new opportunity in the midst of a conversation. He notices the phrase, affirms its potential and volleys the idea back to his partner. And, he also up before trying to add too much value the conversation. Instead of projecting his own meaning onto the other person and rushing in with the answer, he sits in companionable silence and gives his partner the space to breathe. And he puts himself in a supportive, encouraging position to help keep the momentum going until they come up with a solution. *No game, just sports*.

You can't perform without an audience. Creative people have a tendency to fall in love with their own ideas. To disappear into their own heads and work from a myopic perspective. But the reality is, nothing happens until a sales is made, and nobody knows how good your product is until they give you money. Everything has two births. First as an idea, then as the real and tangible output of that idea. And without that kind of market feedback, you're winking in the dark. You're the tree that falls in the forest. I remember the first time I played one of my songs for a girl. At the tender age of sixteen, it was the first time I ever shared my original music with anybody. I was trembling, sweating, probably crying and possibly peeing. It's hard to recall. The point is, I got the idea out of my head and into the world. And even though she broke up with me three weeks later on my birthday, at least I executed. Proving, that we don't need an idea, we need an "I did."

016 -- THE EQUATION SCENE FROM OCTOBER SKY

Beware all anxiety thieves. Instead of going back to sleep and slaughtering his brain's finest impulses, he leaps out of bed, thinks on paper and makes the word flesh. Instead of breaking for lunch and carousing with the coal miners, he chooses a productive obsession that's as large and as great as he is. Instead of marching in lockstep with the town's blue collar culture, he turns himself over to a more academic project where he feels at home intellectually. Instead of ignoring this pressing existential demand, the excitement at having discovered something worth doing galvanizes him. Homer is an archetype for the psychological landscape that all artists inhabit. His story is the perfect example of how to convert brain potential into passion and genuine accomplishment. There's an outstanding book about this element of the creative process called [Brainstorm](#). Maisel explores how artists and creators can use their tendency to obsess to their creative advantage. How obsessing productively can lead to fulfillment rather than frustration. Required reading for anyone who wants a more productive, prolific life.

Success never comes unassisted. Homer is a genius, but also a pragmatist. He knows it's hard to be creative alone. He knows it's like playing basketball without a backboard. And he knows if he doesn't get out from behind his desk and enlist his friend's support early in the process, they may never solve this problem in time. Homer, like all great creators, recognizes the perimeter of his circle of competence and stays inside of it, but is smart enough to get help from someone with a complimentary skillset. Quentin, the nerdy, weird poor kid—who secretly lives out in the swamps—becomes the secret weapon, the clutch player, the ninth inning closer, the greater assister, who hops off the bench, comes into the game and secures the win for the team. Homer breathes in help. He admits he needs it, goes out of his way to ask for it, accepts it gratefully and adopts it immediately. He lets it be okay that he needs other people. Which is a small victory in itself, considering how stubborn and antisocial artists can be.

Manual competence builds cognitive richness. Homer was kicked out of school and sent to work in the coal mines. Best thing that ever happened to him. Working that dirty, unglamorous and physically taxing job was exactly what jarred the idea loose in his brain. By getting out of his head and into his body, he got in touch with the deeper currents of himself and listened for what wanted to be written. The physical work transferred the locus of his brain energy. And by pumping rhythmically and repetitively, he also pumped the well of his creativity. In fact, it's an interesting metaphor. Coal is an energy resource. A fossil fuel. And throughout history, it was primarily burned for the production of electricity and or heat. Homer uses the coal to stoke his creative fire. And as a result, he not only proves his innocence, not only wins the approval of his teacher, not only earns his way back into school, not only enters him into the county science fair, but secures his place in history as a famous space engineer and bestselling author.

017 -- THE HULA HOOP FROM HUDSUCKER PROXY

Innovation is innocence plus ignorance. Norville is a naïve, overzealous, inexperienced mailroom screwball. And that's exactly why the board of directors puts him in charge of the company. He's the ideal candidate to temporarily depress the company's stock price so they can execute their trading scandal. But as I've said before, sometimes it takes a person who knows nothing to change everything. Objectivity is equity. It's the outsider advantage. When you know nothing, you can offer perspective without a vested interest. You can spot opportunities without being subject to the internal politics of the organization. Progressive insurance followed a similar narrative. The founder died in a car crash in the mid sixties, at which point his college aged son took over the business. But despite the new president's lack of experience, the company went on to become one of the largest in the country. Not to mention, their approach to pricing changed the auto insurance industry forever. Why? Because when you don't know the rules, you don't know when you've broken them. When you don't know the limit, it's easier for you to surpass it. It's counterintuitive, but, the less you know, the more likely you are to come up with an original idea.

Capture people's imagination. Hudsucker throws a wealth of resources toward their new innovation. From engineering to production to accounting to marketing, they've committed to producing and marketing this new product. And yet, nobody knows what the hell it is. Or how people are even going to react to it. The extent of their market research is the frequently quoted line, *you know, for kids!* The paradox is, it's hard to persuade people to pay for something they're not used to paying for; but nobody knows how good your product is until they give you money. What's a creator to do? Steve Jobs, the a master at figuring out what customers were going to want before they did, would tell us to just ship the damn thing. As it says in his [biography](#), he had an uncanny ability to cook up gadgets that we didn't know we needed, but then suddenly couldn't live without. Why give customers what they want when you can tell them what they need? Hudsucker achieved the same goal. Their hoola hoop created a new standard by capturing people's imagination, not by listening to their needs.

Everybody is somebody's somebody. In one of my fiction books, [The Religion Wars](#), we learn about someone called the *prime influencer*. It's a big data theory about a single influential person who sits at the seed end of a vast social network that ultimately connects all of civilization. According to author Scott Adams, the prime influencer isn't aware of his or her power. And yet, any catchy idea from them has the potential to quickly travel through the social fabric of civilization and change the world. *Cool*. Enter the little boy on the sidewalk. He's about to become the prime influencer. I love how it reads in the original screenplay, "The screaming pack of children are staring, fascinated, at the hula-hooping youngster. The children are dumbfounded. It is a moment the likes of which they have never dreamed. They become maniacal, possessed. We don't know where they are running, but we can guess." This moment is every innovator's dream. *Virality*. And it occurs right at the low point, when the inventor and the storeowner have all but thrown in the towel. Proving, that momentum hinges on the power of one.

018 -- THE FORMULA SCENE FROM MONEYBALL

Ask questions, but also question answers. Pete is no athlete. He hasn't spent his life in baseball. And he doesn't have a traditional view of the game. He's a chubby, entry level geek with a degree in economics and a bunch of radical ideas about how to assess a player's value. But that reality allows him to break through the walls of denial and ask the questions aren't being asked. And so, his character, both physically and intellectually, personifies the entire crux of his approach. Oakland doesn't need a roster of expensive superstar players who look good in uniforms, they need guys who can score runs. Period. As it reads in the [original screenplay](#), "They thought it was the chicken that made the chicken soup taste good, when really, it was the onions. And onions are a lot cheaper than chicken." Pete's players, in this case, are the onions. Just like him. I'm reminded of another powerful line in the script that didn't make the final cut of the movie. Pete says, "There's a much more difficult question than asking how to win baseball games. Once you begin to pull at that string, your understanding of the world might begin to unravel."

Walk in and create a problem. Pete has two minutes in the parking lot to make his case. That's it. The moment has come for the big pitch, pardon the pun, and if he doesn't create a holy shit moment right then and there, he may never get the change to do it again. Initially, we taste his fear. He even apologizes to Billy for what he believes. But once he gets going, once he musters the confidence, he doesn't tuck it in, he doesn't turn down the volume, he just owns it and goes for it. He finds the biggest thing he's trying to say, and just says it. Pete may not be able to leg out a triple, but he sure knows how to paint a picture that changes everything. And that's what prolific communicators do. They equip people to spot a new story with their own eyes. Instead of trying to change people's minds, they create a problem that leaves people with no choice but to change their minds on their own. They make sure people walk away from their interactions with beautiful reminder of what might be.

When you're good, you make others gooder. Oakland's veteran scouting department, which consists of ten grizzled old tobacco chewing lizards who played baseball in the sixties, still operates the same way they have for decades. And that's precisely the problem. Their approach is based on history and wisdom and subjective opinion, i.e., this player looks like a superstar. Pete's approach is based on math and logic and [sabermetrics](#), i.e., this contributes the most to the team's offense. Which isn't to say there's not a place for instinct. But when you're a financially limited team playing an unfair game overshadowed by rich teams who can buy their way to a championship, obviously something isn't working. And so, they employed Pete's objective approach, winning a record breaking twenty games in a row. But what's really fascinating is, although they still failed to take home the championship, another team later won *their* first world championship in ninety years embracing Pete's philosophy. It's a humble reminder that the mark of a great thinker is how far your thoughts travel. And that the purpose of magic is to illuminate and elevate everyone, not just your own reflection. Once you hone this skill, once you master the art of movement value, not only will your creative output multiply, but the people in your life will start bringing their seeds to you, begging you to help build their forests.

019 -- THE TYPEWRITER SCENE FROM THROW MAMA FROM THE TRAIN

Establish a gentle flow that obfuscates procrastination. Larry is living under the proverbial piano on a rope. After his wife stole his last novel and garnered mainstream success and critical acclaim, he struggles with horrible writer's block. What I love about this scene is, it's a wildly honest and accurate look at the life of a writer. It's lonely. It's quiet. It's just you and the work. But there's a misconception. Facing the blank page seems like an iconic, romantic and inspiring experience. *The freedom. The potential. The power.* But the reality is, most artists experience it as an intimidating, frustrating and painful part of the creative process. *The blazing island of white*, as the cartoonists call it. And so, day after day, artists plop down in front of that empty canvas, hoping to somehow will the art out of them, and they end up torturing themselves. Sometimes to death. Prolific creators, on the other hand, take a different approach. They dig their creative well before they're thirsty. They fortify their intellectual inventory with an organized, trusted and robust [content management system](#). That way, their process of creation isn't driven and dictated by time pressure alone. And they never have to worry about facing a blank page in the first place.

Never underestimate the creativity of avoidance. We all have the equivalent to a blank page in our lives. And we all have our private arsenal of spectator sports and shadow projects to avoid confronting it. We invent things to outsource to preserve the illusion of productivity. We artfully create constant distractions instead of working. We jack ourselves off on social media to satisfy our bottomless need for validation and approval. We creatively convince our colleagues and competitors that we're busier than we really are. And we react to digital fidgets that are really just everyone else's agenda for our time. Larry prefers using scotch tape to give himself a homemade pig face. *Anything to avoid working.* What's amazing is, all of these surrogate activities, these inventive procrastinations and addictions of the self, require energy and creativity. Meaning, we just as easily could have burned those calories creating something from whole cloth. Making something that shows people how we see life. Perhaps creative blocks are simply a matter of energy misappropriation.

Keep creative production going. *Writers At Work* is a series of books that contains candid conversations with some of the world's great contemporary novelists. Something I noticed after reading several of them consecutively was, these guys used to write letters. Piles of them. Every single day. But not just to correspond with readers, colleagues and critics, but to get the creative faucet flowing. To pump oil into the machine. To fuel their ability to execute. To keep production going. Snail mail correspondence ensured there was something going on all the time, not just the moment they sit down and decide to start working. And so, whatever your principal work unit is, whether it's taking pictures or painting landscapes or composing songs, consider finding a preliminary trigger to activate the process. Something simple, easy and incremental to grow your executional victory bank. Once that becomes a daily discipline, by the time you make your way to the blazing island of white, going to work will feel threatening. Remember, if you can't remove the poison, blunt its sting.

020 -- THE SALES SCENE FROM WALK THE LINE

Find something that has magic in it for you. Identity is a luxury item. Due to historical, genetic, environmental and economic variables, not everyone can afford to become who they are. Cash, however, was one of the lucky ones. And I love this scene's serendipitous juxtaposition of what *compels* him, aka, watching the recording session, and what *constrains* him, aka, working as a door to door salesman. These profound moments of contrast happen to creators everyday. In fact, when I started my company out of college, I worked a number of jobs to make ends meet, from waiting tables to selling furniture to parking cars. All of which constrained rather than compelled me. But after few years of accruing a massive debt to my artist, I couldn't take it anymore. I knew I was meant for something better. Something that had magic in it for me. Something that allowed me to do my rightful work in the human family. And eventually, despite the deafening chorus of wagging fingers and raised eyebrows, I rode my creative horse into the sunset. Johnny would have been proud.

Make the word flesh. If you pause the video, you'll notice the words he scribbles aren't orders for home equipment, they're song lyrics. Cash is interested in telling stories, not making sales. What an iconic moment. Think about it. What artist hasn't snuck away from the mundane duties of their boring day job to squeeze in lyric here or a drawing there? That very experience is where many of our best songs come from. And what's interesting is, the tune he's writing is [Get Rhythm](#), a song about a shoeshine boy who uses rhythm to cope with the tedious nature of his job. *Get rhythm when you get the blues, it only costs a dime, just a nickel a shoe, it does a million dollars worth of good for you, get rhythm when you get the blues.* Sounds like it was written from personal experience, huh? Cash knew exactly what he was doing. Selling door to door was for the birds. Proving, that just because we hold a day job to pay the bills, doesn't mean the artistic gland isn't secreting the entire time. We just have to be smart enough to write down what we feel.

Artists who don't sell, suffer. Three months and he ain't sold squat. *Bar none, the worst salesman he'd ever seen*, says his business partner. But that's only because he didn't believe in the merchandise. Johnny was actually a brilliant businessman, he was just peddling the wrong product. Kitchen appliances? Fat chance. But music? Look out. Give that man a guitar and microphone, and he'll close the sale every time. In fact, considering he had a career that spanned almost five decades, won numerous awards in a variety of categories, recorded tons of hit songs in multiple genres, influenced generations of songwriters and was inducted into three major music halls of fame, I think it's safe to say he knew how to sell. He just needed the right product. The point is, everybody sells. Everybody. It's not the easiest or most enjoyable part of the process, but without it, we're just winking in the dark. Like my mentor used to say, if you're not there to sell, you're just a visitor.

021 -- THE APARTMENT SCENE IN FINDING FORRESTER

The mind is a terrible office. The romantic notion that an artist is working when he's staring out the window is true, but it's not the principal work unit. Stuffing our eyes with wonder is essential for inspiration, but eventually, we have to make the word flesh. We have to extract what's inside of us, lest we think ourselves into a corner. It's like my therapist used to tell me, don't just sit in bed thinking, *go think on paper*. Experience your ideas kinesthetically. Whatever is rising up from within your depths, just get it down. Judgment comes later. Forrester says the first key to writing is to write. Which sounds like one of those super unsatisfying zen koans that falls somewhere between *no shit* and *oh really*, but the advice couldn't be more lucid. Regardless of the medium, the first step in doing anything is to just do that thing. Anything else is procrastination in disguise. Every moment we're just thinking about something, the idea is actually dying. It's deprived of the oxygen of documentation. We have to start punching those keys.

Befriend simplicity. Jamal's face in this scene is priceless. Forrester challenges his preconceptions and rocks him to his very core. He isn't just receiving lesson on writing, he's witnessing a meditation on human nature. *The first key to writing is to write?* Could it really be that simple? You bet your ascot. The problem is, our species loves to overcomplicate things. Complexity feels like progress. It helps us preserve the illusion of productivity. And it overcompensates for our shortcomings and insecurities. But the reality is, the creative process is alarmingly simple. It's input, throughput and output. It's inhale, pause and exhale. It's inspiration, organization and distribution. Three steps. Nothing more, nothing less. Anyone who tells you otherwise is a chef selling pizza with goat cheese and truffles. Forrester is the real deal. Like a good mentor, he doesn't preach, he models. And because his hands are dirty, because he's literally putting words on paper before his student's very eyes, that makes him right.

Participating in the energy exchange. The score adds a subtle layer of poignancy to the scene. This particular song was written by Ornette Coleman, one of the major innovators of the free jazz movement of the sixties. I just love the way the music starts at the same time as the typewriter. It's the perfect parallel. Jazz, after all, is about cocreation. Riffing back and forth. Borrowing energy from the people around you. Who's to say writing can't feel the same way? I'm reminded of when I served on the board of directors of a publishing association. During my presidency, I hosted quarterly writing marathons. Fifteen of us would literally sit in a room and write for eight straight hours, stopping only to eat and pee. It was goddamned magical. Like an all day silent jazz concert. Words poured out of people like melted butter. Writers who hadn't produced in months were suddenly prolific. In fact, I'll never forget when my chronically blocked friend told me during lunch: *Watching you type motivates me*. Cool, daddyo. Another reminder to not only pay attention to what you do that gives you energy, but what you do that gives other people energy.

022 -- THE BAR SCENE FROM SHAKESPEARE IN LOVE

Leave people's campsite better than you found it. Marlowe doesn't get defensive about giving away his ideas. He doesn't demand credit for the suggested plotline. He doesn't ask for an invoice at the end of the conversation. And he doesn't call a team of barristers to draft a non disclosure agreement. Kit simply says, *here*, as he generously contributes to his colleague's creative process. Why? Because he's already a successful in his own right. The creative faucet is already flowing. Meaning, there's a certain degree of artistic faith. A belief that the muse will return. A trust that there's more where that came from. Creativity, after all, is an asset. The more you use it, the more you have. Whereas, if you're selfish with your knowledge, if the prospect of plagiarism scares your imagination into hiding, then nobody wins. Marlow, then, represents the rising creative tide that lifts all boats.

Distribute your motive force accordingly. Success has a funny way of putting the heart in conflict with itself. When we see the prosperity of a friend or a colleague, it either fuels our creative fire as a glowing source of inspiration, or awakens the green eyed monster and sends us into a spiral of jealousy. And while the latter is more common and human, it's also significantly less productive. Bitter jealousy, we start to find, is actually a mask for procrastination. It's a prosperity blocker. A heart impoverisher. A pace slower. When we spend our time justifying and rounding down other people's success, we only hurt ourselves. Shakespeare *tries* turning toward his friend's triumphs with a hospitable heart, but his eyes tell another story. He *wants* to be happy for his fellow playwright, but deep down, he makes excuses for other people's accomplishments. No wonder he hasn't written a word.

Don't mistake talking for doing. [Gollwitzer](#) famously found that announcing our goals makes us less motivated to accomplish them. Telling people our goals, he says, creates a social reality that tricks our mind into a sense of satisfaction, thinking the work is already done. When in fact, we haven't executed zilch. This phenomenon is called *substitution*, and artists are among the world's worst perpetrators. It stems from our fear of idleness. Our gnawing desire to remind every artist we encounter how busy and booked and in demand we are, lest they assume we're sleeping under a bridge. Marlowe is an artist who executes. Shakespeare is an artist who explains. Kit is a creator who does. Will is a creator who discusses. And the difference is palpable. Notice the bartender in the scene. He serves as the impartial observer. The focus group of one. The mirror held up to the truth. Once the two playwrights begin riffing back and forth, his facial expressions are the barometer of prolificacy.

023 -- THE SEMINAR SCENE FROM ADAPTATION

Spectator sports are addictions of the self. McKee's book on story and narrative is the best in the world. No doubt. But while seminars are inspiring and educational, they're also expensive, time consuming and a poor replacement for doing the work. In the same way that a large group of people who gather for an hour each week deceive themselves into thinking *that's* church, the event becomes a surrogate for productivity. It's a distraction. It's playing dress up for the wrong audience. Kauffman's internal monologue says it all, "It is my weakness, my ultimate lack of conviction that brings me here with all these desperate idiots lapping up everything this bag of wind spouts. Easy answers. Rules to shortcut yourself to success. And here I am, because my jaunt into the abyss brought me nothing." The irony, of course, is that his voice over rant is exactly what he needs to moves the story along. It's the oldest trick in the book. *If you can't think of anything to write about, write about the fact that you can't think of anything to write about.* Because your problem is never your problem. Creative block is a symptom, but what matters is the source. Continue to medicate yourself with seminars, and you'll never uncover it.

Help inspiration seek you out. People say there's nothing new under the sun. But considering the sun is eight hundred and sixty four thousand miles in diameter, if you can't find something new under it, you're not very creative. Originality of voice isn't hard to achieve, it simply requires time, consistency and patience. And that's why I love this scene. When artists whimper about getting creative blocked, it infuriates me. Is that humanly possible? Are you not paying attention? Life is not a story where nothing happens. With the right framework, i.e., metacognitive, ritualistic or recreational **tactics** for finding inspiration where no one else is looking, something will happen. By taking a **holistic** approach to creativity, i.e., rejecting the notion of the elusive eureka moment, you can live your life in a way that your art gets done over and over. McKee's speech at the end of this scene is among the truest moments in modern filmmaking. It's worth reading the **original screenplay**, if you haven't already, just to let his construction of words massage your ears and heal your eyes.

You are a longing machine. Adaptation's portrayal of the tragically depressed but lovingly sincere artist is spot on. There isn't a creator alive who hasn't been in his shoes. *Sad. Hopeless. Overweight. Uninspired.* No wonder the movie is a favorite among artists. No wonder it was nominated for a cavalcade of awards. Because as you watch it, you discover your own humanity deep within the conflicts of the characters. You remember that through despair and vulnerability, you can still triumph in the end. And you realize you're not the only crazy person banging your head against the **brick wall of mystery**. Charlie Kauffman actually gave a brilliant lecture on this topic a few years ago. My favorite line from his speech was, "Do not disregard all the little voices. Failure means you risked failure." I loved this movie when it came out. It captured my imagination as a viewer, compelled my interest as a storyteller and kickstarted my ambition as an writer. What more can you ask for in work of art?

024 -- THE GUITAR SCENE IN AUGUST RUSH

Fuel your artistic energy reserve. August isn't just a songwriter, he's a savant. The boy hears and feels and smells and touches music everywhere he goes. It comes from inside of him, it comes from outside of him. And regardless of how he engages with the world, there isn't anyone or anything that doesn't inspire him. The question is, why is he the only one who hears it? Simple. *He's the only one who's listening.* Which isn't a zen koan, it's just the way human perception works. Whatever you go looking for, you find. August exemplifies the practice of awareness plans, which are metacognitive procedures and mental recipe for perceiving and thinking about the environment around him. To him, everything is an instrument. Music is his lens for interacting with the world. And that's why he's able to keep the faucet flowing and keep production going. August is building an unlimited contextual reservoir to uniquely inspire him.

Famous for having feelings. Every time I watch this movie, I weep tears of joy. The dialogue gives me chills, the soundtrack makes me want to create and the story reminds me that my hope is not seeded in the wrong garden. And yet, critics ripped this movie apart when it premiered. The reviews called it schmaltzy, illogical and overly sentimental. *Well, yeah.* Don't you know anything about music? That's the whole goddamn point. If art tugs on people's heartstrings, it worked. If art says something for people that they can't express for themselves, it worked. If art delivers something people can't find on their own, it worked. Taste snobs drive me up the wall. That's why I never read reviews of anything I publish. I stay on the side of the creators, where I belong. As the old saying goes, those who can't *do*, review. Chicken shits.

Timing is a version of luck. The thing is, it runs deep before you even find success. August, for starters, was the product of two professional musicians. One was a classically trained cellist, the other was a rock and roll star. And the combination thereof endowed him with a massive musical inheritance. A genetic package wired us for certain artistic powers and proclivities. August also lives in one of the most creative, inspiring and accommodating cities in the world. Manhattan is his platform. And it grants him an all access pass to collaborators, mentors, venues, universities and of course, an audience. August was lucky, but he was also smart enough to *realize* he was lucky. And that not only humbled him, but helped him find ways to stay in the game long enough to still be around when the world was ready for him. Right guy. Right place. Right time. Right product. Right audience. Right leverage. That's luck. It's a confluence of events.

025 -- THE CRITIC SCENE FROM RATATOUILLE

Find your idea a friendly neighbor. Remy's vision was to reimagine a classic. To put his unique spin on a something that was a fixture in the culture for centuries. *Not an easy task.* In fact, most artists who try to reinvent the wheel watch it spin off the axel and fly into a ditch on the side of the road. But not this artist. Remy works by instinct. He takes action on his intuitive leads. He boldly reinvents a time honored tradition, step by step. And what's the outcome? He changes the customer's life forever. But the real question is, what forces were at play, *psychologically*, that we can learn from? Simple. Remy found something that was already in the customer's head and hung something next to it. The memory of ratatouille became the mental hook upon which the customer could hang this innovation. Proving, that it's okay to be new, but not so new that nobody knows what to do with us. New is good, but we don't want to be so impossible to classify that people drop the mental ball. *Does your idea have a neighbor?*

Let emotion do the heavy lifting for you. Ratatouille, which was traditionally viewed as a peasant dish, didn't seem like the smartest way to impress the country's most renowned and pretentious restaurant critic. But our tiny chef had an instinct. He knew exactly what he wanted to create. So he infected the people around him with his vision and led them to execution. And when the plate finally arrived at the table and the critic took the first bite, we witness a magical moment. *Home. Childhood. Family. Comfort. Care.* Remy's creation wasn't just a vegetable dish, it was a time machine. And it transported the critic to another realm of existence, allowing him to engage with his work on a deeply profound level. That's what's possible when we dare to challenge our customer's preconceptions. To violate their expectations about how something is made, and who it is that makes it. *Does your art do that?*

The changing definition of failure. Despite the positive review, the restaurant ultimately closes down due to an inability to comply with the health code inspection. Which seems like a failure, and maybe it is. But every new beginning comes from some other beginning's end, as the [song](#) says. And we discover that this closing is the best thing that could have happened, both for the chef and the critic. Anton may have lost all credibility as a critic, but he ends up funding a popular new bistro that builds financial prosperity, local community and a platform for artistic expression. I'm reminded of a presentation I made many years ago. The audience reviews were the worst I'd ever received, and I was devastated. But then, a few months later, I received an email from the *one* woman in the room who was actually blown away that day. And her company ended up hiring me for a project that led to tons of future business. Funny how that works. Sometimes failure multiplied by time inverts into success.

026 -- THE LABCOAT SCENE FROM CLOUD WITH A CHANGE OF MEATBALLS

You're better because it took longer. Growing into your originality can be a deeply discouraging process. Considering the mental impediments that block creativity, the inevitable delays that thwart momentum, the personal relationships that threaten progress and the failed attempts that crush enthusiasm, most young artists wish they could just press fast forward on the entire process. But the reality is, that experience of tempering is exactly what gives your instrument its unique sound. If you were to find your voice too early in the process, you'd be bypassing the necessary spiritual work to get there, ultimately making your success wafer thin and unsustainable. Flint is determined to invent something great someday—and he will, there's no doubt—but just like the oversized sleeves of his lab coat, only the passage of time will facilitate the growth required to do so. *Have you made your peace with delayed gratification?*

Reverse engineer your dream. Flint's walls are collaged with inspiring images of his creative heroes. *Edison. Einstein. Tesla. Newton.* These are giants upon whose shoulders he will stand. Eventually. For now, notice that he draws a picture of himself, bearing the moniker of *best inventor ever*, and pins it on his wall of fame. This is pivotal moment in his career. He's no longer dreaming of becoming an inventor, he *is* an inventor. He acts as if. He is who he says he is. His belief, predicated more on whimsy than reality, is that he can *and will* do this. Flint plans to live his life, against all evidence, as if these advances in fortune and visions of success were already here. It's creative visualization at its finest. But the secret is, he doesn't just sit in bed trying to activate the universal law of attraction, hoping to manifest his dreams into reality. He runs out of the house in the middle of the night, locks himself in his laboratory and gets to work inventing. *What moment first initiated your momentum sequence?*

A fashionable on ramp to creativity. Flint's lab coat is more than clothing, it's a commitment device. Something that gives his mental obsession a physical expression, adds energy to the system and moves the creative ball forward. Something that makes the effects of his work real and visible for all to see, even in the early stages of production. And something that gives him an elegant excuse just to have ideas and validate his creative process. I'm reminded of when I started drawing [thinkmaps](#) for clients. I bought an orange jumpsuit. Mainly because drawing murals on massive dry erase boards was a sweaty, dusty, dirty endeavor. But also because the jumpsuit changed the way I worked. Every time I slipped it on over my clothes, my enthusiasm doubled, my energy increased and my sense of purpose skyrocketed. Plus I looked like an escape convict. The point is, every creator needs a uniform. A wearable identity totem that prompts a work mindset and sets a tone that says to your brain, work happens now. *What object helps you merge into the creative process?*

027 -- THE BLOG SCENE FROM JULIE & JULIA

Follow effort, not passion. Julie works at the call center of a city development corporation. Her job primarily consists of answering phone calls from scared, grieving, angry victims of the twin towers attacks and attempting to provide them with resources and direction. And so, by the time she gets home after an emotionally draining day at work, all she wants to do is cook. To disappear from the world. To drop an existential anchor, enter into her creative territory and experience pure freedom. Cooking, for her, is the meaningful and engaging activity that recalibrates the soul and rebalances her above the precipice of meaninglessness. This is a profound realization. Julie is starting to understand the rich context of meaning around the activity of cooking. And that provokes her motivation. Therein, then, lies the secret to discipline. Making an activity existentially painful not to do. Arranging your life in a way that it actually becomes easier to just say yes and get to work. *If you were the last person on earth, what would you still do everyday?*

Permission is the preventer of progress. A few years ago, I wrote a daily devotional on my favorite topic, [execution](#). The central theme throughout the book was how people can overcome the problem of *permission*, meaning, any mental construct of not-enoughness that deadlocks progress. Julie personifies this creative challenge beautifully. Since a major publishing house didn't pick up her novel, she doesn't give herself permission to be a real writer. Since she wasn't a celebrity chef with her own product line and global name recognition, she doesn't giving herself permission to be a real cook. Eric, on the other hand, reminds her that every great chess player was once a beginner. That we don't have to be great to get started, but we have to get started to be great. He convinces her to reject the tyranny of being picked. To stop waiting to be discovered. And to just go online, press publish, and there it is. She's a writer. She's a cook. It's real. And nobody can take that away from her. That's the beauty of technology. It pulverized the problem of permission and paved a way for her to step into her rightful identity. *How are you manufacturing your own big breaks?*

Behind every famous creator is a fabulous mirror. Most great ideas are just waiting to be talked out of. It kind of breaks my heart, but that's the way humans are wired. We're always the last to recognize our own value. Julie, of course, uses every trick in the book to deflect her husband's brainstorm. *It won't work. It sounds boring. It might get me fired. It's not my place. It's not possible.* But notice, he stays with her. Spoken like a true editor, he keeps probing and challenging and suggesting and affirming, cutting through his wife's inevitable layers of creative doubt. And eventually, once all the excuses and permission and hesitations melt away, there's nothing left but a great idea. This scene couldn't be more honest. Conversations like this happen at dinner tables every night in every city to every couple. The question is, are you willing to be a good mirror? Someone who shows others what they can't see for themselves. Someone who believes in people more than they believe in themselves. Hope so. Because without you, we're just starving artists playing basketball without a backboard. *When was the last time you served as a sounding board for someone you loved?*

028 -- THE PHONE SCENE FROM PURSUIT OF HAPPYNESS

Commitment is a creative constraint. Chris is a broke, divorced, homeless single father. He can't afford not to show up every day and close deals. It's literally life and death. That's the why. The dangling sword of obligation. The running imperative that drives his behavior. He may not have as much experience as the other stockbrokers in his training program, but he certainly has more to lose. And so, there's a profound level of commitment that informs every decision he makes. There's a theoretical constraint that forces him to work intelligently, work efficiently, and most importantly, work differently. Chris's life situation is a form of acute sales pressure. But as dire as it sounds, it actually works to his advantage. Had he gone to work with a diploma in his hand and a trust fund in his name, it would have made him less hungry. He would have been more susceptible to apathy. And the repercussions of failure would have been nominal. Perhaps the pursuit of happiness is fueled by the presence of sadness. *How could you commit yourself into a profitable corner?*

Small times long equals big. Chris's lowly circumstances reduce his workday to a mere six hours, only two thirds of the typical stockbroker's day. But again, he doesn't run from his limitations, he leverages them. Chris turns his circumstances into a temporal constraint. He uses the ticking clock as a motivator to invent ways to make sales calls more efficiently. This is my favorite part of the scene. He doesn't hang up the phone between calls. He doesn't stand around the water cooler on break. And he doesn't waste time in the bathroom. That earns him an additional eight minutes a day. Which doesn't sound like much, but over the course of a year, that accrues to more than thirty three hours. That's an entire week of work. *Wow.* Chris uses something called a prolificacy equation, which is an incrementalist approach to building a body of work through patience, delayed gratification and continuity. *Are you willing to build a body of work by adding one small piece at a time?*

When all else fails, defy protocol. The most profitable moment in your professional life is when you realize you've been standing on a whale fishing for minnows. It's that blinding flash of the obvious when you slap yourself on the forehead and think, *why didn't I think of that before?* I've personally had this moment several times in my career, and each time, it never failed to amaze me. It also never failed to make me money. Chris, you notice, has this moment about halfway through this scene. And you can almost hear it in his inner monologue. Why be limited by the rules of a game I don't even need to play? Why wait until I've called everyone to reach out to potential high value customers? Screw it. I need a sale now. And so, he skips ahead to the top of the call sheet, cold calls a whale, books the appointment, develops a relationship, makes his pitch, closes the deal, wins the coveted full time position at the firm and goes on to form his own multimillion dollar brokerage firm. *Which rules are you prepared to subvert?*

029 -- THE CRYING SCENE FROM SOMETHING'S GOTTA GIVE

Metabolize fallen tears into written words. Art allows us to deal with whatever interferes with our intention to make meaning. Erica may be a heartbroken, blubbering mess, but that doesn't stop her from doing her work. In fact, it's quite the opposite. Her devastating love affair actually *fuels* her creative fire. And so, we watch her grant meaning to her failures, power through the experience—not over it—and spin the straw of life into a masterpiece. She even kills off the man who broke her heart at the end of the play. Like the old saying goes, hell hath no fury than a writer scorned. That's the best part about being an artist. Nothing bad ever happens to a us, it's all just material. Grist for the mill. Coal for the factory. All experiences are justified, processed, rendered and reconciled. And as long as we vow never to let pain leave without picking its pocket, we can float on a tsunami of acceptance for anything life throws at us. *How are you using everything as a basis for growth?*

Every artist needs a good low. Our species spends a lot of money trying to buy happiness. But sometimes what we really need is for life to hand us a pile of shit. Literally. Consider it from an agricultural perspective. Manure contributes to the fertility of soil, assists in the growth of life, even functions as an energy efficient fuel source in some mountain cultures. Shit may have a foul smell and a filthy reputation, but it's still been an essential resource human civilization. Why should artists be any different? Erica is a true professional. She's vulnerable enough to open herself to the low, humble enough to give thanks when it comes, and creative enough to leverage it until it's gone. She's a woman with an exquisite understanding of her own artistic timing. It's the season of creation, of exhaling. And as the air goes swirling out, she honors the flow and works until the vein is dry. *How good are you at recognizing when life is giving you a gift?*

Art is subordinate to life. Keaton won multiple awards for her role in this movie. And when you read the reviews, most people agree that the crying scene was one of the most touching, priceless, hilarious performances of her career. What artist can't relate? The conflicting emotions that come and go like thunderclouds. The sudden creative momentum that pulls you out of bed in the middle of the night. The series of verbal epiphanies that make you feel like an literary superhero. And of course, the musical triggers that transport you to another time. That's my favorite part of this scene—the song playing in the background. If you translate the lyrics, the chorus says, “My list of needs is really quite brief, I need a man who can bring my relief, from all the stress and strains of the day.” And therein lies the irony. Erica doesn't need a date with her ex, she needs a date with the page. She needs to take all that bitterness and sadness and jealousy and tenderness and vomit it out in the form of art. Because men will always be around, but inspiration comes unannounced.

030 -- THE CLUB SCENE FROM THE SOCIAL NETWORK

Failure is what makes life a story. Every entrepreneur leaves behind a trail of fail. If you're not failing, you're not trying. If you're not failing, you're not innovating. And if you're not failing, you're not learning. Failure is the fertilizer of growth and the prerequisite of creative success. But keep in mind, just because something ends, doesn't mean it's a failure. Napster ended, yes, but it also pissed the right people off, created a new way for people to connect through music, went down as the fastest growing business of all time, changed the industry for better and for always built a platform that enabled Parker to ultimately become a billionaire. Who's the joke on, here? The point is, everyone's first hello world doesn't work. The difference maker is how the creator responds to the experience. Those who can't cope, jump off a bridge. Those who reframe failure as something else, jump into the pantheon of entrepreneurial greatness. *Are you training yourself to be failure free?*

Commit to fighting a cosmic injustice. Raymond started Victoria's Secret because he wanted a place where a man could buy lingerie for his wife without feeling like a pervert. Proving, that a great way to build something is to start out by solving your own problems. By scratching your own itch. This assures you understand the target market. Parker started Napster because the girl he loved in high school was dating the captain of the varsity lacrosse team and he wanted to take her from him. Proving, if you stick around and continue to be yourself and create something truly great, the correct people will find you. Zuckerberg started Facebook because he was pissed off about being dumped by his girlfriend. Proving, that the best way to complain is to make things. To convert the precipitation from life's inevitable shitstorms into delicious water. This assures you channel your emotions into something productive. *Have you taken inventory of your creative motivation?*

Set boundaries, lest people set them for you. Mark has the one thing everybody wants: *A billion dollar, once in a generation, holy shit idea.* But he doesn't have eyes to see that yet. Shawn does. According to the hero's journey [archetypes](#), he's the mentor, the seasoned traveler of the worlds who gives the hero support and advice that will help him along the journey. That's why this scene is a turning point in the movie. Shawn's jedi-like approach to helping his young apprentice understand the implications his coveted position is unforgettable. His words are equal parts cautionary tale, sales pitch and motivational speech. But despite Parker's intelligence, charm and generosity, we're still not sure about him. The big question is, and it's the question every creator must constantly ask himself, is this an opportunity, or an opportunity to be used? Mark has no idea that this new investment deal, profitable as it may be, will also dilute the shares of the company, destroy his relationship with his best friend and lead to a major legal battle between the founders. *What person in your life doesn't respect your boundaries?*

031 -- THE COOKIE SCENE FROM STRANGER THAN FICTION

Scratch your own itch. Most law students spend seven hours a day *just* studying. That requires a tremendous amount of energy and focus and endurance. And of course, cookies. Ana's necessity, that is, her community's necessity, literally became the mother of invention. But in addition to solving the immediate problem, two other outcomes rippled out from the center. First, she discovered an unconscious competency. *Baking*. It had become second nature for her. Second, she added a new meaningful facet to her identity. *Treats*. That's what people knew her for. And so, this new combination of skill and reputation is what gave her the courage to quit law school and pursue baking as a full time career. All because a bunch of her friends were hungry. Funny what we learn about ourselves when we get thrown into necessity. *What will happen when you become more than what you're known for?*

Once you've got some, you can get some. On one hand, nobody wants to wait for the rest of the world to tell them their work is okay. As I learned in the book *Art & Fear*, courting approval puts a dangerous amount of power in the hands of the audience. On the other hand, if you never share your work with people, you're just winking in the dark. As my mentor once said, eventually you have to get out of the garage and go out and play for people. Ana is in the ideal situation to make this transition. Her study group affords her a natural platform of people she likes, trusts and sees weekly who are overworked and underfed. And so, she gives it a shot. Which can be a terrifying prospect. But as an artist, you can never fully anticipate how your audience is going to react to your creation until it's out of your head and into their hands. The exciting part is, once your work passes through the crucible of real usage, with real people who offer real feedback, you just might hear the door to your future opening. *What audience can help your work get counted as the real thing?*

Live in, and produce for, a specific audience. Idealists prioritize values over vehicles. Their message of making the world a better place is more important than the medium through which that goal is accomplished. Meaning, they're *going* to leave this cosmic campsite better than they found it, regardless of the type of work they do. Ana is the type of person who undoubtedly would have made the world a better place as an attorney. Harvard would have given her the tools and she would have delivered justice. That would have been a rewarding, successful journey. But it turns out, her highest idealistic vehicle, the territory where her creativity felt at home, wasn't standing up for the public, it was baking for them. It's not as glamorous. It doesn't pay as well. And the platform is significantly smaller. But changing the world doesn't always have to happen on a massive scale. Sometimes it can be as simple as baking cookies for your hungry, overworked friends. Idealism isn't about passing legislation, it's about finding the small corner of the world that you can touch, making it perfect, and setting it free. *Whose life is better because you love them?*

032 -- THE DRIVING SCENE FROM HAPPY GILMOUR

Develop an appetite for playful experiences. Imagine how many significant ideas, inventions, projects, businesses, even careers, that started out as innocuous little blips. A bet between competitors. A joke between friends. An experiment between colleagues. An absurd idea between you, me and the bedpost. These are the moments that become fertile playgrounds in which innovation flowers. Because our guards are down and our curiosities are up. And that's the ideal mindset for creativity. The tricky part is making the transition from blip to brilliance. Noticing you've stumbled upon something with a high level of **movement value**, and then taking immediate and massive action upon that. Happy dramatically recognizes his moment of conception. *It's the unorthodox swing.* And so, he spends the rest of the movie leveraging it. First, as a driving range hustle to make a few extra bucks on the side. Second, as a strategy to pay off his grandmother's tax debt. Third, as a calling card for his career as a professional athlete. And finally, as a catalyst for the generation of golf enthusiasts. All because he made some stupid backyard bet. *How do you give the people around you permission to be playful?*

I am an idea, give me money. It's the ultimate entrepreneurial epiphany. You're doing something you love, something you're naturally good at, something you would gladly do for free, and then out of the blue, somebody offers you money to do it. Like, real money. They're going to cross your palm with silver for being yourself. It's a pinch me moment. Because you think to yourself, *wait, you can get paid for this?* I remember the first time an organization asked me what my speaking fee was. That was the first time I'd ever heard that term. And ironically enough, I was speechless. Eventually, though, I gathered the courage to charge the company a whopping hundred dollars. And as soon as I held that first check in my hot little hands, my world changed forever. Just ask any artist or athlete or entrepreneur. It's the strangest sensation. Physically hold real money that you earned from doing what you love, from being who you are? That's a transformative moment. But again, only if we allow it to be one. If we shrug the money off like it's no big deal or we didn't deserve it or the experience was a fluke, we may never see it again. Besides, you don't do it for the money, you do it for what the money stands for. That you're worth it. *Are you still playing for free?*

The only way to belong is on your own terms. Happy says golf is a stupid sissy game that requires goofy pants and a fat ass. Even when he discovers his unconscious competency to drive one hell of a long ball, he still maintains his position about the sport. Golf, for him, is a means to an end. *Money for grandma's house. That's it.* But after a few months of playing, he has another epiphany. He can succeed on his own terms. Gilmour can still participate in the game without marching in lockstep with its historically rigid and pretentious culture. With his unorthodox swing, overaggressive streak, wild television antics and rockstar fan interactions, he refuses to be swallowed by everybody else's vision. And in the end, he wins the tournament, gets the girl and

saves the house. But as ridiculous as the movie may be, it's still a story about what's possible when you trust your own voice and take responsibility for the reverberations. Which certainly beats spending your sacred time living in other people's worlds and putting your life on hold until somebody stamps your creative passport. *Whose permission are you still waiting for?*

033 -- THE FISHBOWL SCENE FROM BIG FISH

Creativity is not location agnostic. Artists can come from everywhere. But if they want to reach the higher echelons of creative success, eventually, they have to go somewhere that's big enough for them. Big enough in geography, big enough in mindset, big enough in access and big enough in resource. The challenge is, it's not a clean break. Humans are emotionally attached to the flock. And so, the joy of moving toward something doesn't stop the melancholy of what they leave behind. Especially for the people closest to you. Edward's family senses the gravity of his growth, so they literally tie him down. For years. They were terrified of his bones settling into their adult configuration. They know, once his body grows big enough to execute his ambitions, he'll blow this popsicle stand and never look back. What I love about this scene is, exaggerated and cartoonish as it may be, the boy's predicament is deeply relatable. The bed symbolizes the childhoods of a million creators whose families and friends figuratively tied them down, endangering their talent. *What are the limitations of your environment?*

Respect and respond to nature's agenda. Edward's encyclopedia isn't just a book, it's beautiful reminder of what could be. It's an invitation to evolve. A mandate to become the big fish he always was. And so, he wisely pays attention to this moment. He allows the epiphany to kickstart his ambition. And before long, he starts to see horizons that most people can't even tell exist. The goldfish, then, is his spirit animal. His archetype. A totem that represents the traits and skills and potential throttling inside of him. Personally, my spirit animal is a duck. Here's why. First, growing up, I used to feed ducks almost every weekend at the lake by our house. And since then, they've always had a presence in my life. Second, all the men in my family waddle. It's genetic. We walk with duck feet. Lastly, ducks are connected to feminine energy, have a community frame of mind, act very affectionately toward their partners, don't hold grudges and live in the moment. That's me to a tee. The point is, amazing things are possible when we focus on the natural, not the supernatural. *What's your spirit animal?*

No labels, no limits. Parkinson's law states that work expands to fill the time available for its completion. Identity is a similar process. The world will conspire to keep you working small. To live less than you are. To stay in the small fishbowl. And so, it's your responsibility to show people who you're becoming, so they can stop seeing you as everything you've been. To let people know, *this is who I am now*. Edward's journey is about shedding outdated ways of speaking about his identity. And any artist seeking to step into his own will go through the same process. When I first started my company, I worked nights and weekends parking cars to make ends meet. Not a bad job, actually. Got tons of exercise, met cool people, always had a drug wad of cash in my pocket. Eventually, though, I grew tired of dabbling. I was sick of being an amateur. And if I had any intention of making it as an artist, I knew I had to go all in and play in the big leagues. So I quit parking cars and went full time as a writer. And my business exploded immediately. Funny what happens when we live larger than our labels. *What's the one extra degree that will propel you beyond your threshold level?*

034 -- THE REVIEW SCENE FROM SINGLES

Abstinence is a worthy artistic detachment. Our fundamental drive as creators is to be heard. To extend our sentiments and make our thoughts and feelings and expressions accessible to the world. That's why reading reviews of our work is such a seductive pastime. It appeals to our deepest artistic desires. But when we get sucked into that ego vortex, it becomes an addiction. A rabbit hole of defensiveness and deflation. And the worst part is, that addiction becomes a tail that grows back everyday. Or, in the case of digital media, every few minutes. *Singles* is a movie about aspiring. It's about the burgeoning phase of a career in which artists try to find their creative voice. And so, it represents a crucial choice we have to make. Should we torture ourselves listening to voices that don't matter, or execute work that does matter? Should we invest time and energy reading reviews about our creations, or develop deeper trust in our creations? Should we expose ourselves to harsh, unsolicited feedback, or drown out the white noise and get back to work? The answer is, whatever keeps us on the side of the creators. *Are you focusing on principal creation or peripheral masturbation?*

Turn feedback into inspiration. Feedback can be procrastination in disguise. Just another excuse not to do the work. On the other hand, feedback can also be treated as inspiration. An energy source to fuel your creativity. If you look closely at the newspaper, the music critic says the band's lead singer should move to another town where he can disappear into the masses and not stand out like the relentlessly mediocre talent that he is. *Ouch*. There isn't an artist alive, rookie or veteran, who wouldn't be devastated by that blow. Cliff appears legitimately wounded, of course, even despite his band's best efforts to keep the painful barbs out of his ears. And yet, in that moment, he reminds himself that he can process his feelings later. He dismisses the negative comments before they make him upset. For now, the negative energy makes him stronger. They will not retreat. This band is unstoppable. And no matter what happens tonight, they just remember, they're still loved in Italy and Belgium. *Are you giving someone's opinion more weight than it deserves?*

You can't argue with a ringing register. Criticism creates a visceral reaction in almost everyone. Especially artists. We are a thoughtful and romantic and empathetic breed, easily wounded and frequently derailed by shame and humiliation. Worse yet, criticism can lodge in our minds and eat away at our core. The solution, according to one of my **favorite books**, is transforming ourselves into people less willing and less likely to be criticized. Maisel explains that we can actually orient our personalities in a direction that uses criticism as an opportunity to effect positive change. I'm reminded of the time I was featured on a list of the worst tattoos of all time. How proud my parents were. But of course, the shady underworld of anonymous commenters lashed out at me. They called me names that would make a rainbow blush. Meanwhile, something occurred to me. I was the one who built an iconic brand, a profitable enterprise and entire career out of wearing a nametag. Not them. So who's the joke really on here? *Will you let criticism prevent you from fulfilling your dreams?*

035 -- THE BIASES FROM MONEYBALL

The user experience for creativity. Pete converted his dark, stale basement office into an inspiring, personalized and prolific command center. Dry erase boards covered with undecipherable equations, walls collaged with sports page clippings, sticky notes scribbled with algorithms and computer screens sprawling with code and spreadsheets. Forget about the baseball diamond, this is his home turf. His territory. His war room. His creative nirvana where utopia truly manifests itself. Billy may feel overwhelmed when he walks in the door, staring blankly at the surrounding, but not Pete. In this space, he has the home field advantage. And that's why his message is received. It's a beautiful lesson about the power of context. Pete proves that our primary creative environment is what becomes the structural asset for creating our ideas, and the user experience for communicating them ideas. *Are you cultivating the optimal conditions to make your creative process happen?*

Seek out unoccupied channels. Originality comes from tapping into unexpected venues as rich areas to mine for inspiration. Viewing everything around you is a point of connection with crossover usefulness. As my mentor once said, *the whole world is your rhetorical toolbox*. Pete's version of this is discovering a sanctuary of defective, unwanted, overlooked and undervalued ball players. The island of misfit toys. The place where no one measures up to conventional expectations. But rather than ignoring the players that most teams don't like, he transforms brokenness into beauty. He sees disturbing or unwanted things as potentially meaningful and becomes enriched by things people normally treat as garbage. Pete exemplifies the practice of **deep democracy**, meaning, treating everything you encounter with fundamental affirmation and radical acceptance. Baseball players may be his currency, but the larger creative principle still applies: With the right mindset, anyone can discover a river that hasn't been fished. *Are you trying to change nature or follow it?*

Objectify your process. Pete writes a code that builds in all the intelligence he has to project players and get things down to one number. Namely, on base percentage. This is a brilliant strategy for baseball, as it allows him to assemble a team of undervalued players with high potential, despite hamstrung finances. But it's also a smart approach to being an artist. Some creators call it their critical number, their prolificacy equation, their daily mission piece, or their opportunity filter. The name doesn't really matter. The point is to boil your work down to *one thing*. Something clean and simple and easy to calculate. A shorthand that triggers an entire world. A proxy that does the heavy lifting for you. That way you can focus on creating. For example, every time somebody reaches out, requesting my service, participation, resources, time, talent or money, I always ask the same question. *Is this an opportunity, or an opportunity to be used?* That's my one thing. It's a boundary setting technique, and it's saved me thousands of hours of frustration, kept me focused and prolific and helped me stay profitable over the long term. *What's your critical number?*

036 -- THE SURREAL SCENE FROM MIDNIGHT IN PARIS

People who don't get the joke are dead to you. Bender's dilemma is that he inhabits two different worlds simultaneously. To the lay person, that would sound like a surreal concept. But not to a group of surrealists. These men long for contradiction, surprise, absurdity and madness. They welcome the bizarre. Their work, after all, is conceived at the confluence of genius and insanity. And so, meeting a man trapped between generations is a great honor for them. That's the part of the scene that touches me. Bender has found kindred spirits. He's discovered his own kind. A community that shares a common passion. People who aren't interested in catering to the normal. *Sigh.* Has that ever happened to you? If so, you know profound it can feel. But you also know that the whole thing happens in an instant. Even if it feels like a lifetime. It's relativity at its finest. The dangerous part is, sometimes it happens so fast that you fail to recognize it. That's why you have to keep your antennas up. You have to stick around and continue to be yourself until the correct people find you. *Which tribe is weird enough to make you feel normal?*

Every person helps unlock a little piece. This scene illustrates the transformative power of dialogue. In dialogue, we become observers of our own thinking. In dialogue, we understand the self in the context of other people. In dialogue, we connect with others, observe how they respond to us and gain a broader vision of our ideas and our identities. Unfortunately, too many artists are seduced into taking the antisocial low road. Locking themselves in their studios. Staying at home all day. Constantly disappearing into their own work. And as a result, decimating their ability to relate to others. *Myself included.* Gruber's theory of [gradualistic creativity](#), however, touts the interpersonal imperative. His research shows that establishing social environments and peer groups for nurturing work are essential to creative success. That our art should be approached interactively, always conducted in relation to the work of others. To use one of my favorite mantras, it's hard to play basketball without a backboard. *How would your work change if you had access to better sounding boards?*

Inspiration is the eye of the beholder. Each of the characters hears the exact same story. Bender is confronting the shortcomings of his relationship while falling in love with a woman from another era. And yet, each of the artists envisages a different masterpiece inspired by such an unusual romance. One man sees a photograph. One man sees a film. One man sees a problem. One man sees a rhinoceros. It's the perfect illustration of the subjectivity of inspiration. And, if you dig a little deeper, if you look for the thing behind the thing, there's also a subtle message about originality. Artists, after all, are notoriously possessive about their ideas. So when a good one drops out of the sky, everyone wants to be the first and only one to snatch it. But the reality is, everyone metabolizes inspiration differently. Some see what they want to see. Some see what they need to see. Some see what they expect to see. And some see what they can afford to see. Nonetheless, by the time that moment is received, registered, recorded and rendered, everyone's result will always look different. Always. *What happens when inspiration registers against your template?*

037 -- THE SONG SCENE FROM LEAN ON ME

Art is anger management. Joe's school is riddled with abject poverty, low test scores, brutal gang violence and dangerous drug problems. And yet, his students can sing like angels. How is that even possible? Simple. The severe conditions that oppress their daily lives become the very fuel that enables their art. Blues music, after all, isn't just about knowing which notes to play, but also knowing *why* they need to be played. These poor students may not experience happiness in their suffering, but that doesn't prevent them from metabolizing that suffering into something that brings happiness to others. It's a powerful lesson in humility and gratitude. The students remind us to approach creative work as thank you in perpetuity to the forces that shaped us. Both good and bad. Recognizing that, most of the time, we're just taking dictation. *When life is speaking to you, are you taking notes, or just taking notice?*

Constraints are catapults. Clark doesn't anticipate this fountain of musical talent. And frankly, neither do the students. Why should they? Nobody believes in them. Not their parents, not their teachers and not their communities. But once the principal installs the mandate that all students have to learn the school son, and be able to perform it on demand, everything changes. The song opens a vein and their whole culture comes out barefoot. And this moment becomes the positive turning point in the movie, sending the school on a new trajectory. Not to mention, instills a profound sense of school pride: *By thy side we'll stand and always praise thy name, to ever lend our hearts and hands to help increase thy fame.* That's not a school song, that's a church hymn. And what allows it to surface? Clark introduces a constraint into the creative process, forcing the students to restructure everything in the system around it. *What constraint will set your creativity free?*

Participate in the energy exchange. The real magic of this scene isn't the song, but how the song changes people. The boys are back in good standing. The class erupts in applause. The instructor becomes a hero. And the principal transforms from a radical tough love disciplinarian to an encouraging, sprightly, almost lovable leader. Which is interesting, considering the phrase *alma mater* literally means "nourishing mother." That's the power of art. It's the great infection. A form of communication that aims at eliciting a recreative echo. An act of bringing humanity and connection to change someone else. And so, any performance, singing or otherwise, is more than just how people experience you, but how people experience themselves in relation to you. It's not about being the life of the party, it's about bringing other people to life at the party. *When you walk into a room, how does it change?*

038 -- THE CAPE SCENE FROM THE INCREDIBLES

Artists are defined by what they decline. Success is just as much about knowing what you *aren't*, what you *don't* want and what you *won't* do. Seinfeld was once asked if he ever considered pursuing a movie career, to which he famously responded, *he didn't think the world needed him to do that*. And so, it takes a certain degree of honesty and humility to admit when you've surpassed the perimeter of your competence. To tell a client, look, I'd rather turn you down than let you down. To choose long term fulfillment over short term gratification. Edna refuses to do capes for safety reasons, clearly, but also for status reasons. She is a tasteful, artistic, minimalistic design genius, unaccustomed to being questioned. And she never looks back. Her prolific body of work speaks for itself, earning her the right to say no to work that doesn't pass through her opportunity filter. Meaning, she makes artistic choices that will propel her toward an inspiring future, not keep her stuck in the past. *Are your current projects shaping a new life worthy of your past success?*

Success is a process of elimination. The power of no is a project strategy, but it's also a philosophical strategy. Because only through saying no do we allow the door of opportunity to swing open. Only through saying no to the good do we make room for the great. The challenge is learning to ask the right questions. My list of opportunity filters includes the following: Is this a project worthy of my heart and soul? Does this work allow me to grow in new directions? And will the existential threats along my journey be worthy of my worry engine? *If the answer is no, let it go*. I'm reminded of a writer friend of mine who always asks himself: Ten years from now, will I be proud of undertaking this project today? Every artist must decide for himself. The objection, of course, is that in the beginning of your career, you can't afford to say no. Doing so would be at odds with getting heard, getting known and getting your career on the runway. Very true. Saying yes early and often is a necessary experience. But over time, the less you say no, the more likely you are to fall victim to the erosion of your time, the decay of your focus and the meaninglessness of your work. *What have you learned to live without?*

Define the whitespace around yourself. In the world of visual design, whitespace is a critical compositional element. It literally enables objects to exist. Whitespace helps the work breathe. It creates balance, focus and sophistication. And it represents the aesthetic balance between positive and negative. Identity, then, is no different. We define the whitespace around ourselves every time we say no. I recently met with a potential client who requested a number of professional services, one of which was project management. Translation, tons of detailed, back and forth, technical process kind of work. *Vomit*. The mere thought of that work made my chest tighten. And so, I told him, you don't want me for this job. It's not my sweet spot, I'm not excited as I hear about it, and I know I wouldn't be happy doing it. Thanks for the consideration, but agreeing to this work would be a disservice to your company. I was proud myself. That conversation was a healthy milestone for me. Especially because it's so hard to say no when you're hungry. *When was the last time you turned down new business?*

039 -- THE SCIENTIST SCENE FROM FRANKENWEENIE

Equal parts head and heart. Rzykruski explains that science isn't good or bad, although it can be used both ways. What's interesting is, creativity works the same way. It's a neutral construct. Not unlike like tofu, it takes on the flavor of whatever sauce it's immersed in. And so, as creators, the *conceptual* elements of creativity, meaning intention and motivation and love, are equally as important as the *clerical* elements, meaning organization and production and proficiency. The trick is honing our ability to wear both the artist and the scientist hats. To employ the skills of the head *and* the heart. It can't just be one of the other. Because if we're all conceptual, we grow out of touch with the realities of the present. Our process lacks the practicality needed for execution. And our ideas never make it to the execution phase. But if we're all clerical, we lose sight of the big picture. Our process lacks the vision needed for motivation. And our ideas never achieve enough momentum. *Are you using your brain right, or just your right brain?*

The naked terror of regret. Victor ran two experiments. One that he loved, and one what that he just wanted be over. That's a deeply profound insight. Especially for an eight year old. Victor didn't realize it, but he was talking about the heart in conflict with itself. And that's something all artists experience at one time or another. In fact, when I first saw this movie, the raw honesty of this scene made me tear up. Sitting there in the theater, I immediately flashed back to a number of projects and jobs and experiences, even relationships, that I got into for the wrong reasons. They were doomed from the beginning, and I knew it. What a sinking, hollow feeling that is. *Blech*. On the other hand, contrast those feelings to the opposite experience, to the moments in which the vomit of happiness that spews out uncontrollably, and regret is nowhere to be seen. That's what happens when love changes your variables. Expectation determines outcomes. *What dream in you, that serves and helps others, would cause you deep regret if you never took the risk to go for it?*

Stuff your eyes with wonder. Culturally speaking, science is geeky. It's always been geeky. Since the beginning of the seventeenth century, most people who built and organized and tested the universe's knowledge were viewed as outcasts. Until recently. Now science is mainstream. Now the geeks have inherited the earth. Now it's finally cool. What's more, science isn't just a long list of facts that some old white men figured out long ago. Science has actually replaced religion as a source of wonder for many people. It adds spiritual dimension to life, in that it connects us with something bigger than we are. But as the teacher explains, people like what science gives them, but not the questions science asks them. We haven't evolved completely. And so, all the more reason for us, the creators, the dreamers, the conjurers, never to lose our human tendency to ask why things are they way they are. Never to bury our sense of wonder. *What's your favorite dangerous question?*

040 -- THE ROOF SCENE FROM SHAWSHANK REDEMPTION

We take ourselves with us. Everyone on the roof is eavesdropping on same conversation. But each person responds differently. Some people express concern. Some people extend congratulations. Some people couldn't care less. And some people snicker at the captain's expense. But one man takes a genuine interest. Andy may be a convicted murderer, but he's still a banker. A man whose mind has trained itself to have a very sensitive radar. And so, upon hearing trigger words like *inheritance* and *tax* and *government*, a light switches on inside his brain. There's no stopping him. Andy sees an opportunity to overcome his existential distress, do what he does best in front of the people who matter most, and begin to feel normal again. Even if that means getting thrown off the edge of the building. That's not just commitment, that's confidence. By walking away from the mop, he demonstrates profound trust in his own abilities. *How can you start doing the job before you're hired, or before the job even exists?*

Execution trumps intention. Red is shocked to see his friend standing up. He even cautions him to keep his eyes on his work, lest the guards walk over and club him into shape. Red doesn't realize, however, that his friend holds a different definition of the word *work*. Andy is an intellectual. A thinker. He clocks in at the factory of the mind. His work isn't slopping tar, it's solving problems. The interaction he has with the captain *is* his work. That's why he's able to create, literally on the spot, a viable strategy for saving money in a legal, tax free, family friendly, lawyer free way. To the prisoners and guard, it's an astounding calculation. But to the banker, it's just another day at the office. Ultimately, this scene becomes a pivot point in the movie. It's the beginning of redemption. And it all starts with one man's decision to demonstrate his genius. Proving, that if we never produce anything, it doesn't matter how talented we are. *Does your fear of failure trump your desire to express?*

A little dancing smile of satisfaction. Andy's incident on the rooftop kicks opens a lot of other interesting doors. Shortly after his exchange with the captain, the warden begins using the banker's financial wherewithal to handle matters for a variety of people, even guards from other prisons. Andy's role creates new jobs for other prisoners, solicits government funds to improve the decaying library, even help uneducated prisoners earn their high school diplomas. He's no longer a nameless face, he's a trusted resource. *That's the redemption.* And so, there's a valuable lesson to learn about branding. Andy starts building his reputation solely out of who he is and what he loves. *Finances.* Everything flows from that organizing principle. But over time, he allows his audience, his customers, his community, to expand the constellation of his identity according to their needs. And that allows his work to find its own legs. Sending him on a creative trajectory that rebalances him above the precipice of meaninglessness. *How many different ways can you get paid to get paid to be yourself?*

041 -- THE STRIKE SCENE FROM KINGPIN

Wax on, wax off. Behind every heroic artist is a helpful mentor. The one who gives you the courage to begin your quest. The one who returns you to the path when you stray. The one who strengthens you when you weaken. And the one who commends you when you prosper. Show me your mentors and I'll show you who you are. The hard part is, you can't will this person into existence. Mentors are like inspiration, they come unannounced. They appear when the student is ready. Ishmael never could have anticipated this chance encounter with a famous bowling prodigy. He just happened to be in the right place at the right time playing the right game in front of the right audience. A great reminder that timing isn't everything, *it's the only thing*. What's more, he made himself mentorable. Ishmael could have easily shrugged off the stranger's advice and gone back to rolling a respectable game. But he welcomed his suggestion, implemented the change on the fly and saw immediate results. Little did he know, his life would never be the same again. *What is it about you that will allow great mentoring to happen?*

Activate your internal generators. Every artist has a unique set of intrinsic triggers. Inputs that stoke the creative fire. Little moments that freeze time and give us the opportunity to clothespin a piece of stimuli onto our psyche for further evaluation. Roy's trigger is the sound of a strike. That satisfying crack, that familiar explosion, that crisp reverberation, that unmistakable crunch, it makes his heart quiver with happiness. To him, a strike is the sound of home. Home in the literal sense of his childhood, but also home in the existential sense of his creativity. That's why, almost instinctively, he leaps out of the barstool and follows the sound to its source. Because he knows on the other end of that polished wooden rainbow is a pot of gold. And so, it's a powerful lesson about the artist's perceptual landscape. The importance of never turning a deaf ear to nature. The necessity of humble inquiry. And the value of meticulous attendance to inspiring stimuli. *What intrinsic triggers stoke your creative fire?*

We see what we need to see. Munsen's filter is the sound of strike. That's the tiny detail that triggers a whole world. The central moment that instantly sizes any bowler up. Show me your strikes and I'll show you who you are, he might say. The strike, then, is an inkblot test. A shortcut to understanding. And the interesting thing is, everyone has their own version of it. I've been wearing a nametag for over five thousand consecutive days. That's mine. It's a small, repeatable and portable filter that helps me make sense of the people I meet quickly and accurately. Based on how someone responds to my nametag, I know everything I need to know about them. *Period*. Now, if that sounds like a form of black and white thinking, you're right. *It is*. But in the creative process, thinking in absolutes can actually be quite useful. Absolutes can become the constraints that catapult your ideas. That's the beauty of the finite world. No room for excuses. Seinfeld once said that he could tell everything about someone based on two things. How they drive cars and how they drink coffee. *What's your inkblot test?*

042 -- THE SWEARING SCENE FROM THE KING'S SPEECH

Discomfort is the activator of action. Carlin once gave an [interview](#) about approaching comedy from the side door. Meaning, he would come at the material in a direction the audience wasn't expecting, to help them see things in a different way. It's a clever strategy for idea communication, no doubt. And if you apply the general principle, it's also applicable to idea *inspiration*. In this scene, the speech therapist notices something about the king's creative process. Vulgarity is the side door to fluency. Swearing is the trump card to stammering. Anger is the wormhole to eloquence. And so, instead of practicing muscle relaxation and breath control techniques, he comes at the king from an unexpected direction. *He forces him to talk dirty*. Which, as we all know, isn't how kings behave. Especially during wartime. These people are royalty. Paragons of properness. The public should never be exposed to their more tasteless tendencies. It's bad form. But the therapist knows it's the only way in. By forcing the king to say words that make him uncomfortable, it stretches him psychologically. That's how he's able to make a breakthrough. Perhaps getting into a creative zone starts by getting out of a comfortable one. *What three situations make you the most uncomfortable?*

Change your definitions, change your world. I have a friend with a brilliant concept for a novel. But like a lot of creators, all of his ideas are trapped inside his head. They've taken up permanent residence in his psyche and have no intention of coming. What's more, the physical act of writing gives him anxiety. For him, putting words on paper is like pulling teeth with a crescent wrench. *Understood*. Because the reality is, all he really needs is an updated understanding of what writing is. That's another side door to prolificacy. Increasing output by expanding the definition of the process. Lionel changes the king's definition of what a speech can be. By forcing him to curse and yell and pace and purge his emotions—in a container of safety and freedom of course—the king reaches a level of raw honesty in his work, physically transforms in the room and catches a glimpse of what's possible. And all he did was change his definition. Lionel may have been hired to help the king prepare his first wartime radio broadcast, but what he really did was equip the king to spot a new story with his own eyes. *Which of your definitions need to be revised?*

Lower the threat level. When I mentor young artists, I tell them that the goal isn't to change who you are into somebody different, it's to *channel* who you are into *something* different. That's the other side door to creativity. Lowering the threat level of the work by changing its context. Take [speech recognition software](#). For a hundred bucks, you can buy a program that lets you say words as they magically appear on your screen. *That's it*. It's a marvel of modern technology, and it's only the beginning. But consider how many creative threats that one program wipes out. Boredom? Now the mundane task of writing is more enjoyable. Disengagement? Now you've changed the way you interact with your computer. Speed? Now you can flesh out ideas at the speed of thought. Proficiency? Now your slow typing and poor spelling don't have to delay your progress. Comfort? Now you can use your computer in a relaxed, ergonomic way without being tied to your keyboard and mouse. And all we've changed is the context. Not the content. Not the creator. Just the context. *Which hundred dollar technology will make your creative process a hundred times easier?*

043 -- THE SUPPLY SCENE FROM HALF BAKED

Nurture a landscape of opportunity. Thurgood literally sniffs out an opportunity. Which may come off as juvenile and cartoonish, but it's not completely unrealistic. Highly prolific individuals really do follow their noses. When new ideas announce themselves, plastering posters on brick walls of their brains, these people intuit what wants to be created. *It's active listening at its most mystical.* As an entrepreneur, I've always had a strong opportunity agenda. When I was eleven, I converted our front lawn into a parking lot for fans of a nearby golf tournament. When I was fifteen, I taped porno movies from the adult channel and rented copies to the football players. And when I was nineteen, I recorded music in my basement and gave the albums to girls I liked. The point is, each of these adolescent enterprises started as an opportunity I sniffed out. Some ventures were more profitable than others. Some ventures were more work than others. Some ventures were more legal than others. But looking back, the *real* benefit of those business experiences was the strengthening of my opportunity muscle. And that's an asset that pays massive dividends in any creative career.

Always keep kindling handy. Thurgood's chance encounter with the supply department symbolizes the first phase of the creative process. *Inhaling.* Pardon the pun, but it's impossible to be prolific without it. Because your job is as a creator and communicator of ideas process a unique confluence of raw materials into your system. To keep production going in the the idea factory of your mind. I'm reminded of a recent cartooning [documentary](#), in which one of the writers discussed his inhaling process. He said that when he starts having trouble writing, he can usually trace to not having read enough. My experience as a songwriter is similar. And so, I always keep kindling handy. Not a pound of weed, but a playlist of inspiring music that reconnects me to my original enthusiasm and refuels my artistic energy reserve. That's how I inhale. Everything becomes another ingredient in one, big, boiling pot of inputs. Pun absolutely intended. *What is today's creative opportunity?*

Opportunity is subordinate to wherewithal. Obama famously [said](#) that opportunity is who we are. That the defining project of our generation is to restore that promise, and that no one is better positioned to take advantage of those opportunities than us. *I couldn't agree more.* The challenge, though, is that opportunity isn't the only variable. There's a larger creative equation at work that centers around the idea of *wherewithal*, meaning everything needed to buttress opportunity, including knowledge, resources and courage. Because even though creating art is work, creating the opportunity to make art is work too. It's a much more strategic, measured and entrepreneurial type of work. But it's work nonetheless. When I first moved to a major metropolitan city, I started busking in the park with my guitar. Not an activity I ever anticipated doing, but it created an opportunity make art, from songs to performances to a documentary film. The point is, we get our start by giving ourselves a start. That's where opportunity grows. *What is the opportunity is going to pass you buy if you don't act on it?*

044 -- THE SIGNAL SCENE FROM CONTACT

Holster your eureka fingers. Our most important creative discoveries rarely arrive as romantic thunderbolts, burning themselves out in a great flash. Rather, they materialize on the fringes as faint pulses, fading in and out of reception, awaiting our hand to coerce them into existence. Ellie's team spends four years listening to radio transmissions, hoping to find signals sent by extraterrestrial life. *Four years.* And not a single sound in sight. But just when they think the endeavor is futile, just when they reach the end of their creative rope, and just when the government threatens to withdraw funding from their program, something swims up to consciousness. It's first contact. The moment of conception. And what's important to notice about this scene is, the stark contrast between search and discovery. One minute they're crashed out on the couch, battling the ennui of the search, the next minute they're literally running down the aisles as excitement ripples through the room. The creative process requires both. *Are you fighting to stay awake or fighting to stay calm?*

The tools we can't imagine working without. The team has been preparing for this moment their whole lives. Tens of thousands of hours of studying and working and waiting, it's all prologue to this moment. And so, while the signal is a surprise, what's *not* a surprise is how quickly, efficiently and effectively the team captures the signal. Notice the relentless collaboration. They leverage everything they have in the house. Rendering instruments, commination tools, tracking devices, computer screens, system drives, audio cables and the like. They stay on it, they don't let it get away, and they make a discovery that changes everything. This scene is a perfect illustration of integration, meaning the process of employing the **whole** of your personality, talents, gifts and experiences to contribute the highest amount of value and firepower those around you. Ellie and her team compress all of their assets into a tight little package, leaving no talent untapped, and the result is a major scientific discovery. A cosmic jackpot. *Is everything you do designed to give you a stronger creative base?*

Counting your creative chickens. Ellie's gut response is to keep the signal on the quiet. Because if they go public with this and they're wrong, the program is toast. *Goodbye funding, hello straightjacket.* However, once they confirm the source location of the signal, and it begins repeating an undeniable sequence of prime numbers, it's on. Call the government. Bring on the aliens. This signal is too legit to quit. And so, we see firsthand the creator's struggle with containment. On one hand, she's deeply possessive about her project. So she safeguards her artistic vision to protect the intellectual property. On the other hand, she's deeply passionately about her projects. So she gives the world a all access backstage pass to her dream. I'm reminded of when I first started my career as a writer. I had a bad habit of counting my creative chickens before they hatched. I would either blow the lid off a new idea by boasting to people who belittled my ambitions, or I would force a new idea to execution before it was ready to come into the world. Either way, the stress of false hope and the humiliation of renegeing became unbearable. Lesson learned. *Are you doing your victory dance before the game is over?*

045 -- THE BUBBLE SCENE FROM EXPLORERS

Planning is procrastination in disguise. Wolfgang is a scientific genius. The problem is, he's a planner. A stereotypical *ready, aim, fire* personality. That's why he kicks around the landscape for the perfect subject to experiment with. Because he has the scientist hat on. Ben simply presses go. He's a doer. More of a *try, listen, leverage* personality. That's why he initiates the program sequence. Because he has the enthusiast hat on. Even when his friend tells him not to touch anything, he realizes, *it's his dream and he'll touch if he wants to*. Ultimately, it's his subversion of permission, dislike of delay and spirit of independence that sets the stage for the rest of the film. And so, this scene becomes a case study of how planning is the preventer of progress. It alienates unseen targets, overrides spontaneity and limits your ability to stretch. Like my mentor used to say, the problem with having a plan is, you might hit it. Ben's productive impatience is exactly what the team needs to get their idea off the ground. Not to mention, into the ground. *Are you willing to look bad on the road to immortality?*

Keep passion in play. Ben is not a scientific genius. But he *is* a science fiction enthusiast. Thanks to a late night binge on nerdy movies, it's his vivid dream of flying over a giant field of electronic circuitry that ultimately inspires the moment of conception. Had he never jumped out of bed in the middle of the night to sketch out the images he saw in his dream, inspiration would have come and go like a feather in the wind. Ben's sense of vision and wonder and belief and possibility become as important as the circuit board itself. It's a subtle reminder that talent alone does not guarantee innovation. It's what we add to talent that makes the greatest difference. If talent was enough, everybody would be successful. But they're not. Only those who buttress talent with these intangible forces, are. *Are you spending time increasing your talent or increasing your character?*

Mistakes count as done. This first experiment was, by all accounts, an accident. Ben inadvertently traps his friend inside the sphere and flies him around the city. But when he finally tumbles out, there's an epiphany. *Anything within the sphere experiences no inertia*. Meaning, occupants can accelerate and decelerate at fantastic speed without suffering ill effects. And so, the miscalculation of the sphere's size becomes a blessing in disguise. Proving my theory that most great ideas are the results of experiments, mistakes, accidents, errors or jokes. I'm reminded of a fascinating book called [Ideas That Became Big Business](#). It reveals the origin stories of inventions like chocolate cookies, rubber tires, hot tea, pacemakers, waffle cones, paper towels, maple syrup, penicillin, soap bars and stainless steel. What do they all have in common? *Accidents*. They were all mistakes that become big business. In fact, my entire career came from something I saw in a trashcan. *Do you listen to the way you talk to yourself when you make mistakes?*

046 -- THE ORSON WELLES SCENE FROM ED WOOD

Kindred spirits will find each other. Wood is a broke, eccentric, inexperienced, stock footage using, blindly optimistic, cross dressing filmmaker. In fact, he's on a career path to become the worst movie director of all time. But nobody can deny, *the man has vision*. And that's what makes this serendipitous encounter with his childhood hero all the more poignant. Welles is a beloved, larger than life, world famous alpha male creative genius with credits in theater, radio and film. He's quite possibly the polar opposite of his young admirer. And yet, the two men discover they have a shorthand for a shared culture. Both are outsiders to the studio system. Both struggle for creative control. Both have a unique artistic vision. *They're kindred spirits*. How many of those do you have? The point is, prophecy is a lonely business. Next time you find yourself precariously balanced on your sanity ledge, reach for the likehearted. Heal your soul through the balm of we. Reach out and cocreate. Because art without witness, isn't. *Are diversifying your creative reservoir through the regularity of human bonding?*

Visions are worth fighting for. Orson says his last film was the *one project* where he had total control. Where the studio couldn't touch a frame. Which is interesting, considering that film was ultimately considered by many critics, colleagues and fans to be the greatest movie ever made. Orson was right. Visions really *are* worth fighting for. Life's too short to play in a cover band. If you want to make a name for yourself, you have to make your own music. Besides, why sacrifice your life being everybody else's dream machine? Why acquiesce to the assholes who don't get the joke anyway? Just be widely selfish. Do it for you. The purpose of creation, after all, is liberation. To make something to call your own. To have a body of work you can point to. To build something nobody can take away from me. Selfishness isn't just your right, it's your responsibility. Like my mentor used to tell me, if you're making art for anybody other than yourself, you're in for a world of disappointment. *Do you have the courage to bet on your vision?*

Stand on the foundation of your rarity. Ed has seen god. Orson's advice left him a changed man. Reenergized, confident, beaming and triumphant, he marches back to the studio and demands to do it his way. So they do. And when the movie debuts, he knows it will become the film he's remembered for. What's interesting is, while *Ed Wood* did poorly at the box office when it premiered, it still received mass critical acclaim. In fact, twenty years later, the movie maintains a massive cult following. And so, the movie *about* the man was received in the same vein as the man himself. Wood may have been dubbed the worst movie director of all time, but he also accumulated an enormous body of work, had a huge impact on pop culture, was the topic of a number of documentaries, he even inspired a legally recognized religion naming him as its official savior. They refer to him as the patron saint of late night movie hosts and insomniacs. *That's one hell of a legacy*. And it's a beautiful reminder that it's impossible to fail at self expression. That nobody can criticize a life that belongs to you. Because if you're just being yourself, nobody can tell you that you're doing it wrong. *If you let your inner voice dictate the shape of your art, what price will you pay in a world that punishes authenticity?*

047 -- THE CLUB SCENE FROM COLLATERAL

Answer the call to adventure. Being born is our biological moment of conception. Everyone experiences that. But realizing *why* we were born, that's our *artistic* moment of conception. And for those fortunate enough to have that realization, nothing is more inspiring. It's our principal identity achievement. The awakening of the soul. The point of no return. The first step into egoic tension as we start the journey of love finding itself in us. Campbell famously named this moment the **call to adventure**, in which the hero goes forth of his own volition to accomplish the adventure. And what's interesting is, it doesn't always come crashing in like a wrecking ball. The call can come through a blunder, a gradual realization, even a cataclysmic event. Daniel's moment of conception was a concert. His call to adventure commenced on a smokey underground bandstand during the swinging sixties. When was yours? The point is, every artist has one. And it's their responsibility to honor that moment of conception. Doing so implants the necessary humility to stay both sane and successful in the arts. *Are you running away from your gifts?*

Become a friend of flow. Daniel's story is about an artist entering flow state. How a person can become focused, fierce and absorbed, enclosed in their musical headspace, experience pure spirited essence, behave as if the thermostat on his imagination was set permanently on high, and disappear into his work while staying completely relaxed in the process. I'm reminded of a fascinating documentary called **Happy**, which explores human happiness and the newest findings of positive psychology. I particularly enjoyed their research on flow, which proved that people who experienced flow on a regular basis were happier. Turns out, activities in which we have very clear goals, and know, moment by moment, what we're supposed to do, help us feel in control. The secret, then, is twofold. First, building a diverse repertoire of activities guaranteed to provide the experience of flow. That way, you can step into a healthier, happier state when sadness creeps in. And second, keeping an ongoing and cumulative record of the flow activities you manage to accomplish each day. That way, you create a progress rich environment that emotionally invigorates you and prompts continued creative action. *What experiences make you disafuckingpear from plain sight?*

Find your homebase. Daniel knew as a young player, what mattered was being around the music. For him, it wasn't about making money *from* music, it was about making a life *in* music. Treating creativity as a holistic experience and existing in a way that his art got done over and over. But that's not just music. His approach applies to any art scene. It's not about having a hit, it's about having a homebase. A place where you can commune your your fellow artists and audience members. A place where you can surround yourself with a vision of what you might one day become. A place where you can lock into the historical, societal and institutional frameworks of the artistic world. And the best part is, it doesn't even have to be a physical place. Homebase can be analog or digital. What matters is that you're not alone. That you're consistently cocreating with others. **Gruber** called this a gradualistic approach to creativity, whereby the creative product is subordinate to the creative moment, the creative moment is subordinate to the creative process, and the creative process is subordinate to the creative life. *Have you invited yourself into a community of good fortune?*

048 -- THE RADIO SCENE FROM THAT THING YOU DO

Scaring success into hiding. Every artist should expect to fail. It's in the job description. If you're not failing, you're not making art. However, that doesn't mean you shouldn't still prepare to succeed. Because you never know. The odds may be stacked against you, but if your bags aren't packed when the world is finally ready for you, you'll either miss the boat completely, or, worse yet, get taken on a ride before you're ready to go on one. And like the dog chasing the car, you won't know what to do with success once you catch it. I'm reminded of a family vacation I took about twelve years ago. We met a guy on the beach who worked for the biggest talk show in the country. Naively, I gave him copy of my recently published first book, hoping he might find my story interesting enough to warrant an interview. *He didn't.* And I never talked to the guy again. But in retrospect, that's probably good thing. Because I wasn't ready. Had I finagled my way onto the biggest talk show in the country, I would have left behind wake of missed opportunities, wasted attention and underleveraged exposure. *When the big kahuna comes along, will you be in a position to ride it?*

The evolving landscape of art. This movie takes place in an era when the mass market still mattered. When radio play was the royal road to fame and fortune. When a single disc jockey held the keys to a band's artistic future. But that was fifty years ago. Now we live in a direct to consumer era. Where the need for the middlemen of the world is quickly vanishing. Where the *fans* are actually becoming the gatekeepers. And so, our job as artists isn't to get on the radio. It isn't to be all things to people. It's to narrowcast to a small, specific audience. It's to go out and create the market for what we love. It's to figure out which of the mainstream hoops are not worth the time, money and effort to jump through, and then forge ahead without stopping. Think of this way. Shakespeare didn't open in twenty countries. He had one theater and one audience. The people cherished the art. The artist cherished their attention. And together, they made something magical. Outside of that sacred space, nothing else mattered. *Are you still buying tickets for the starving artist lottery?*

Little things make a big difference. There's something inescapably joyful about watching this scene. It's every rockstar's dream. It's exactly how you would react in the same situation. And it's a game changer. Their moment has come. As of right now, these four men will never be the same again. Ah, the elusive tipping point. The moment of critical mass. The irreversible ignition of momentum. *Burn the ships, boys, there ain't no going back now.* We should all be so lucky. Campbell originally named it **crossing the threshold**, in which the hero enters into the field of adventure, leaving the known limits of their world and venturing into a dangerous realm where the rules are not known. What artist doesn't dream of it happening to them? The only problem is, it's still a movie. As iconic and romantic and inspiring as this scene is, we can't let it skew our relationship to reality. Because any veteran will tell you, *there are no big breaks.* Only an accumulation of small breaks that eventually accrue enough weight to get you noticed. It's volume times consistency to the power of timing. *How will you know when you've entered your zone of magnified creative power?*

049 -- THE PIANO SCENE FROM RAY

Mashing up multiple frames of reference. Ray was a master of creative convergence. He was the original mashup artist, whose playing reflected influences from diversity genres, including blues, jazz, rhythm and blues, country, gospel, even orchestral music. That was the magic of his music. The whole was greater than the sum of its parts. And his convergence not only created a unique inimitable style, but also pioneered an entirely new genre of music. He left behind an artistic legacy without which the history books could have been written. Ray's meaningful contribution, then, was a function of masterful combination. That's the power of creative promiscuity. His music provided multiple entry points for the audience. And through his continuous, voluminous level of output, he multiplied his reach. But had he stuck with one genre or style his whole career, we might not know him as the legend he is today. *How are you integrating diverse influences into your work?*

We are remembered for the rules we break. Sixty years ago, nobody had the audacity to break the genre boundaries. Music was completely compartmentalized. Gospel was for religious people. Classical was for old people. Country was for white people. Blues was for black people. Ray, on the other hand, wanted to integrate both race and style. He wanted to make it okay for people to sing songs they once thought were off limits to them. Perhaps that was his true genius. Musically, he was certainly a brilliant songwriter and performer. But culturally, his contributions were even greater. Charles smashed musical and racial barriers. He paved the way for a generation of artists who may ever have crossed those lines without his help. It's like he was the first musician to run the four minute mile. Because once he crossed that finish line and the rest of the world saw it was possible, everybody else started breaking the record too. It's a powerful reminder that our function as artists is to warn people what is dangerous and possible out there. *What barriers are you famous for breaking?*

Nobody wants another anybody. When your fiercely independent southern mother insists you make your own way in the world, cover tunes aren't an option. The only true art is the visible manifestation of the soul's journey. *That's* what people want. Not a karaoke machine of oldies. Not a hacksimile of the rockstar du jour. Just a person who's willing to slice open a vein and bleed their truth all over the page. Ray did that. He cracked himself open and poured out his pain and poverty and guilt all over the keys. And yet, he never did it from vitriolic or sanctimonious posture. Charles knew that originality wasn't about trying to prove something to those who doubted him, it was about speaking with his own voice and doing the best he could. It wasn't about demanding his rights, it was about deploying his gifts. And in the end, that's what allowed him to compete in clean air. *Are you accepting the marketplace conditions or work to create new ones?*

050 -- THE DRACULA SCENE FROM FORGETTING SARAH MARSHALL

Paint yourself into an accountable corner. Rachel forces her lovelorn friend to perform a song from his unfinished rock opera, right there, on the spot, in front of dozens of strangers. Peter is given no choice. He has to get up there. There's too much build up and too much social pressure to back down now. You can see it in his eyes. *He just wants to run away.* It's an awful feeling. But what he doesn't realize is that having an audience changes the way you experience your art. He's been working on his musical for five years, but now he's finally given the chance to see it through other people's eyes. Even if it's just scattered applause or sporadic laughter or a few heads nodding in the distance, he's still receiving witness to his work. And that's all he really needs. Rachel, the real hero of this scene, has created something called a *momentum device*. It's an elegant **excuse**, physical tool or memorable experience that builds confidence, reinstates commitment and reinforces competence. It's a powerful practice for any artist looking to generate real movement in their work. *Where do you need to plant the seeds of momentum?*

Art is subordinate to life. Peter has been on a downward spiral ever since he met his last girlfriend. And now that they've broken up after five years, he's really hit rock bottom. His apartment has become disgusting, his diet has become pathetic, his attitude has become hopeless and his personal appearance has reached an all time low. For god's sake, the man wore sweatpants every day for a week. Is it any surprise, then, that his creativity has plummeted too? Of course not. Every artist draws a line from their life to their art. Whether they know it or not. And so, the real job is working on the project of building a life. Otherwise there will never be a self to express. This situation, known as *artist debt*, is a common struggle among creators. It's when we become disconnected from our primary creative joys, failing to achieve our quota of artistic usefulness. And unless we start depositing credits back into our account, creativity atrophies. *What does it take for you to be optimally creative?*

Be a surprise, not an expectation. Peter has an idea for a rock opera. It features sad vampires who smother the women they care about with love, and it's performed with puppets. *Huh?* Even he admits, the idea is dark and weird and emotionally overwhelming for most people. And yet, when he shares it with the patrons in the bar, the audience can't help from laughing. The song is strange, but also funny and cute. And in this moment, a light switches on inside of him. Peter realizes that his musical is actually comedy. And that opens the whole project up. Who knew eternal love could be so hysterical? It's a good reminder that the human brain loves surprises. Surprises set off chemical cascades that rearrange our inner landscapes, affecting our view of ourselves and of the world around us. In fact, the word *surprise* originated six hundred years ago, stemming from the verb *surprendre*, meaning, overcome with emotion. And so, the element of surprise is an asset. It's the art doing what nobody expects, but everybody remembers. *What could you do in your work that would be a welcome surprise to your audience?*

051 -- THE STUDIO SCENE FROM O BROTHER WHERE ART THOU

Dishonesty is underrated. Everett and his friends lie about everything. The name of their band, the location of their hometown, the color of their skin, the genre of their music and the number of players in their ensemble. *And it was worth it.* Their single became a hit and their sins became pardoned. All because they lied. The question is, where does an artist draw the line? Spielberg famously snuck onto the lot of a major movie studio, commandeered an empty office and worked there for months until producers and directors noticed him. Universal just assumed he belonged there, so they checked out his first independent short and the rest was movie history. *That was a lie.* The greatest director of all time, whose films have grossed over eight billion dollars to date, told a lie. But does that make him a *bad* person? No. It just makes him a person. Steven did what he had to do to make his dreams come true. Because there's a time to be honest, and there's a time to sell cars. Sometimes you have to tell people what they need to hear to get what you want. *How could you make something just true enough not to be a lie?*

Let your why drive. Look into the lead singer's eyes. He has no idea what the hell he's doing. Everett isn't a blues singer, he's an escape convict in search of buried treasure trying to get back into good graces with his estranged family. And yet, he confidently plunges into the vortex of uncertainty. He pulls the band together, pulls the engineer's leg and pulls the song off exquisitely. Everett may be a man of constant sorrow, but he's also a man of solid execution. This scene reminds me of a mantra that's guided my creative work for more than a decade. *Don't be stopped by not knowing how.* How is overrated. How is a dream destroyer. How has no bearing on whether or not our dreams become realities. It's just a matter of will. When I wrote my first book, I didn't know what I was doing. When I gave my first speech, I didn't know what I was doing. When I launched my online training network, I didn't know what I was doing. And when I began preproduction on my first documentary, I didn't know what I was doing either. But what I did know was *why* I was doing it. That was enough. And I trusted that how would come in time. *What event will serve as your catalyst to start a favorable chain reaction?*

Counting your creative chickens. This movie contains multiple levels of spiritual symbolism, cultural allusion and ancient mythology. One of the themes that particularly resonate with me is expectation. How life is under no such obligation to make us happy and grant us what we want, only to give us what we need. In fact, early on in the film, a blind man driving a trolley prophesizes that the three convicts *will* find a fortune, though it will not be the fortune they seek. What a perfect message for someone pursuing a career in the arts. *Never count your creative chickens before they hatch.* It's not healthy when your work depends on things out of your control. The reality is, the drug of choice most dangerous to artists isn't heroin, it's expectation. Because despite your best laid plans, best deployed efforts and best held intentions, your career as an artist will probably feel like the movie you never saw the trailer for. Which doesn't make it a bad move, it just not the fortune you sought. Being okay with that is difficult. *How are your expectations helping or hindering you in accomplishing your artistic purpose?*

052 -- THE OFFICE SCENE FROM SAHARA

Echoes the habits of action. Sahara was a box office failure. The critics skewered the film in the media. Even the original author disowned the project once the movie premiered. *So what.* This montage is the most compelling opening credit sequence of any movie I've seen. It's a beautifully executed single take motion control camera that details the hero's history, but also alludes to the soon unfolding story. The room we see is more than just an office, it's an archive, a command center, a war room, a laboratory, a playground and a creative sanctuary. You can't help but want to jump inside the screen. Particularly because of the substances. There's just something romantic about the bottles of whiskey, half smoked cigars, cups of coffee and snack wrappers strewn about the room. Not to endorse any one of those substances as magic bullets for creativity, but moderate amounts of alcohol, tobacco, caffeine and protein have been clinically proven to be helpful for certain types of tasks. The point is, you get the feeling that whomever works in this space, knows how to slide into their working day before their procrastinatory urges kick in. *What triggers get you working before you've had a chance to protest?*

Create a progress rich environment. Look around. There isn't a square inch of whitespace left. The office walls are plastered with awards they've won, maps they've conquered, articles they've written, projects they've led, even dignitaries they've met. But these decorations aren't there to stroke their egos, rather, to stoke their creativity. Truth is, every artist needs to surround themselves with concrete evidence of progress. Doing so saturates their consciousness with victory, triggers their creative focus and makes them more inclined to take further action. I used to write a monthly column for my local business journal. Published for about six years. And although they didn't pay me for the work, the dividends of visibility, credibility and accountability were more than enough compensation. I even had ritual on the first of every month. I would run to the newsstands and pick up a hard copy to hang on my wall. Because surrounding myself with those achievements was emotionally invigorating. *What's on your wall?*

The outward expression of inner stirrings. What I love most about this scene is, the room is literally alive. Computers are humming, beakers are boiling, fans are blowing, cigars are burning, experiments are running, faucets are dripping and molecules are dancing. Appropriate, considering the office belongs to a maritime archeologist. But that's the whole point of a primary creative environment. To craft a setting that reflects who you are and what's important to you. To create an space that sets a tone that says *work happens here*. That way, inspiration can flow as a natural consequence of the surroundings. In my current workspace, everything is an associative trigger. I immerse myself in a thicket of visual inspiration, tools, and materials. From decorative patterns to physical objects to customized playlists to olfactory stimulation to **desk style**, everything is in its right place, everything is right with the world and everything helps me enter into my zone. It's the perfect user interface for my brain. *What things make your creativity feel at home?*

053 -- THE MANUSCRIPT SCENE FROM WONDER BOYS

Matching footprints with heartspace. Grady teaches creative writing at the university level. But in the process of trying to repeat the critical acclaim of his first novel, he becomes sidelined by a severe case of writer's block. *Shocking.* It's a classic case of the cobbler's kid syndrome. We neglect those closest to us. Due to our utter dedication to wider market demands, we fail to note the needs of our intimate ecosystem. Because nobody wants to hire outside help in something they're supposedly experts in. There's too much cognitive dissonance. And so, the kids go barefoot. What's interesting is, this phenomenon of *operational farsightedness* is extremely common. Especially with creative types. It's almost comical. You don't need a supreme sense of irony to see the humor in the blocked creative writing professor. But it is a pointed reminder that what we're good at, we're bad at. Nobody is impervious to the peril they advise others against. *Are you smoking what you're selling?*

Recognize when life is giving you a gift. Grady just watched two thousand pages of his latest manuscript flutter out of the window like a flock of white doves. Seven years of work, down the tube. What a profoundly sad, sinking and searing pain that is. It's like Hemingway's wife, who famously misplaced and lost a suitcase filled with her husband's manuscripts. *Ouch.* If you've never had the pleasure of losing everything, of laboring in vain, *wait a while.* It's only a matter of time before the delete button depresses. But as the book agent suggests, it's for the best. It's a sign. In fact, the benefit of burning everything to the ground is, you get to salt the earth and see if you can do it again. You get to test how much faith you have in yourself. And you get to start from scratch, letting go of everything except the person you've become, and reinvest that into something new and better. Grady's loss of the manuscript, devastating as it is, forces him to rework his second novel into something even better. At the end of the movie, we watch as he finishes typing his new novel, now using a computer rather than a typewriter, of course. *What's your secret for finding the silver lining in every situation?*

Practice aggressive pondering. Crabtree suggests that subconsciously, a person will put themselves in a situation, perhaps even *create* that situation, in order to have an arena in which to work out an unresolved issue. It's a covert way of addressing a problem. *Love this idea.* In fact, the process can even be more deliberate. Often times when I exercise, right before I step into the gym or the yoga studio or the running trail, I set an intention. I plant a seed in my brain. I take a particular thought or problem or issue that I'm currently struggling with and use that as a framing device to guide my experience. And by the time I'm done, the mental prompt I've layered on top of the rhythmic, repetitive action will produce an insight I wouldn't have discovered otherwise. It's the same reasoning behind traveling with your romantic partner within the first three months of the relationship. The road, after all, is the ultimate testing ground. The arena where the truth surfaces. The wringer through which successful relationships endure. *How will you use your situation as a catalyst to grow and evolve?*

054 -- THE FINKLE SCENE FROM AGE VENTURA

Prolific thinkers are prodigious linkers. Ventura may have overdue rent, a battered clunker of a car and an eccentric sense of style, but when it comes to the skill of *bridging*, he's undeniable. The art of making connections and noticing natural relationships between seemingly unrelated ideas is what makes him successful as a detective. And so, he executes every strategy in his playbook to solve the case. Gazing out the window, replaying voicemail messages, staring at the clues, jumping up and down, pacing around the room, talking out loud to himself, even having conversations with his pets, anything to get blood to the brain and get the intuitive juices flowing. But as the night progresses, he's still firing blanks. And by the time morning breaks, he's totally spent and on the verge of tears. Of course, that's precisely when the muse shows up. She makes herself known at just the right time to give him just the right insight. Inspiration is a tease like that. Only making herself known when we've reach the end of our creative rope. Frustrating, but inevitable. *How will you beguile inspiration?*

We need you to be you. Wiggles is the hero of the final act. Thanks to his dark haired floppy ears, we get a vision of the killer in a transgender disguise. We realize that the football player and the missing hiker are actually the same person. Finkle is a man. Einhorn is a woman. It all makes sense now. This is the eureka moment that changes everything. Coincidence? Not at all. The pet detective was simply doing what he did best: *Looking to animals for answers*. As he states early in the movie, he feels a kinship with animals. He understands them. And if that makes him the laughing stock of the police department, so be it. That's how he's wired, that's how he works. And so, it's a gentle reminder to all the creators out there. We need you to be you. To know your flow. To have an exquisite understanding of what sends you into that accelerated, highly spiritual state of creative awareness when you do what you do best. *Are you currently operating out of your passion?*

Avoid sounding boredom. Ventura is an independent contractor. A freelancer. An artist and entrepreneur who runs his own business. And with the exception of his pets, jungle friends and other four legged companions, the man is essentially an island. *This an occupational hazard*. Because no matter how adept you are at problem solving, it's hard to play basketball without a backboard. As the old saying goes, solitude is a nice place to visit, but you wouldn't want to life there. And so, in a time where loneliness has become the most common ailment of the modern world, we ought to be careful to avoid prolonged isolation. In fact, if were starting my business from scratch today, one of the first things I would do is secure a desk at a coworking space. I was just reading a global study about how the number of coworking facilities has more than doubled in the last two years. Turns out, people are actually more creative and productive and satisfied compared to working from home. The energized environment and added accountability of having people around. Artists and creators and entrepreneurs are finally getting the message. It's hard to be creative alone. *What interactions give you confidence?*

055 -- THE BATHROOM SCENE FROM OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS

Shift your body, shift your brain. I remember watching this movie in my high school marketing class. *I loved it.* Most of the other students else were either sleeping or doodling in their notebooks, but for some reason, I actually paid attention that day. Twenty years later, this scene is still one of my favorites. Because the boardroom has massive conceptual, contextual and cultural implications. It's iconic. It's a staple of modern business. It's where deals happen and decisions are made. But the boardroom is also where creativity goes to die. And so, if we want inspiration to think about our work differently, we have to practice a little *physical displacement*. It takes the pressure off, transfers the locus of brain energy and allows the mind to focus. That's why we're able to see patterns we wouldn't have noticed otherwise. The point is, creativity is fed by emotion, emotion is fed through experience, and experience is created through movement. *What setting would be most inspirational if you were asked to come up with a really creative idea?*

Don't just inform, form. Jonathan knows he can't make people listen to him, but he *can* raise their receptivity so his ideas have the highest probability of getting through. His strategy, then, is to be a sleeper. To come in under the radar and disturb the people's worldview. That's the only way to shift their position on the receptivity continuum from opposition to acceptance. And so, he introduces surprise into the equation. Because surprise creates anxiety in the air, and that's the best time to give people new ideas. Forcing a group of stuffy corporate executives to hold their board meeting the bathroom might have made them uncomfortable, but it also made them more open to what he was trying to communicate. Whether or not this would work in real life is doubtful. But the general principle is indisputable. The theater of presenting the idea is just as important as the idea itself. *How are you making your ideas more accessible?*

Communication as a relaxing experience. Jonathan's strategy of moving the meeting from the boardroom to the bathroom is a *stalling maneuver*, pardon the pun. It's a way of buying yourself time in group meetings, auditions, interviews and presentations, so that you can collect your thoughts and build anticipation around your message. It's a powerful way to let the room breathe. The problem is, as creators of ideas, our instinct is to go for speed and volume. To overwhelm the audience with our genius. To fill every second of dead air with words, lest we lose people's interest. But communication *can* be a relaxing experience. It *can* feel more like a bathroom than a boardroom. It all depends on the leader in the room. Jonathan appears stifled and confused in the beginning of the scene, but once he finds his groove and gets the blood flowing, we see him start to have fun and smile and relax and enjoy the experience. He's entirely present. The audience can't help but follow his lead. And from this point on, they'll never look at a bathroom stall the same again. *How are people changed after having a conversation with you?*

056 -- THE CONSTRUCTION SCENE FROM GOOD WILL HUNTING

Love people enough to upset them. Will has a genius level intellect, a gift for mathematics and a rare eidetic memory. And yet, he insists on wasting his time working mindless manual labor jobs and drinking with his buddies. Chuckie refuses to accept this reality. He might be boisterous, but he's not blind. Will's failure to find a home for any of his talents is an insult to his friends, his community, his identity and his potential. And that's the beauty of this moment. Because every artist needs someone in their life to initiate *the shove*, meaning, delightfully disturbing moments that compel you make a massive change in your creative life. Will doesn't realize it, but this conversation is his moment of conception. There may be a brief incubation period to follow, but it's only a matter of time before he cashes in that winning lottery ticket and steps into the light. *Do you have a figure in your creative life who's willing to shake up your situation and keeps things in proportion?*

Creativity exists at the intersection of belief and alienation. It's the strangest thing. On one hand, you have to trust that there is a place for your gifts in the world. That you've been given your own plot of soil to cultivate, and there's only so much available light to grow something meaningful. *That's belief.* On the other hand, if someone feels fully at home in the world, they don't need to make art. Life has to generate a certain amount discomfort and hunger and ache to get the pen moving. Without that thick layer of outstepness, of feeling unhoused in a sense, what's the point? *That's alienation.* Andrea Barrett, the award winning historical fiction novelist, famously said that she writes about the world because it doesn't make sense to her. That through writing, maybe she can penetrate it, elucidate it and somehow make it comprehensible. Will has the alienation part down pat, but he doesn't realize there's a missing piece of belief. He's almost *too* smart. Too proud to realize the opportunity right in front of him. Chuckie simply holds up the mirror. *What will you channel your contradictory feelings into?*

Let the city crumble, but come home together. Creative personalities are hypersensitive to geography. Consider the lyrics of [Angeles](#), the song playing the background of this scene. "I could make you satisfied in everything you do, all your secret wishes could right now be coming true, and be forever with my poison arms around you." Elliot Smith wasn't singing about a beautiful woman making love to him, he was singing about a big city making *promises* to him. That's a different kind of relationship. One in which the physical landscape influences the mental landscape. I remember when wife and I first moved to a big city. Our friend who spent her whole life there said, *this city will feed you things that make you feel bigger than you are.* She was right. Over the next few years, we saw firsthand how easy it was to fall into those kinds of identity traps. Because it could happen to anybody. Geography is seductive in that way. But the secret, I suppose, is setting boundaries. Deciding which parts of the culture are worth participating in, and which parts aren't. *What expectations are you precariously surrounded by?*

057 -- THE RUNNING SCENE FROM FORREST GUMP

Necessity carries a whip. This scene reads like a page out of Woodrow Wilson's inspiring [book](#), *When a Man Comes to Himself*. It's about wholesome regenerating change. A full realization of a person's powers. A man's discovery of the way in which his faculties are to be made to fit into the world's affairs. Forrest, as the president wrote, learned his own paces and found his footing. He initiated the process of disillusionment. Clearing his eyes so he could soberly see the world as it is, and his own true place and function in it. Had the bullies never thrown dirt clods at his head in the first place, his leg braces never would have broken apart, and he never would have discovered that he could run like the wind. And so, in this moment, necessity isn't so much the mother of invention as it is the illuminator of identity. Gump's difficult situation didn't prompt a new innovation, it destroyed an old one. His magic shoes, as he called them, were only magic insofar as they housed and nurtured an immense spirit that ultimately broke free and helped create a truly charmed life. *Is your current life situation going to limit you or liberate you?*

Punch windows in the wall of the self. First he hobbles. Then he gains speed. But when the braces shatter, sending steel and plastic flying into the air, the boy looks down at his legs in surprise. *Well I'll be a squirrel in a skirt*. Guess he never realized how fast he could run until running was his only choice. Yet another case of trial by fire. And it's a potent illustration for the creators of the world. Artists, after all, have a set of preexisting beliefs about their talents. But unless they're tested in the crucible of everyday life, they never expand to their full capacity. Forrest spontaneously did something he didn't realize he could do, and the experience sent him on a trajectory of fame, success and adventure. In the same way that a virus can lie dormant in your body for so long that you forget you were ever infected, a talent can also lie undernurtured in your life for so long that you don't realize you have it. That's when it's useful to have someone you love whispering, or in Jenny's case, *shouting*, words of encouragement to keep your legs in motion. *Who do you have in your life to make sure your potential doesn't go to waste?*

Tie a rope around your heart. Gump's legs were as strong as any the doctor had ever seen. His spine, on the other hand, was as crooked as politician. And so, he was forced to wear the orthopedic shoes and metal leg braces for three years. But despite constant ridicule, name calling, even getting his braces caught in gutter grates, the braces turn out to be a blessing in disguise. In my book on creativity, [One Smoking Hot Piece of Brain Candy](#), I introduced a technique called *tourniquetting*. This is when an artist creates a healthy sense of distance from their work by damming up the creative flow, compressing the circulation and applying enough pressure so there's an explosion waiting for them when they're ready to return. Gump's braces, then, were the tourniquets. They blocked the flow. The constricted his power. And after a few years, once the pressure reached its threshold level, there was no stopping that train. Momma said those magic shoes would take him anywhere, and she was right. That's the power of creative tourniquetting. It requires a significant amount of delayed gratification. And it requires having enough discipline *not* to have discipline. *Are you willing to tie a rope around your heart just to let the blood build up?*

058 -- THE PIGEON SCENE FROM LAST CRUSADE

Everything is grist for the creative mill. In the problem solving process, our first instinct is to look for answers externally. But in most cases, the answer lies within. Something we already know is precisely what we need to find the solution. It's simply a matter of trusting our resources. Believing we are well equipped to handle our creative challenges. Henry, a lifelong scholar of history, suddenly remembers an inspiring quotation from a famous historical figure. And so, he *bridges*, seeking connections and noticing natural relationships between that reference and his current situation. That's what gives him the idea take down the nazi airplane with an umbrella and an flock of pigeons. And as the propeller shreds the birds into a feathery white puree and clogs the engine, it all makes sense. Henry's entire life has prepared him for this very moment. His expansive landscape of interconnected knowledge and experiences has made him a powerful recombinant thinker and inventor. All he needed was the right moment into which he could compress that training. *What do you already know that will help you solve this problem?*

Create without a crutch. Henry is a scholar. A man who fights battles with his mind. Someone who doesn't require an automatic weapon or a custom retractable hang gliding spy gadget to defeat the enemy. Just an ordinary umbrella and a little help from nature. That's about as low tech as you can get. And, it's a humbling reminder that creativity isn't always about having the right equipment. In fact, there's no historical relationship between technology and innovation. That's like the amateur golfer trying to buy a lower score with a titanium driver. When the reality is, if you *really* had an amazing swing and a deep understanding of the game, you could shoot par with a rusty set of rented clubs. Real artists work the same way. They can create anytime, anywhere. People who refuse to go to work unless they have the right tools are unprofessional hack procrastinators. True art is equipment agnostic. *Which of your own excuses are you falling in love with?*

Walk with the wise. Indiana wears a proud expression as he sees his father in a new light. Even he can admit, *that was pretty cool*. And as he watches his father's cheeky stride on the beach, using the very umbrella he just saved their lives with to shield the sun, he realizes how inspirational this moment truly is. In fact, the actual meaning of the word *inspiration* is to arouse reverence. And one of the ways we do that is to surround ourselves with people who challenge and inspire us. To play with those who raise our game. Because there are three kinds of people in the world: Those who make us less than we are, those who keep us where we are, and those who push us to what we might become. And so, next time we're wondering why our creative output is lagging, it's often because our human input is lacking. Perhaps it's time to prune the hedges. *Are you willing to personally amputate anyone who doesn't believe in or support you?*

059 -- THE CONCLUSIONS SCENE FROM OFFICE SPACE

The attraction of working, the arrogance of waiting. Every creator is looking that one big idea, the one that earns millions and changes the world and sets them up for the rest of their life. But while it's fun to fantasize about, it's ultimately a waste of time. Most of the crazy ideas that changed the world actually started out as mistakes, accidents, coincidences, serendipity, jokes or experiments. The guy who invented the pet rock wasn't tinkering at his workbench all day, searching for his ticket to riches. He was sitting at a bar listening to his friends complain about their pets, which gave him the idea for the perfect pet that would never need to be fed, walked, bathed, groomed and would never die, become sick, or be disobedient. That's the way creativity works. The more you tighten your grip, the more it will slip through your fingers. The more you chase it, the more it will elude you. It's more like a zen koan than a scavenger hunt. And so, if we have any intention of making art that lasts, better to keep focused hand on the present than a compulsive eye on the future. It's all there in front of us, but if we try too hard to see it, we'll only become confused. *How can you invite creativity to come and sit softly on your shoulder?*

Tone your hot body. Tom doesn't realize that creativity is about having one big idea, it's about sustaining a steady stream of ideas. Nothing against one hit wonders, one idea does not a career make. Prolific creators have an entire mountain of gold to mine, not just nugget to milk for a lifetime. In fact, what most people don't know about [Gary Dahl](#), the guy who invented the pet rock, was that he was also an award winning copywriter, creative director and advertising agency owner. Meaning, over the course of his career, he probably had tens of thousands of ideas. Many of which were bad. But he kept producing, every single day, because he knew that the best way to see a good idea was to stand on a compost pile of bad ones. Prolificacy then, is the intentional goal; but innovation is incidental result. Truth is, I may have made my career as the nametag guy, but only because I left behind a wake of failed attempts at dozens of other quirky identity experiments. And so, creativity is often a matter of volume plus time. Building a product that sticks out by being a person who sticks around. *How hot is your body of work?*

If you are only creating for glory, you have already failed. Tom isn't trying to change the world with his invention, he just doesn't want to work ever again. That's no reason to make art. No wonder his idea is doomed from the beginning. Not only because the product trite and useless, but also because there's no substance behind it. I'm reminded of poet laureate James Dickey, who said that the most important thing is to be *excited* about what you are doing. To be working on something that you think will be the greatest thing that ever was. Because the difficulty in writing poetry, he said, was to maintain a sense of excitement and discovery about what you were working on. Tom could have used some of that juice. We all could. Considering the inevitable doubts and setbacks and failures of the creative process, there's no chemical substitute for enthusiasm. If we have enough horsepower under the hood, we can usually get ourselves out of the mud. *How are you investing your passion and bravery where there previously was none?*

060 -- THE SIRIUS SCENE FROM THE TRUMAN SHOW

Keep them happy and ignorant. Truman literally lives in a constructed reality. His life is broadcast around the clock to billions of people across the globe. But once he gains sufficient awareness of his condition, the movie starts to take a strangely psychological, even political turn. Truman is waking up and stumbling towards salvation. Hence the falling light and shattered glass. Symbolically, they couldn't be more appropriate. They're a reminder of how the powers that be will always try keep us small, scared and dreamless; dissuading our sense of exploration, preventing us from discovering our false realities. Because the last thing they want is for us to activate our imaginations. To become suspicious of our perceived reality. Fortunately, humans created art to combat this battle. To embark on a quest to discover the truth about our lives. To give ourselves a slant on the game that's being played on us. Truman represents an awakening that's possible in every one of us. *Whom are you allowing to soften the fibers of your spirit?*

Readiness to wreck everything. Truman is stepping into a more mature and authentic identity. Every scene becomes a chisel with which he chips away at the sculpture inside the stone. And by the time he reaches the end of the known world, you can't help but cheer him on. It's a powerful meditation for artists undergoing the process of reinvention. But it's also a warning about the slings and arrows that accompany it. Truman may be waking up to what's true about himself, but not everybody wants him to be successful. They're too invested in keeping him where he is. They want him to remain frozen in the position they met him in. That's why they feel disenfranchised by his awakening. And so, as they feel the foreign nature of his behavior, they start to attack like white blood cells fighting an infection. Funny how reinvention elicits that reaction from people. But it's human nature. They have no incentive to see you change. And once you do, they almost don't even know how to relate to you anymore. *Who is resisting your journey to explore new ways of being an artist?*

Try thinking your own thoughts. Peter Weir famously said that *The Truman Show* was a dangerous film to make because it couldn't actually happen. Little did he know, his movie was disturbingly prophetic. It premiered in the late nineties, when reality television was on the rise. And yet, two decades later, the film doesn't seem like science fiction at all. It could just as easily be another show we fetishize. But what bothers me the most is, television is the polar opposite of creativity. It's leading someone else's life for a short period of time. And yet, millions people live this way. They spend thirty four hours a week thinking other people's thoughts, walking through someone else's museum. Meanwhile, recent research reports that the number of non book readers has nearly tripled since the late seventies. *This isn't good for our brains.* My mentor once said that the purpose of books was to trap your mind into doing its own thinking. But nobody cares anymore. Too many shows in the queue. And my fear is that we've literally become zombies. We've forgotten how to think our own thoughts. *Are you joining the playing field of creation or the smorgasbord of consumption?*

061 -- THE JIGGIWATT SCENE FROM BACK TO THE FUTURE

When in doubt, use nature. Back in the fifties, there were only a handful of ways to generate that much electricity. Doc could tie the car to a hydroelectric dam, build a turbine on the back of the motor, or race the car off the edge of a massive waterfall. Unfortunately, he didn't have the time, resources or clearance to employ those kinds of strategies. But what he *did* have was a weather event. Literally, a bolt of lightning. Proving, that every occurrence, including the affairs of human beings, was due to the laws of nature. Einstein was right. Also proving, that the imagination of nature is far, far greater than the imagination of man. Feynman said that. And so, whenever we're faced with a creative block, the smart thing to do is design systems and structures that invite nature as our collaborator. To align our work with its geometric order and rhythm of the natural universe. Because once we learn how to harness that lightning and channel it into the flux capacitor known as our brains, there's no limit to what we can do. *How did nature solve this same problem?*

Make yourself more strikeable. The problem with lightning is, you never know where or when it's going to strike. Nature is unpredictable like that. The job of the creator, then, is to actually *become* the lightning rod. To provide an easy path for creativity to find its way to his brain, lest its electricity dissipates harmlessly to the ground. Because inspiration, while helpful when it shows up, most of the time, needs to be yanked out of hiding. You have to create it, channel it, command it and commit to meeting it halfway. And if it decides to take the day off, you have to go over to its house, beat down the door, drag its ass out of bed at put it work. That's something all prolific creators have in common. They don't wait on inspiration, they work on discipline. Personally, anytime I find I'm having trouble writing, I can usually trace to not having read enough. Because sentences are my lightning rods. *What are yours?*

Everything is fair game. Marty would have been stuck in past without that flyer about the clock tower. Thank god he never threw it away. But that's the value of being entirely open and vulnerable to every shred of stimuli that crosses your path. Even trash. You never know where you might use it. In fact, my entire career was born out of a nametag I saw in a trashcan. That was my moment of conception. Do you remember yours? If not, perhaps you're not paying close enough attention. Because if you want the world to arrange itself for your creative work, you have to become a master of deep democracy. To allow anything you think, everyone you meet, and everything you experience become part of your professional life. That's how artists create from the inside out. They work as the convergence of everything that's ever happened to them. All devouring mental omnivores. *How often you overlook people, places or experiences that might offer meaningful ideas?*

062 -- THE PLATE SCENE FROM CHOCOLAT

Channeling personality in the service of creativity. Vianne is a creative, friendly, nonjudgmental, atheist single mother with an illegitimate child and a provocative wardrobe. That's one hell of a combination. But what's interesting is, so is her chocolate. Her confections use cacao, chili powder and other exotic ingredients. Which, in a town where abstinence is king, her chocolate wins over the closed hearts of the stuffy petite bourgeoisie. This movie, then, is a case study of *identity based creation*. Vianne integrates the whole of her personality into every piece of chocolate she makes. She taps into her instincts for matching the perfect treat to each customer's need. And ultimately, that's how she's able to find a home for herself and her daughter in the village. It's an inspiring tale of social acceptance and individuality. As one reviewer said, apparently chocolate can cure mental illness, restore marital passion, unite feuding relatives, assuage anger, defeat oppression, inspire art and get you a date. Good enough for me. *What if your creative process was a game to see which part of yourself you could bring to work every day?*

Cross my palm with silver. Artists are notoriously poor businesspeople. We'd rather be heard than paid. We'd rather make history than make money. We'd rather change the world than charge a fee. But the reality is, every product must be sold. Every artist must go out and meet marketplace and ask customers for money. Even if we feel guilty about demanding compensation for our work, even if we experience anxiety when we assign monetary value to our intellectual property, if we don't admit that we're in business for ourselves, we're finished. The secret is to enlist the unique aspects of our personality to enhance our ability to sell. To make the dreaded commerce component easier to swallow. Vianne uses the mosaic wheel. It's essentially an ink blot test for chocolate. Patrons give the wheel a playful spin, say what they see, and she identifies the perfect chocolate for them. It's playful, alluring and unexpected, just like her. It's a device that surprises and delights and intrigues customers in spite of themselves, just like her. Most importantly, it's an effective tool for driving sales. *Period.* Vianne poured her heart into this chocolate to make it great, and she isn't afraid put a price on it and ask people to buy it. *How are you exercising your personality in the selling arena?*

We can smell our own. There's a powerful thematic undercurrent of community in this movie. As it says in the original screenplay, if you lived in this village, you understood what was expected of you. You knew your place in the scheme of things. And if you happened to forget, someone would remind you. *Belonging*, after all, means having people expect something of you, and caring about what that expectation is. Which isn't necessarily a bad thing. Especially for creators who tend to live inside their own heads. Vianne's journey as an artist, then, is more than just designing her own kind of chocolate, but also discovering her own kind of community. At the end of the film, just when she resolves to move to another village, the townspeople who have come to love her, convince her to stay. Because her work is needed there. Vivian is the enchanting rock people can count on. Her value is desirable to the point of absolute necessity. And so, she takes up permanent residence in the village. Emerson was right. Make yourself necessary to the world, and mankind will give you bread. *To whom is your art essential?*

063 -- THE TREEHOUSE SCENE FROM STAND BY ME

Success doesn't have a line. Ace and his gang were older, smarter and had a stolen car. Chris and his gang were younger, slower and had a stolen gun. But both gangs had the same idea. The question is, who deserves the recognition? *Simple.* He who arrives on the scene first, wins. *Period.* That's how the free market works. This movie reminds me of a similar story. Did you know that Alexander Graham Bell wasn't the original inventor of the telephone? *Nope.* Elisha Gray actually recorded his schematics for the exact same invention about six weeks before his counterpart. But when the top technical journal of the industry criticized Gray's phone idea, calling it a waste of time with no direct, practical application, it crippled his enthusiasm. Which killed his momentum. Meanwhile, Bell stayed in motion. He kept at it. And when his invention was finally complete, he walked into patent office literally *two hours* ahead of his competitor, walking out as one of the most influential inventors in modern history. It's a sobering reminder that ideas are never as important as their execution. That life rewards actions, not intentions. And that being the finest doesn't count as much as being the first. *What's your hesitation about getting started?*

Thresholds to an elsewhere. Vern's treasure digging adventure was pathetic. Nine months searching a few jars of pennies? Not exactly a sound understanding of the time value of money. Then again, had he never been under the porch in the first place, he never would have overheard his older brother's conversation. Which means he never would have told his friends. Which means they never would have shared the adventure of looking for the body. And so, there were really three treasures in this movie. *The money. The body. And the memory.* Each ascending in weight and meaning as the story goes on. Interestingly, there's a similar pattern in the journey of the creator. Because in the beginning of a project or a season or a career, there are certain rules we're navigating by. Certain labels we assign to our work. But by the end, those rules shift. And what we're left with, what we find our work to be, isn't what we thought. Like my mentor once told me, you will lose more than you would ever sign up for, but you will gain more than you could ever hope for. Nobody ever gets what they signed up for. *What is still lethal inside of you that wants to be transformed?*

Never met with a tilted head. Chris comes from a family of criminals and alcoholics, and is usually stereotyped accordingly. But in the safe company of his friends, in the sanctuary of their secret hideout, he's a charismatic leader and a creative visionary. And he has a well thought out strategy to find the dead body. *Deceive the parents, make the discovery, return before dinner, become local heroes.* That's a plan and a half. No wonder he grew up to become a lawyer. What's interesting is, later on in the movie, Chris talks about how kids lose their god given gifts unless there's someone there to look after them. But since their parents are too fucked up to do it, they have to do it for each other. Hence the title of the movie. When I first saw this movie as a kid, I always remembered that moment. Because unlike the boys in the movie, I won

the family lottery. I had a childhood of unlimited creative support. Whatever art I was making, they were happy to be there. Physically, emotionally, spiritually. On board at a moment's notice. Relentless affirmation. Instant encouragement. Endless participation. Radical acceptance. *How many imagination partners do you have in your life?*

063 -- The Golden Ticket from Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory

Expectation unconsciously influences inspiration. The creative process is simultaneously mechanical and metaphysical. It's a function of toil and time, but there's also an equal measure of intention and attention. Charlie wanders around the street, finds a coin in a sewer grate and digs it out. That's attention. By introducing it, he created his own opportunity to play the game. Then, when he walks into the candy shop, he buys a chocolate bar for his grandpa. Charlie wasn't trying to win the contest, he was trying to do something generous for his family. That intention. By introducing it, he activated the infinite field of correlation. And the combination of the two changed everything. The lesson, then, is that focusing on a goal changes the person doing the focusing. It's similar to the *observer effect* of quantum physics, which states that the act of observing a system inevitably alters its state. And so, if an artist expects to find ideas in her environment, she will cause an improvement in her ability to spot opportunities when they materialize. But if that same artist lets her attention and intention slip and slide all over the place, she'll miss her moment of conception. *Which of your ideas arrived as responses to attention and intention?*

So shines a good deed. In the [original](#) candy scene, the crooning shop owner throws out tons of free candy to all the eager, wealthy children. Meanwhile, the poorest kid in town can only watch longingly from the window. Now, here's the interesting part. Charlie walks into the same candy shop only few weeks later, hoping to receive the same treatment as the other children. But the moment he starts stuffing his face with chocolate, the owner clears his throat and holds out his hand. Almost as if to say, *I'm not running a soup kitchen here*. But he's happy to pay for the treat. Charlie's a good kid. This is a fair transaction. Besides, the candy isn't even for him, it's a gift for his grandpa. Meanwhile, a major scandal breaks out across the globe. Newspapers report that the multimillionaire gambler actually falsified his winning ticket. He had the nerve to try to fool the whole world. Which means, the fifth golden ticket was still out there somewhere. Waiting to be found by the right person. The honest person. The deserving person. After all, that was the whole point of the contest, we find out. It wasn't a golden ticket, it was a morality test. Wonka needed an honest child, worthy to be his heir. And so shines a good deed in a weary world. *How are you branding your honesty?*

Work perpendicular. Charlie is devastated when the news breaks about the final golden ticket being found. The boy has nothing in the world to hope for now. Of course, his mother reminds him that he'll get his chance. That one day, things will change. *Probably when he least expects it*. For now, he just needs to keep his dream in view, and pretty soon the sky will clear up. Which doesn't put the delicious chocolate

bar in his mouth, but it's start. And that's spiritual theme embedded in this scene. It's a lesson every artist has to learn. Because in the creative process, the best way to find something is to stop looking for it. The best way to accomplish something is to try less. Taoists would call this concept *paradoxical unity*. Which appears vague and esoteric and wholly unsatisfying in its practical application, but it's actually a helpful approach in becoming prolific. As I've mentioned before, sometimes the best strategy is to work perpendicular. To intentionally walk away from our current work and engage in something **unrelated** to the flow of activity. Charlie did just that. He went out for a walk and found exactly what he has stopped looking for. *Which of your ideas have come when you least expected them?*

064 -- THE FIRING SCENE FROM UP IN THE AIR

The only choice is severance. Bob took a mediocre job out of college that forced him to give up on his dreams. To give up on doing what made him happy. But now, thirty years later, he's being given a second change. A new beginning. A fresh start. An opportunity to do his rightful work in the world, and finally become who he really is. *The lucky bastard.* I remember going through a similar transformation in my own career. It was beautiful. There was a profound sense of peace, stillness, possibility and liberation. Nothing to fear, nothing to lose, nothing to hide, nothing to prove. And as I stood on the precipice of transformation, being called to something different, I made choice to lean into a new future. And my work hasn't been the same since. That's the sign of a successful reinvention. When you feel like a whole new person, and yet, more like yourself than ever. *Have you made peace with the mysterious ways in which you would up doing the things you were meant to do?*

Freedom is the flame of admiration. What I love most about this scene is the concept of admiration. How kids look up to people who follow their dreams. And yet, it's not just kids, it's everybody. Because nothing inspires the world more than a someone who acts from his own center and does work that make him alive in all their parts and powers. Louie, to use an example from the standup world, isn't a comedy legend because he's the funniest, but because he's the *freest*. He writes, directs, produces and edits his own network television show, addressing topics most writers wouldn't touch. He circumvents big ticket companies by performing reasonably priced concerts at alternative venues. And he has a no bullshit website that offers cheap standup specials direct to his fans. Don't get me wrong. Louie certainly makes people laugh with his work, but the foundation of his artistry is the sovereignty he has over his work. That's why people admire him. *What are you trading your authenticity for?*

With buried grievances and dreams unexpressed. It's hard to resist the romance of running after your dreams. Especially in this country. America is the place where dreams are had, followed and fulfilled. The prospect of not having to die with your music still in you, the legacy of going to your grave with your life poured out, *man*, that's one hell of a promise. Of course, some say those who think that way need to be beaten with the practicality stick. And maybe they're right. But the upside about following your dream is, it doesn't have to be a binary construct. It all depends on how you define the word *follow*. Let's say your dream matures into an exotic animal that you can't afford to feed forever. Your artistic career path, dripping with risk and instability and blood and toil, becomes too high a price to pay. Does that have to knock you out of the game completely? Not necessarily. If there's a dream in you, one that serves and helps others, one that would cause you deep regret if you never took the risk to at least try it, it shouldn't matter *how* you follow it, only *that* you follow it. Even if it's a subsidiary part of your earning existence. Even if money doesn't have to go next to you when you act the way you act. Frankly, your dream will just be glad you showed up. *How far do you have to follow your dreams to still be okay with yourself?*

065 -- THE KITE SCENE FROM SAVING MR. BANKS

Ideas are riders and need a horse to get to us. Travers is a financially struggling author with deep disdain for animated movies. She's proper, formal, conservative, and her novel's main character is enemy of sentiment and whimsy who doesn't sugar coat the darkness in the world. As she says early in the movie, *what horrors have you in store for my beautiful characters today?* Tough crowd. Good luck pulling an idea out of that cranky, stubborn dame. Disney, on the other hand, the ultimate symbol of magic, the paragon of innocence and joy, has been courting her for twenty years. They're not giving up in their quest to acquire the film rights to her novels. You have to appreciate that kind of persistence. But it's a reminder that creativity is a negotiation. A conversation between art and artist. A battle between resistance and expression. And it's an exchange that requires a certain amount of coaxing. Because matter how swiftly and frequently inspiration shows up, many of our best ideas need to be massaged into shape. *How will you prevent your ideas from getting steamrolled?*

Inhibition is an endangered species. Travers is attempting collaboration with the creative team, but has become increasingly disengaged. The work is bringing up too many painful childhood memories. But somehow, the music composers eventually soften her. The song reawakens her imagination and enthusiastically engages her. Pamela's body language says it all. First, she raises an eyebrow. The involuntary indicator of interest, intrigue and curiosity. Next, she taps her foot. The basic tool for keeping time and connecting with rhythm. Finally, she starts waltzing, laughing and singing. The mark of a fully engaged audience member. This scene is a perfect illustration of what happens when an artist tastes the sweet nectar of pure creation. When someone feels what it feels like to have no artistic restrictions. To be, as the song says, where the air is clear. Because even if that happens for only a moment, it's amazing what kinds of creative doors start to open up. Travers isn't singing a song, she's signing a permission slip. She's giving herself the freedom to live a life that isn't dictated by her history. *Are you allowing the pain from the past to numb the pleasure of the present?*

Align yourself with the flow of process. Travers didn't believe a film version of her books would do justice to her creation. Little did she know, the movie would receive widespread critical acclaim, win tons of awards, inspire a long running musical, even break the world record for the world's largest [umbrella mosaic](#). That's the beauty of creativity. You have an idea for a treehouse and end up building a skyscraper. *Whoops*. But isn't that what makes life worth living? The surprises. The unintentionals. The strange evolutions that turn seeds into forests. Isn't that why you get into the idea business in the first place? Because you never know. All you can do is trust the creative process. All you can do is let go, allow your work to lead you and to believe in the dividends. Besides, the juicy stuff almost always happens in unoccupied channels. Travers never could have dreamed her books would have such a wide impact on modern culture. But had she never said yes to the mouse, none of that would have happened. *What was your resurrection opportunity?*

066 -- THE BAR SCENE FROM RANGO

Filling in the identity lines. This movie is terrifically clever, but it's also a powerful meditation on identity. Rango is a chameleon, both literally and figuratively. With a little mimicry, bravado and improvisation, he presents himself as tough drifter who will blow the ugly right off your face. And the townsfolk believe him. They have no idea he comes from a domestic terrarium. Rango is a blank sheet of paper, in his minds and theirs. And this scene is him filling in the lines. We're witnessing the conceptual beginning of a man's identity. Rango's history, and beliefs are awakening in him. His narrative is beginning to assume a definite form. And his personal mythology is burning itself into people's brains. If you're an artist, there were probably moments just like that your career. Starting from scratch. Filling in the identity lines. Consciously deciding who you're going to be. It's an exhilarating experience. Especially since most of the world isn't lucky enough to become who they are. *What where the sudden but seismic shifts in your sensibility and persona that became foundational for your work?*

We each see what we need to see. Dirt is a town of deep faith. A loyal, tightly knit community who needs something to believe in. Rango, on the other hand, is a loner and a complete fraud. He's not even supposed to be there. But as the spirit of the west advised him, *no man can walk out on his own story*. And so, he doesn't have a choice. Rango raised his hand. He became the hero they were looking for and. And from this point on, that's who he is. If you're a veteran creator, this lesson is particularly useful. Because over the long arc of an artist's career, people often take detours off their main line that they're not initially thrilled with. But that doesn't mean the experience won't become worthwhile. Creative people must always allow for the possibility that new meaning will arise in unexpected places. As my mentor once told me, when you think you know your destination, you're on the wrong path. *Are you willing to lean into a different future?*

Mighty oaks from tiny acorns grow. Rango's entire future was predicated on something he read on a bottle of cactus juice. That seemingly innocuous detail was the divergence that resulted in a significantly different outcome. It's [chaos theory](#) at its finest. Sensitive dependence. Initial conditions in which a small change at one place in a deterministic nonlinear system can result in large differences in a later state. Sound like quantum physics? You're right. But it also sounds like the creative process. Because the obligation of an artist is to always be on the lookout for that divergence. That tiny detail that triggers a whole world. Every creative person has their version of it. Fifteen years ago, I decided to put on a nametag. And out of that moment, I built a brand, a business and an entire career. That was my first experience chaos theory. But what's interesting is, now I notice those innocuous details everywhere. To me, everything is a nametag. Everything is a bottle of cactus juice that could change everything. *What do you see when you see people?*

067 -- THE PARKING LOT SCENE FROM FIGHT CLUB

Carve a path back to yourself. Jack initially pretends to be an imposter at support groups as an emotional release to relieve his insomnia. But then he creates fight club. And at first, he feels strange, but it's a good strange. Flailing and gasping and bleeding and stumbling, his eyes glaze over with endorphins and serenity. And that's when he realizes, they've crossed a threshold. To paraphrase from the [original screenplay](#), at fight club, you weren't alive anywhere like you were there. And after fight club, everything else in your life got the volume turned down. You could deal with anything. The people who had power over you had less and less. We all started seeing things differently. Wherever we went. *We should all be so lucky.* Not to pick fights with strangers in parking lots. But from a creative standpoint, we all need our own version of fight club. A routine recreational activity makes us feel alive. A venue that inoculates us against the sterility of the world. A platform that offers a swift kick to the solar plexus. It's an effective tool for recalibrating the soul and keep creativity flowing. *Do you have a portable, purposeful and private sanctuary to reconnect with the self, the body and the spirit?*

Happiness only real when shared. We're not only watching two men fighting, we're witnessing a conceptual beginning. As they sit on the hood of the car, there's no doubt that something wants to be built here. The experience is simply too meaningful. But the key is the final line of the scene. *We should do this again sometime.* That's precisely the right attitude to have in this experience. Because when we find something that has existential resonance for us, the essential next step is sharing that discovery with another person. It makes it more real. Otherwise we're just living inside our own heads, winking in the dark, playing basketball without a backboard. I remember the first time I played music in the [tunnel](#) under the arch by my house. I came back home a changed man. And I told everybody. Because when you finally find the physical conditions that elicit your best work, you want to shout it from the rooftops. *How often are you sharing what really matters to you?*

Your body will never lie to you. This movie is dark, violent, nihilistic and sinister. But it's also a beautiful example of the relationship between creativity and physicality. After all, the shortest distance to the brain is through the body. And if there's something we want to achieve artistically, often times, we can back into that creation by changing our sheer physicality. One medium in which I've noticed this relationship play out is songwriting. I've been composing music for over twenty years, but only in the past three did I start playing standing up. That one decision changed everything for me. From the experience *practicing* my music, which became more invigorating. To the experience of *performing*, my music which became more effective. To the experience of *listening* to my music, which became more enthralling. Even the music itself reflects this new shift in energy and position, as my songs have become dramatically faster, louder and more muscular than any of my previous work. All because I got my ass out of the chair and let my body dictate. *Are you creating the physical conditions that elicit your best work?*

068 -- THE ROOFTOP SCENE FROM PEACEFUL WARRIOR

Crucified thy ego, arise thy higher self. Danny stares down his treasured collection of trophies, awards and medals. They're everything he's ever worked for. And yet, despite his lifelong success as a scholar and an athlete, they're just props. Superficial validations of immature ego needs. Plastic crutches symbolizing the attainment of a goal, rather than the enjoyment of the journey. That's why he smashes them to the ground. Because it's not who he wants to be anymore. And so, as he destroys the shelf, he destroys the *self*. Danny begins to let go of a persona he has come to identify with and call his own. It's the initiation of *existential severance*, which is a process most artists undergo at one time or another. I remember my own experience with it, during which my mentor asked an interesting question. What if you started a new career today, he asked, letting go of everything you've tried and built and accomplished in the last ten years, *except the person you've become*? Danny is asking himself the same question. And he's starting to realize, maybe he finally achieved enough to be okay with himself. Maybe he actually feels complete about this part of his journey. Maybe if lets go of who he was—quite literally—he'll be able to become who he needs to be. *Are you afraid of the only place that gives you real answers?*

Get rid of all your best weapons first. Taoists scripture states that when we let go of what we have, we receive what we need. It's the paradox of letting go. And that's what makes this scene on the rooftop so powerful. Because in most cases, the thing we need to let go of, is a part of the self. Something that's been good to us. Prolific comedians, for example, write a new act every year. They scrap all of their old material and start from scratch. Louie once said during an interview that he likes to open with last year's closer, just to fuck himself. *That's letting go.* And every artist has their own version of it. I've composed dozens of songs over the years—*good ones, too*—that I simply no longer play. And I miss them. They're like creative brainchildren who don't come to visit anymore. But the reality is, we can't grow as artists by looking in the rear view mirror. We have to stay in motion. We have to create new work. And we have to accept that anything we made in the past only matters insofar as it brought us here. *Have you confronted your built in reluctance to let go of what's working?*

Fear doesn't go away, it just changes shape. Danny's first love was gymnastics. It was the first thing he gave everything to, and the first thing that gave everything to him. But now that he's watching it slip away, precariously balanced on his sanity ledge, the panic is starting to settle in. Have you ever found yourself standing out on that ledge? It's a grim existential crisis. A death of sorts, rife with its own form of grieving. Because you have make peace with the psychological fallout that results from your new position in the world. When I worked a full time gig with a marketing agency, there were a host of new feelings that accompanied my transition. The constipation of not having an outlet to express my impulse to originate. The frustration of putting somebody else's brand before my own. The distress of working significantly below my pay grade. And the inadequacy of telling people I wasn't succeeding solely on my own steam. A different family of fears, no doubt; but fears nonetheless. *Are you ready to give yourself a pep talk down off your ledge of anxiety?*

069 -- THE QUARRY SCENE FROM THE FLINTSTONES

Create rituals of leave taking. Flintstone is crane operator at a construction company who moves rocks for a living. And every afternoon at quitting time, when he hears the coveted sound of the alarm, he slides down the dinosaur's tail, punches the time clock and heads home. Standard operating procedure for the rock quarry. Of course, most creative professionals don't have that luxury. We're artists who work in nontraditional or home based environments that don't contain natural boundaries. And so, it's important that we create *rituals of leave taking*. Microstructures that celebrate the completion of a period of work, slow down the creative process and set healthy boundaries to demarcate the line between work and nonwork. For many years, I kept a classic hotel concierge call bell on my desk. And every day when I finished my mission piece, I slammed my hand bell as hard as I could. Initially, it was sort of a joke. But what I found was, the physical movement of hitting the bell combined with the piercing chime that echoed through the room was deeply satisfying. *Are you adopting the right mindset when working at home by placing punctuation marks throughout your day?*

The abrupt discontinuation of creativity. Flintstone doesn't take his work home with him. Within minutes of leaving the jobsite, he's already at the drive in, relaxing with his family and letting the distress of the day melt away. *Must be nice.* Artists, after all, don't have this luxury. In fact, there's a long withdrawal process after we've been working on something for a while, similar to that of a drug addict. We may not experience the headaches, insomnia and tremors of opiate users, for example, but depending on the extent of our reliance on the highly addictive substance known as creation, we may require a certain amount of psychological readjustment. In my own experience, artistic withdrawal manifests in the form of anxiety. For me, the pain of having not created anything trumps everything. More than rejection, more than mediocrity, more than loneliness, when I stop making things, I grow claustrophobic. Quickly. What can I say? I'm genetically wired for prolificacy. It's simply my nature. I'm happier when I'm being productive. But the good news is, I know that about myself. And so, I can properly recognize, endure and domesticate my withdrawal symptoms. *What tools do you have for negotiating the inevitable creative rapids?*

Go pro or go home. Flintstone is the typical sixties blue collar worker, constantly scheming ways to improve his family's working class lot in life. And what I love most about his character is, he literally represents grit. Thick skin. Hard work. A regular guy who endures the pure, unromantic slog of production, every day. Modern artists could learn a thing or two from his archetype. As people with romantic personalities, delicate skin and a hypersensitive relationship to the world, perhaps little rock dust on our boots might do us some good. Pressfield famously **wrote** that the muse favors working stiffs. Mercenaries. Guns for hire. Creators who implant the proper humility. And so, this scene is a reminder that we have a responsibility to treat our work as a daily practice. To professionalize our art. Despite our nonconformist values and anti-establishment reputation, every artist is a working man. A bronto crane operator. We punch in. We sit down and do our work. And we respect what we do. *How are you using daily momentum to keep yourself from feeling detached from the creative process?*

070 -- THE TYPEWRITER SCENE FROM THE SHINING

We can't set art off in a corner. Jack assumed the seclusion at the hotel would help him reconnect with his family and create the motivation needed to finish his play. But instead, he ended up going insane from cabin fever, getting possessed by the hotel ghosts, going on a murderous rampage and ultimately freezing to death in the hedge maze. Not exactly the kind of productivity he was looking for. And so, it's a bloody good lesson about the dangers of remaining in isolation too long. Because what happens to the creator is, he starts losing perspective. He starts missing out on the subtle cues around him that could lead to opportunities to connect. And by the time his work is done, there's nobody around to share it with. When I went through my workaholic phase, I was completely preoccupied with my vision, my business, my art, my career and myself. I sacrificed my relationships by creating friction between friends, family members, colleagues and lovers. And I sacrificed my time by not having a life outside of my career, with few centers of belonging and little involvement in my community. The point is, we have to find the balance between productivity and sociability. We have to stay prolific, while still going out of our way to honor the part of us that is not satisfied with a life of estrangement and isolation. Nobody should sacrifice human connection on the altar of creative production. *Are you remembering to appreciate the wholeness of real people?*

Become a master of your disinclination. Jack's typewriter tantrum seems inflated and unwarranted, but any writer will attest, when the art is coming, when you're cranking away feverishly and extensively, senseless interruptions are profoundly frustrating. Squeezed by our surroundings, muddled by triviality, swept into the undertow of inconsequentiality, our work simply never gets done. Unless, long before we start creating, we put some energy into prioritizing, organizing and streamlining the routines that keep others from frittering away our attention. But unlike Jack's policy We can hang creative **signs** on our office doors. We can download **apps** that disable our internet connection for the time period we specify. We can install **plugins** that block social sites that waste our time. Whatever it takes to inoculate us against distractions and maintain motivational equilibrium. If we want to become masters of our disinclination, we have to consciously engineer our environment in ways that cultivate the conditions for creativity to expand. Jack's system is simple. If he's in this room, he's working. And that means don't come in. Period. *What's your policy for managing compositional paralysis?*

Slam the iron door. Prolificacy means developing simple, predictable system. One that takes willpower out of the equation. One that doesn't force you to borrow time and resources other parts of your life. One that allows you to achieve a solid baseline of daily activity. One that doesn't require investing a single neuron in the unnecessary, exhaustive search of possibilities of where to direct your creative energies. Writers, for example, often treat their creative process as a standing appointment. They're **due at**

the page, as they say, at the same time everyday. And they uphold that commitment with religious fervor. They don't downplay the importance of their work time. They don't back out at the last minute. They make a schedule and stick to it. *That's a simple system.* Jack is setting a boundary with his system. He's slamming the iron door. And he's letting the other people in his life know that the creative rapids are gushing, but rest reassured, they will pass eventually. *What simple, predictable system will keep your creative practice grounded?*

071 -- THE SHANKS SCENE FROM TIN CUP

Avoid the cold start. Your brain is a machine. And like any mechanical device, you need to bring it up to operating temperature in order to run properly. Without that crucial warm up cycle, the motor is vulnerable to errors, misfires, wasted energy, toxic emissions, even full blown system failures. And so, when you sit down work each day, consider using a *centering sequence* before pulling out of the creative driveway. A ritual that keeps you from doing things that you regret, things that come from the shadowy parts of your personality. For many years, I've been using a tool from a program called [Ten Zen Seconds](#), which is an approach to mindfulness and an invitation to live a more centered, grounded, and meaningful life. The way it works is, you use a single deep breath as a ten second container for a specific thought, matching the rhythm of your respiration to the symmetry of your words. Every morning when I sit down to write, this centering sequence brings my brain up to operating temperature. It's how I avoid the shanks. *How are you warming up your mental system?*

My brain burns with their color. Roy's was so in awe of the golf legends lined up on the driving range, hitting beautiful shot after beautiful shot with graceful ease, his brain got in the way. But once he got out of his head and into the present moment, once he reconnected with his body and accessed his authentic swing, he hit a perfect seven iron into the trees. Creators could learn from this experience. We're a group of people with notoriously racing brains, and we have to be careful not to do too much work in our heads. The goal, after all, is to *relieve* ourselves of the necessity of remembering, not to add more mental bricks. To help our minds peacefully return to their natural state, not strain the brain. That's why the tradition of making mental notes is a terribly unhealthy, unwise approach for organizing ideas. The mind is a terrible office. We don't need to make mental notes, we need to make notes. Writing everything down relieves us of the necessity of remembering and opens our mind to receive new ideas. Writing everything down directs the traffic flow of our overcrowded minds. Without adopting this habit, our brain will be too overwhelmed to keep the ball in the fairway. *Are you prepared to kill the virus in your brain?*

Getting ready for the job of creating. Golfers go to the driving range to work out the shanks. To loosen the lid on the pickle jar of peak performance. To flush the bad shots out of their system before hitting the lynx. It's a practice takes discipline, but once that also takes humility. Because the golfers at the range are daring to do their work poorly in the beginning. They're allowing themselves to be bad. And they're accepting failure as a necessary part of growth. Artists should be no different. Even if our first ideas impress us so little that we see no good reason to continue, we should never stop ourselves from hitting those shots. When we practice [forced vomiting](#), for example, we release our thoughts without committing to keeping them. We create off the record, making things without the burden of evidence, following our most impractical curiosities. It's the work before the work. The driving range of creativity. And we find our rhythm, our groove, the tempo of our creative nature, by hitting enough balls until meaning and truth finally manifest. *Do you have a daily psychological holding environment?*

072 -- THE MAKEUP SCENE FROM THRILLER

A true artist doesn't need permission to work. Baker learned the art of makeup through trial and error. He wasn't taught to make monster molds through a particular school of thought. He just did a lot of it, played with it, had fun with it and figured out what worked and what didn't. He did research at libraries and read books about makeup. He created artificial body parts in his own kitchen. And he made up all the friends in the neighborhood with ghastly third degree burns and gashes and wounds. Baker even jokingly admitted, he wasn't allowed in a lot of houses when he was a kid. But despite the union calling him the worst thing to ever happen to the art of makeup, he still won oscars, influenced a generation of artists and changed the industry forever. He became the most respected, admired and sought after special effects artist in the world, all because never waited for permission. Baker just started producing. And in a culture that often makes it difficult for creativity to express itself properly, that's an achievement work celebrating. *What parts of your life are you not giving yourself permission to live creatively?*

Find what inspires the inspired. Thriller released this hour long documentary in tandem with the infamous music video. Providing candid glimpses behind the scenes of the production, the film became one of the top selling home video release of all time. More importantly, this documentary was the first image that legitimately haunted me as a child. Anytime it came on, I would literally cower underneath my family's beige coffee table and cry and wail until the wolf was gone from the screen. Sound traumatic? Actually, I loved every minute of it. Thriller captured my imagination and inspired my creativity. It turned me into a person who lived to be startled, to have my eyes opened in unexpected ways. When I think back to the cultural and artistic influences that helped me become who I am today, this movie always tops the list. And not just because it was scary, but because you could crawl inside the heads of the creators and discover what *made* it scary. Because to me, artist statements are more interesting than art itself. That's what inspires me. That's what gives me permission to try something new. Yes, I pay attention to the work, but I what I obsess over is the thinking behind the work. *Are you studying the inner landscape of artists you admire?*

Imposing your vision on the world. Jackson had already released five records, achieving stardom as a child singer. But for this new album, he didn't want to make another music video, he wanted to create an elaborate work of art that would become a cultural stimulant. Landis enthusiastically agreed, bolstering that vision with generous machinery, resources and infrastructure. And were able to create the most culturally, historically and aesthetically influential pop music video of all time. Thriller didn't just drive album sales and pave a new path for the recording and music video industries, it also helped create the video rental business. Due to its massive popularity, fans wanted to watch the video in their home, so video rental chains started popping up to lend copies of the tape for a small price. That's the leverage potential of an artist vision. Jackson didn't know what he wanted to create, but he knew why he wanted to create it. And so, he sought out to create his own iconography in accordance with his unseen but tangible vision, and he ended up changing the world. *What is the most important thing you can do to bring your activities in line with your values and vision?*

073 -- THE CUPS SCENE FROM PITCH PERFECT

Create a holy shit moment. Beca, like any good artist, is going find a way to be herself. Competitive acappella may not be her ideal creative activity, but she's determined to exist in a manner that makes sense to her. To belong on her own terms. And her audition does just that. Her song defies convention, opting out of the traditional audition number. Her song leverages her immediate surroundings, transforming a mundane item into a memorable instrument. Her song creates a surprise, breaking the patterns and expectations of the judges. And her song sets off a chemical reaction in the audience, one that triggers alertness, snaps their brains to attention and sears the moment into their memories. It's a holy shit moment. An intentional point of overdelivery. An interaction undeniably soaked in wow, that people can't help pick her. The captain doesn't even approve, but she yields nonetheless due to the team desperate need for new talent. It's a pitch perfect example of *stopping* power versus staying power. Because the effectiveness of a performance isn't dependent on its longevity, rather, its ability to evoke emotion in the moment. *What could you do that would be a welcome surprise?*

Adversity exercises the creative muscle. Beca is an introverted, introspective and independent soul. Her dream is to pursue a career in music *making*, not music performing. That's why she works the overnight shift the school radio station and spends her spare time making mashup mixes of popular songs. That's her creativity territory. But when necessity comes knocking at her door, she has no choice but to get out from behind the computer, get up in front of complete strangers, and crack herself wide open. This scene is a deeply vulnerable moment. But most auditions are like that. They cold, unfamiliar and intimate. And that's a good thing. Because no artist will ever come to discover themselves except as a outcome of *disclosing* themselves to others. Creativity is a series of long, meandering journeys of discovery. And the more detours we take, the better. It shapes our work. Carlin once said that if you don't get up in front of people every day of your life, you'll never learn who you are. He's right. Without a collision between our work and the outside world, we're the tree in the forest that nobody hears. *Are you avoiding the emotional risk associated with live encounters?*

It costs nothing to encourage. Every artist needs that first person to take them seriously. Someone who believes in them more than they believe in themselves. Someone to make their creative experience immediately available to them. Even if that person only comes into their life for a brief moment. I remember the first presentation I ever gave about wearing nametags. After my talk, a retired octogenarian surgeon from the audience approached the stage, pulled me aside, looked me straight in the eye and said, *you need to quit your job and become a public speaker*. Talk about market feedback. Truth is, I wasn't expecting to hit a homerun on that day. I was just grateful for the chance to play. Fortunately, the good doctor helped show me what I couldn't see for myself. And it change the trajectory of my career forever. That single decisive interaction compelled me to take a massive risk in my creative life, the dividends of which I'm still collecting today. *Who was the first stand for your greatness?*

074 -- THE SEMINAR SCENE FROM LITTLE MISS SUNSHINE

Anchor what you create to probability. Every artist works in the dark. Everything we make is an arrow shot into eternity. And every time we share our work with the world, there's no telling which pieces will get heard, paid, recognized or criticized. It's just another day of dropping the rose petal down a canyon, waiting for the echo. The hard part is, sometimes the echo vibrates instantly, stroking our egos and satisfying our need for immediate gratification. Often times the echo sounds completely different than we anticipated, illuminating an unexpected vision of our creative future. And other times the echo never comes at all, humbly reminding us that so many things in life just go away. That's art. We're making public bets with our imagination. The joy has to come from the work itself, not the impression it makes on the world. And if something doesn't succeed, we keep adding to the collection. We keep increasing our creative capital. Because while every rose has its thorn, not every petal has its echo. Sometimes all we hear at the end of our performance are a few chairs scraping the community college floor. *Are you looking within to validate your work, or letting others define your reality?*

What's the sound of no hands clapping? Richard is striving to build a career as a motivational speaker and life coach. He maintains unshakeable confidence in his personal development program, which preaches mantras like *leaving loserhood* and *rejecting rejection*. But the marketplace views his philosophy as annoyingly unoriginal. His business partner says that nobody is interested in turning his nine step program into a book. And yet, he vows to redouble his efforts. He never gives up. He even takes a moped over to his partner's hotel and confronts him, but to no avail. Richard's character is completely pathetic, and that's why you empathize with him. Because every performer has been there before. We're convinced our work will evoke an active resonance, only to watch it garner a dull thud. We're anticipating watching the crowd reach new heights of hysteria, only to watch them staring down at their phones the whole time. It's all part of the inevitable mindfuckery of the creative process. And the best way to inoculate ourselves against that devastation is to expect nothing. To release our addiction to outcomes. *Are you still living life perpetually poised in a ballet of expectation?*

Will my sweat be sold as elixir? Richard is living life on spec. Living and dying by every gig he gets. But the ambient pressure of not knowing where his next meal is coming from is starting to wear on him. And if he doesn't solve the problem of livelihood and secure a measure of comfort soon, his family will be in a world of pain. Sound familiar? Most artists can relate. Because we all live in fear of the work drying up. We all understand feast or famine cycles. We all know how it feels tossing coins in the wishing well, hoping bills will float to the surface. *It's murder out there.* And so, every creator needs to keep one eye cocked to the commercial possibilities of their work. Because despite our romantic and altruistic wirings, if we're not prepared to

pursue any financial avenues that are available to us, we may not be able to underwrite our creative endeavors. The secret, then, is working out our own brand of compromise. Reconciling our own commercial efforts. Doing what it takes to still be okay with ourselves. Eddie Izzard, standup comedian, actor and writer, recently said during an [interview](#) that he was a creative as opposed to a capitalist. Capitalists make things to make money, he said, but creatives make money to make things. Now there's a brand of compromise I could get behind. *Are you remembering to resolve the economic problem of livelihood?*

075 -- THE DEADLINE SCENE FROM ALMOST FAMOUS

See moods as an invitation to create. William has everything he needs to create. A quiet office, a blank page, a looming deadline, a jazz record, a cup of coffee, a candy bar, a memory bank of experiences and stack of polaroids to memorialize the adventure. His primary **creative environment** is fully intact. But what he doesn't realize is, he has his mood. His feelings. His current headspace. *Uncoolness. Disappointment. Anxiety.* Lester helps him understand that these are the truest tools for giving shape and forward motion to something. All he has to do is bleed them onto the page. I can completely relate to his predicament. Whenever I'm feeling whipped between disappointment and exhilaration, whenever I'm drowning in doubt, whenever my mind tries to shut the door on joy, I can always create. I can always metabolize my emotions into something interesting. Even if the outcome isn't perfect or good or worth sharing, as long as it delivers me from meaninglessness, all is well with the world. That's the thing about mood. It's not meant to be ignored, it's meant to be invested. *Is your process of creation dictated by mood or derailed by it?*

Weird is the new normal. Lester says the only true currency in this bankrupt world is what we share with someone else when we're uncool. *Best line of the movie.* And what's interesting is, at the time of the film's release, that insight was more prophetic than we realized. Because little did those classic rockers know, forty years later, the mass market would be dead. The freaks would inherit the earth. The weird would become the many. And uncool would go mainstream. This is perhaps the greatest advantage of being an artist today. Nobody has to be weird in a corner anymore. In the space where technology and sociology intersect, where physical proximity has been removed as a gating factor to connection, each of us can make our home in the world through a culture we participate in. We can even nominate ourselves as leaders in that culture. If we want to start a meetup group in our living room where local bluegrass songwriters can come to share their tunes with fellow dandelion wine drinking eccentrics, we can do just that. All it takes is an internet connection, fifty bucks and a desire to discover kindred spirits. And so, weirdness no longer has to be a constraint to creativity. It can be a catapult. *Are you sniffing out and connecting with resonant identities?*

Procrastination in disguise. William is trapped in planning mode. Like most novice creators, he's spending half his time planning for things he *could* create, if only he didn't spend half his timing planning. It's classic energy mismanagement. And every artist has been there before. I remember having a similar phone call with a friend of mine about ten years ago. I was on deadline for a project, and completely stifled. But after about ten minutes of complaining, Kate said something I'll never forget. *Stop planning and just write.* My heart dropped into my stomach. Could it really be that simple? Is it possible I'm overthinking this process? Unquestionably. Failure in creativity doesn't come from poor planning, it comes from the timidity to proceed. Planning is a four letter word. It's just another way to manufacture mental monsters that keep you from achieving. I have colleagues who have been planning to write, literally for a decade. But because they spend all their energy talking about their ideas, when the time comes to execute those ideas, they've already depleted all their stamina reserves. It infuriates me. Don't let it happen to you. *Are you making goods out of your ideas or gods out of your plans?*

076 -- THE PENCIL SCENE FROM DARK KNIGHT

You are what you charge. Years ago, one of my books was featured in a major international publication. I was so elated, I nearly pissed myself. And I remember buying a copy from the newsstand and bringing it to my mentor's office. He took one look at the article and said, *you just doubled your fee*. Really? Just like that? Turns out, he was right. Artists raise their fee when they raise their value. Not when they need to make more money. Not when their landlord hikes up the rent. Not when the client offers to pay more. And not when their friends start raising their fees. When they *raise their value*. And so, the goal is to constantly seek out experiences and projects and accomplishments worth pointing to. Opportunities that raise your value, no matter what. That way, your self worth is not subject to negotiation. That way, when you pull your chair up to the table, there's no guilt around asking to be paid what you're worth. Joker may be an insane, evil freak, but he's also a criminal mastermind with a sound, lucid strategy for solving the mob's jurisdiction problem. Joker knows his value, and he asks to be compensated accordingly. Because if you're good at something, never do it for free. *Does a lower fee make you more affordable, or less attractive?*

Schedule time to do business. Watterson famously said that his purpose in writing cartoons was to say things, not to sell things. I've always felt the same way, although as I grow as a creator, I know that every artist has to admit they're in business for themselves. If we intend to contribute to the world's reservoir of truth and beauty, we should also intend that the world contributes to *our* reservoir of dollars and cents. Otherwise our overriding sense of mission prevents me from doing business. When I first started my company, I knew money was the inevitable hurdle I was going to have to vault. And so, my mentor forced me to spend two hours a day, every day, asking customers to buy. In person, over the phone, via email, it didn't matter. Ever morning from nine to eleven, I put on my sales hat. And I hated every goddamn minute of it. Assigning monetary value to my intellectual property tied my guts into knots. In fact, every time I picked up the phone, I prayed for my call to go to voicemail. But that standing daily appointment was exactly what I needed to grow as an artist. Joker, on the other hand, doesn't have such anxieties. He saunters into the room laughing and doing magic tricks. Those mobsters didn't stand a chance. We should all be so confident in the selling arena. *Is the problem that they can't afford you, or that they don't understand how they can afford you?*

What business could you be in? Everyone diversifies. Even comic book villains. Being religious about how you make your money is the quickest way to go out of business. Successful artists and creators engage the muscle of yes. Instead of locking themselves into limited concepts of how they earn, they stay engaged with the growing list of financial avenues that are available to them. The modern musician, for example, can make money in any number of venues, including giving music lessons, performing at church services, playing background music for theater, releasing albums under

multiple monikers, selling songs to other artists, managing other musicians, earning online streaming royalties, building digital products and subscription programs, writing commissioned pieces, arrange charts for bands, selling band merchandise, writing sheet music, selling songs to music libraries, creating ringtones, earning collaboration royalties, selling website advertising and licensing songs for commercials. As long as they keep a finger on the pulse of their various streams of musician income, they can stay afloat. Because every opportunity is another chance to get paid to do the things they love. *Are you governing your growth by insisting you never diversify?*

077 -- THE PORCH SCENE FROM SIDWAYS

Excessive quantities can reduce the yield. Several years ago, I reached a point of *diminishing creative returns* as a writer. I was making one lateral move after another. Running up the score on my creative resume, but never graduating to a whole new level of judgment and wisdom and perspective. Repeating a proven formula for success, but never growing into unknown territory and creating something new. It was a painful place to arrive as an artist. Like the veteran employee who discovers she doesn't have ten years of experience, but one year of experience, ten times. *Ouch*. And so, I made a deal with myself. If I'm going to execute, I *have* to elevate. Volume can't be the only boat that rises with the creative tide. If I'm going to continue my artistic journey, I have to do so ways that excite and exhilarate me. As a result of this commitment, my entire creative horizon shifted. I started working bigger. The projects grew more ambitious. Instead of just recording another studio album, I began writing, producing and starring in a concert documentary. Instead of just writing another business book, I started building an innovative intellectual property development system. That's elevation. Like a fine wine, constantly evolving and gaining complexity. *Are you creating things that call on more of your essence?*

Evolving yourself always and forever too. A pinot grape is surprisingly similar to the artist's personality. Both are thin skinned, temperamental, and require constant care and attention. Both require a deep understanding of an asset's individual potential. And both need a certain amount of coaxing into their fullest expression. But where they differ is in their process of growth. Because once a wine peaks, it begins its steady, inevitable decline, and eventually becomes undrinkable. Artists, on the other hand, don't have to suffer the same kind of demise. It's never too late to reinvent themselves. Consider the touring musician, who moves from city to city, repeating the same set list over and over, but never really evolves as an artist. Consider the standup comic, who always does the same material, but never uncovers new layers of himself. Consider the movie actor, who rides her famous catchphrase for an entire career, but never steps into new, challenging roles. Each of these artists *could* evolve if they wanted to, but they don't. And their recycled material starts to feel reheated quickly. It's a shame. **Fuller** was right when he said the rigid, the fixed and the unmovable will snap, crackle and crumble, unable to bend with the winds of evolution. *What are you holding onto that no longer serves you?*

An index of your human value system. Wine is a living, breathing organism. If you opened a bottle today, it might taste completely different than if you opened it on any other day. And yet, the wine is still true to its roots. Quite literally. It's yet another interesting parallel between grapes and art. I'm reminded of my mentor's words, who once told me that's it's possible to repeat yourself, but without saying the same thing twice. That piece of advice never left me. It became constant mental note to always push myself to create something different than the day before. To continue dipping

my toes into new subjects while still staying true to the parameters of my **engine and values**. And to remember that books only fill one shelf of my creative room. That's the whole point of building a body of work. Executing themes in our projects so our art is less random, and more of a representation of our feelings and ideas and sense of life. *What kind of structure can you place around your creative routine to make sure you're executing against your value system?*

078 -- THE BLOCKING SCENE FROM KARATE KID

The crucial calorie burning experience. In the industrial revolution, we fulfilled critical economic functions by engaging in unpleasant and inconspicuous production. We knew that in the future, we would have great rewards for our labor if we suffered now. And so, we burned calories when nobody was watching, developed the blue collar, middle class work ethic and birthed capitalism. Fast forward two hundred years, and now we're incapable of deferring our gratification. We're obsessed with convenience. We're addicted to the sweet nectar of instantaneity. And we're habituated to sacrifice the permanent on the altar of the immediate. Daniel's training starts with menial chores that make him feel like a slave. But after a week, he realizes those actions helped him learn defensive blocks through muscle memory. Miyagi couldn't teach him those moves on day one. Daniel wasn't ready. He hadn't done the work yet. Only through pain of hard labor, of inconspicuous production, was he in a position to reap the rewards. That's what every creator needs. An initial calorie burning experience to set the stage for success. An *industrious revolution*, if you will, to humbly build their physical and emotional calluses. *Are you seeking long term fulfillment or short term gratification?*

Choose to make it hard for yourself. The problem with delayed gratification is, it's harder to enjoy, learn, value and integrate into our identities than instant gratification. It's uphill psychological work. It tests our self worth. And since modern culture demands and even *rewards* instantaneity, what's the point? Well, for starters, delayed gratification, affords us the opportunity to daydream, to wonder and to whimsy. Engaging in long periods of watchful waiting has been **clinically proven** to create a rich emotional inner life of romantic imaginings. And so, it's one of the ways we advance our artistic maturity and emotional intelligence. What's more, a capacity for delayed gratification makes it possible for us to aspire to objectives and dreams that others would disregard. Amazon is a prime example, no pun intended. They're slowly building a physical presence across the nation, adding warehouses and pickup locations and, for the first time in history, giving big box retailers a competitor to be scared of. Bezos is a artist and capitalist, but he's also an incrementalist. He understands delayed gratification. And he has no problem playing a game to wait out the world. Proving, that the greatest advantage is to not need it right now. *How can you contribute to your reserve of patience?*

Beware of downhill psychological work. This movie came out thirty years ago. But these day, our culture places a premium on instant gratification. If something isn't *perfect, now* and *free*, we're not interested. And the problem is, we're creating a new generation of artists devoid of determination. Consider the modern musician. She worries about being famous, not being good. She want to be a rockstar, but she doesn't want to learn the chords. And so, her craving for instant gratification pushed her to cut the wrong corners. Is it any wonder she becomes so frustrated with the music business? If only she understood, we can't microwave everything. As much as our

ingrained impatience demands immediate results, all artmaking requires labor, time, patience, rejection, discipline, commitment and grit. Daniel's journey is filled with every one of those things, but because his character learns to accept periods of minimal progress along the windy road to success, he wins the tournament, gets the girl and gains newfound respect from his nemesis. Wax on, wax off, indeed. *What inspires your persistence and determination?*

079 -- THE SKATING SCENE FROM AIRBORNE

A return to the self. Mitchell is a fish out of water. A free spirited, easy going surfer dude who's stuck in a gritty, midwest blue collar town. He feels trapped to the point of claustrophobia. He's bereft of inspiration. And if he doesn't reconnect with spirit soon, he may stop breathing. But the moment his blades arrive in the mail, he makes a break for freedom. The minute he starts skating again, he comes back home to pure expression, pure creation. Rejoining the only world he's ever known and felt home in. And so, the beauty of this scene isn't just the incredible stunt work, but the reminder that we all need our own version of skating. The place where our soul finds expression. The activity that upholds how we belong to the world. And we need to go there regularly. Because after too long without existing in a manner that makes sense to us, we start to get twitchy. The longer we neglect the fire the more we are overcome by the smoke. What's more, our restlessness can reach a point where it becomes a visible problem for the people around us. *What experience brings a measure of coherence back to your life?*

Find your culture's binding agent. Skater boy has officially entered flow state. His tricks are colorful and inventive and spontaneous and uninhibited. And as a result, his creative expression gives others freedom to express *themselves*. His energy becomes the permission slip for individual personality to shine. But he doesn't just attract fellow bladers, his followers are cyclists and skaters and athletes of all sizes, styles and skill levels. That's the higher purpose of creativity. Not just to make stuff, but to connect people. To create a shared culture, captures where people have landed and encapsulate everyone's edges. When I worked at the campus radio station in college, I experienced a similar sense of community. Nobody cared where you came from or what your major was or who your parents were. All that mattered was the music. Music was how we processed existence. Music was what made life possible. Music was what loosened the lid on the social jar. Music was what restored us to ourselves. Everything else flowed out from there. *How much time do you spend with people who inspire you?*

My love will wear you down eventually. Mitchell manages to endear a change of heart from the other students, help his team win the skating race, earns the respect of the school bully, and of course, gets the girl. Classic narrative. And the secret is, all of that happens because he finally finds a home for his portfolio of talents. Instead of working small, hiding his light under a bushel, laying low until the end of the semester, he lets it rip. He finds a way to join the club, but to belong on his own terms. It's a compelling example of *outofstepness*, in which an existential outsider feels unhoused and not fully at home in the world, so he makes art to make sense of that world. But what's really interesting is, while Mitchell has distaste for the society in which he lives, and disdain for the people who live in it, he doesn't take such an individualistic stance that he completely alienates himself socially. He still brings outsider energy to his social interactions, but there's a balance. A shared acceptance of the status quo. A willingness to dance at the party he was thrown into. *Is your outsider posture getting in the way of authentic, human connection?*

080 -- THE INTERVIEW SCENE FROM POLLACK

Rituals to accompany your creative journey. Pollack works from within. He trusts himself. He knows that in the creative process, nothing is guaranteed, but nothing is gained by predicting the worse, either. So why dismiss rather than affirm his chances? He proves that only when we point ourselves in the direction of possibility, optimistically announcing that our internal, external and cosmic resources are available to us, do we increase the odds of success. When I started my career as a writer, I began using a series of affirmations and short cognitions. They pointed my mind in the direction I wanted it to go. They talked me into a more trusting frame of mind. And they loosened the grip of my negative thoughts. One example from my daily centering sequence is the phrase *I trust my resources*. When I recite those four words throughout the day, I draw a single deep breath, using my respiration as a ten second container for that specific thought, matching the rhythm of my respiration to the symmetry of the words. It's a small, simple tool, but it works wonders because of accumulation. Like any routine practiced multiple times a day for several years, it has a profound effect on your mindset. *What ritual could you employ to intentionally support your ability to trust yourself?*

Trust comes from experience. In the water purification process, the goal is to remove all the undesirable chemicals, biological contaminants and gases before the water is fit for human consumption. Interestingly, trusting yourself works the same way. In order to keep trust alive, you must start with making yourself trustworthy. Meaning, you have to endure a *process* that removes the mental contaminants, like doubt and fear and anxiety, which prevent you from trusting yourself. And that purification process, of course, is *creating art*. Repetition. Dedicated practice. Daily discipline. Accumulating a track record of trustworthy behaviors that make you more likely to believe in yourself. Pollack trusted his unique style of drip painting, but only because he first spent so many years experimenting with novel tools like enamels and sticks and basting syringes and paint applicators. That was his purification process. He was building a bank of experience that deepened and broadened his trustworthiness. By staying in motion, continually creating everyday, he ultimately accumulated enough experience to trust himself. *Do you spend your time building up your strength or worrying about whether or not you're going to become successful?*

We become what we expect. When you trust ourselves, we tend to prove ourselves right. When we believe in the availability of our own answers, they tend to show up at the right time. That's how expectation works. It's not magic, it's a psychological primer for future performance. It's been scientifically proven that there's a positive correlation between expectation and performance. And so, if we proclaim ourselves as creative and prolific and artistic, then we're already ahead of the game. What if, then, we started each day of work from the sure place that we were artists, no matter how our current projects were going, no matter what we saw on the page in front of us? What if we announced to ourselves that we were well equipped with sufficient internal assets to be

successful? These sorts of expectations can have a profound effect on our attitudes. The point is, we can't always wait for overwhelming evidence to trust ourselves. Sometimes we just have to act as if. *Do you have a deep belief that everything you've experienced in your life, up until this very moment, will sufficiently support whatever you do in the next moment?*

081 -- THE DOORWAY SCENE FROM AS GOOD AS IT GETS

Build a routine and ride it. The worst advice in the world is when someone tells you to *just do it*. Because as profound and simple and honest as those three words may be, they're not especially useful for the struggling artist. Fact is, if *just doing it* was all it was going to take, you would have just done it by now. Unfortunately, the creative process is a bit more complex than a shoe commercial. I'm reminded of a writer friend of mine who recently asked what he could do to overcome his creative block. Part of me wanted to smack him on the back of the head and tell him just do it, but I knew that wouldn't be helpful. And so, I asked him the same question I ask everyone in his situation: What's your writing schedule? His answer was, sometimes he writes in the mornings, sometimes he writes in the evenings, and on and on. I interrupted him and said sometimes wasn't a schedule. We both had a good laugh. But together we realized, every artist needs to build a routine and ride it. Even if that means shutting out the neighbors. After all, the creating we don't do today is lost forever. *When was the last time you sat uninterrupted and quiet with just your thoughts?*

Create your own standards of discipline. Vonnegut famously said that the triumph of most things is a matter of organization. What's interesting is, he was talking about morality. About good versus evil. Angels and mobsters and the like. And yet, his advice perfectly applies to the physical organization required to thrive as a creator and communicator of ideas. Because we all need a secure base to operate from. We all need reliable containers for the energies rising within us. Melvin may be an obsessive compulsive, disdainful, unlikable pain in the ass, but you've got to hand it him, the man knows how to keep a schedule. Ridiculous as his routine may be, it's still a helpful lesson for creators. Especially those of us who work out of our homes. We have no choice but to create our own standards of discipline. Every day, we have to set up narrow parameters that keep our productivity in check, but also create just enough room to be free and play. *Which routines naturally call forth your most productive, enjoyable and concentrated abilities?*

Train yourself to deal with bad conditions. I've spent the majority of my adult life working at home. And despite my best efforts to inoculate myself against distractions and interruptions, I accepted the fact that there will always be a barking dog down the hall, a construction crew hammering down the street, or a retired neighbor who smokes pot in the bathroom right after lunch. That's my life sentence as a writer, and I've made peace with it. Melvin, on the other hand, is unable to withstand the external pressures that attempt to deter him from his productive path. As a result of his obsessive compulsive disorder, he insists on working under ideal conditions. But as a result of that routine, his perfectly crafted creative nirvana, he's not mentally and physically prepared to cope with the unusual events that transpire during the movie. And therein lies the lesson. Instead of trying to swim against the disruptive current, what we should do is systematically practice with distractions. Intentionally surround our creative process with obstacles, embrace the distractions and find the inner focus that exists regardless of the external environment. *How could you become so accustomed to stress, distractions, and pressure, that they no longer phase you?*

082 -- THE BAR SCENE FROM INTO THE WILD

Use baitless hooks. Edison famously built his own private fishing pier so he could have a place to be alone with his thoughts each day. What's interesting his, he never used bait. Just a hook. That's how process oriented he was. That's how detached from outcomes he was. To him, fishing wasn't about reeling in dinner, it was about reveling in the experience. Alex seeks a similar existence. A life of single minded immersion. His dream is to trade his traditional achievement orientation—working as a means for achieving an ends—for his coveted adventure orientation, which is living in the moment and being one with nature. And so, the question becomes, can the modern artist live this way? Can the creator of ideas, a responsible person who wants to make art but also wants to pay the bills, afford to fish with baitless hooks? It's hard to say. Because you can't neglect your basic needs. Everyone has to resolve the problem of livelihood. And that's the challenge with transcendentalism. It's romantic and admirable and interesting, but not always the most practical way to live. *How do you balance your need for achievement with your desire for adventure?*

Love the work more than what it produces. Making an idea real takes consistent, persistent application of energy toward that idea. And that takes time. Lots of it. And so, for the sake of our sanities, we may as well discover the ecstasy within the process itself. We may as well embrace the sublime joy of seeing things come together to produce an artistic whole. Detaching from outcomes in this way help keep us focused on the creative process, not what creativity produces. In fact, contemporary flow research shows that creators and performers are actually motivated by the quality of the experience they feel when you are involved with the activity, not the end result. They operate from an *autotelic* mindset, meaning they enjoy the process of creation for its own sake. Alex is an inspiring example of someone completely engrossed in the moment. Someone who knows the journey *is* the destination. I'm reminded of something my mentor used to say. It's not the book, it's the person you become by writing it. And the best part is, that principle applies to any creative project. Because the medium we're working with is ourselves. *Is the present moment your friend or your enemy?*

A look back at all those times the world didn't end. This movie stirs up boundary issues for me. Alex reminds me to always wonder, is this an opportunity, or an opportunity to be used? Is this going to bring me closer to success, or is this everyone else's agenda for my time? Boundaries, after all, determine how others will treat us. They define what we are and are not responsible for. And if we don't set them for ourselves, others will set them for us. Most artists struggle with this issue at one time or another. They're terrified of containing the access people have to them, depriving themselves of the many pulls on their time an attention. But the thing about boundaries is, it's not being irresponsible to our work or our relationships, it's being responsible to ourselves. In my late twenties, I used to take mini sabbaticals. I'd spend a few days in

a cabin in the mountains, free from the burdens of technology, completely cut off from the world. And it was difficult. As someone who's genetically wired for hard work, one of the hardest things to do is nothing. Especially when that next email might be a paying client. But what I realized is, my life doesn't need to revolve around one pseudo digital crisis after another. Most of the world is not sitting on the edge of their seats, eagerly anticipating my every move. *What would a radical level of self care look like for you?*

083 -- THE RECRUITER SCENE FROM RISKY BUSINESS

Creators have to cut their own channels. This movie reminds me of an inspiring [story](#) about a wild food forager. His local farmer's market wouldn't permit him to become a vendor because he wasn't the primary producer of the food sold. And so, he created his own market. Literally. He began offering wild food walks in the region, wild mushroom adventures and workshops, acorn classes, local fishing tours, and most excitingly, community supported foraging. This underground marketplace that was a private, members only club, that charged a nominal entrance fee and offered a wide selection of locally foraged foods. Within six months, the market had exploded to thousands of members, ultimately creating a middle ground for vendors who didn't want or weren't ready to sell their foods through larger institutions. It may have been risky business, but the dividends were worth it. *Is your work created in response to demands of the market or demands of the gift inside of you?*

Don't let the market call the tune. Joel doesn't have the grade point average, test scores or class rank to gain admission to the ivy league. The recruiter is visibly unimpressed by his resume. Then again, let's not forget his work at the school of hard knocks. Joel deals in human fulfillment. He grossed over eight thousand dollars in one night. That's one hell of an extra curricular experience. What's interesting is, at the end of the movie, Joel's father comes up to him and excitedly informs him that the recruiter was satisfied with the interview and said their university could use a guy like him. Not because he was ivy league material, but because he was a fully functioning, independent adult. *Time of your life, huh kid?* Joel hired himself. He created an environment of unlimited possibility instead of accepting a blueprint of inherited options. He acted without feeling dependent on circumstances, without having to wait for events to align in his favor. A reminder that it is our work that creates the market, not the other way around. *Are you letting the market call the tune of your creative symphony?*

The revolution of the willing. Losing your virginity isn't about sex and it isn't about loss. It's about coming of age, pardon the pun. And so, the larger story of this movie is about a guy, inexperienced and uninformed, who uncovers a stepping stone to a new level of awareness and maturity about himself and the world in which he lives. Joel's personal transformation is a beautiful thing. A rite of passage. A healthy human milestone. And while it is the end of the innocence, it's also the beginning of opportunity. And that's why this is such a powerful scene. We're literally witnessing a person crossing the threshold into adulthood. The ringing phones, the loyal customers, the zealous fans, the sexy girlfriend, the lit cigarette, the cool guy glasses, they're all markers. Artifacts. Symbols of transformation from a shy mama's boy into an enterprising, savvy young man. This is his moment of conception. Joel is like the metal alloy that, once yielded, will never return to his original shape. He joined the revolution of the willing and he's never looking back. *How aware are you of priceless learning opportunities.*

084 -- THE MONTY HALL SCENE FROM TWENTY ONE

The product of picking a good system. I love this movie because it's not about luck, it's about math. That's why every artist should watch it. Because luck, more often than not, is simply a matter of volume. Basic probability. For example, if you pick from a bag that has forty red marbles and eighty blue marbles, which color are you more likely choice? *Blue*. Because there are twice as many. And so, the goal for creators is to build a system that increases our number of blue marbles. To pursue a conscious strategy that makes it easier for luck to find us. Jonathan Mann creates and publishes a new song and video each day. He's been doing this for years. And due to his vast quantity of material and speed of composition, he's built a massive body of work, earned critical acclaim and secured his career as a working professional songwriter. That's not luck, that's volume. In his career, each song is another blue marble. Mann has anchored what he creates to probability. And so, his success is a product of picking a good system and following it until luck finds him. It's an inspiring reminder that our economy rewards generosity. That there is no gift if there is no art. And that giving the first creation away makes the second one possible. If you work that way, there's no need to gamble. *Have you chosen a system that vastly increases your odds of getting lucky?*

Overcoming emotion with statistics. Artists tends to be emotional, impulsive creatures with a hypersensitive relationship to the world and a penchant for exaggeration and drama. But as the professor explains, if you don't know which door to open, it's best to keep emotions aside and let simple math get your ass into a brand new car. And so, our version of simple math is getting our units up. When in doubt, create. Because on the neverending list of things to do, creating more real work, executing more actual product and shipping more lasting value, in the unique way that only we can deliver, is always the our best bet. Again, simple probability. If we want to be in the right place at the right time, we need to be in a lot of places. Consistency plus volume. It's the only surefire path to creating a market wide hunger for our work. Even if we aren't necessarily creating *all* day, as long as we're creating everyday, art won't take as long to pay for itself as we originally thought. **Conroy** once wrote that he used books as instruments to force his way into the world. Perhaps each creator needs their own version of that to let the best have a real chance at them. *When you don't know which creative door to open, what's your default strategy?*

Mentoring is the real jackpot. Ben solved the statistics problem flawlessly. Then again, it could have been a fluke. One answer does not a genius make. So the professor investigates further. And after noticing a stunningly high score on his latest term paper, he connects the dots. He's found a winner. His next card counting superstar. And so, he coaxes him into join his blackjack team. And the rest is history. What's interesting is, Ben's character was based on a **real student**. A kid whose extracurricular gambling antics afforded him the opportunity to launch several startups, develop an engineering software product and work as a consultant to professional sports teams. All because the

professor saw something in him. That's another form of luck. Finding mentors at a time in your life when you're capable of listening. Encountering guides that give you new contexts from which to relate to the world. Of course, it's not entirely luck. There has to be something about you that will allow great mentoring to happen. *If you were starting your career over again, in what area would you want more mentoring?*

085 -- THE DEATH STAR SCENE FROM STAR WARS

Move matters to a higher ground. A pivotal moment in the creative journey is when we finally let go of the illusion that we can control anything. There is no control. There is only the work we make. Our job as creators is to put everything we've got into the task of creating, and then let it go. Our job is to focus on the labor, and then let everything else flow from there. Sound frightening? It most certainly is. But it's also freeing. Because there's a deep release and relief when we empty ourselves of expectation. And once we stop burning calories worrying about things we can't control, our mind is free to move matters to a higher ground. Specifically, to *principal creation*, which is the primary work unit of our creative process. Whether it's typing words on the screen, writing new melodies on the piano or clicking the shutter on the camera, principle creation, the one thing we can control, has finally become job number one. It's creative nirvana. The imperturbable stillness of mind after the fires of desire, aversion, and delusion have been extinguished. Luke is surrendering to the facts of existence. He shuts down his targeting computer and stops obsessing about hitting the target. And in return, he actually gains the energy and desire to achieve the impossible. *Are you focusing on outcomes or what needs to be done right now?*

Force nothing, allow your work to lead you. Luke has enemy fighters unloading on him from every direction, his master's words of wisdom ringing in the back of his mind, the base captain screaming into his headset and a limping, smoking droid hanging off the side of his jet. Talk about a crowded environment. Does your creative life ever feel like that? If so, that's normal. Because number of variables affecting any given outcome is near infinity. If we produce and publish our new landscape painting, for example, there's no telling how the marketplace will respond. They may give it an active resonance, a dull thud or a shattering silence. It's completely unpredictable. And so, do we really want to waste time trying to make that calculation? No. We're better off staying in motion, making more art, making more contributions to the world's reservoir of truth and beauty. That way, we can allow new opportunities find us through the attraction of working, not the agony of worrying. The point is, we can't make things happen the way we want. We can only create. *When was the last time a more interesting result happened when you decided to go with the flow?*

Just when you get there, there disappears. This four minutes of cinema is better than all of the sequels combined. I remember replaying this scene over and over again as a kid, and it still gives me goose bumps three decades later. What's interesting is, it wasn't until my late twenties until I truly understood the productive and calming power of letting go. Taoists call it the law of polarity, whereby any over determined action produces its exact opposite. Like quicksand, the more your struggle to get out, the deeper you sink. That concept will fundamentally alter the way you do your creative work. Learning how to turn toward anxiety, instead of trying to eradicate it. Learning how to view stress as a gift, not a condition. When you work a nontraditional job with erratic income, sporadic employment, feast or famine cycles and lack of job security, these kinds of strategies are the closest thing you'll ever find to the force. *Are you putting your enemy against the wall, only to force him to fight harder?*

086 -- THE FOCUS SCENE FROM DECONSTRUCTING HARRY

Your personal pause buttons. When the quality and frequency of your thoughts determines your livelihood, panic is always right around the corner. The life of the mind may be a dazzling and voluptuous operation, but it's also a territory for which there is no roadmap. And if you don't have a personal, portable toolbox for reducing the experience of anxiety on a moment's notice, you can end up overdosing on yourself. Harry feels like a blob and a blur, just like one of his fictional characters. His brain burns with the color of anxiety. And yet, the more he tries to calm himself down, the deeper he descends into an infinite loop of neurotic hell. Cookie, aptly named, knows exactly how to nourish her friend back to life. She has an armory of anxiety reduction strategies to talk him down, including drinking tea, eating snacks, holding hands, making jokes, telling stories, talking about sports, taking deep breaths, all of which help reassure, relax and restore him back into focus. If more of us had a toolbox like that t our disposal, panic would come and go like a revolving door. *What are you willing to try to heal yourself?*

Another game of blame roulette. When a subject starts to become fuzzy and soft and blurry, the default response is to blame the junky camera. Or the dirty lens. Or the inclement weather. That's the human instinct. We externalize blame. We expect the world to adjust to the distortion we've become. We artfully find all the ways everybody else was wrong, which makes you innocent through process of elimination. When the reality is, *we* are the one that need sharpening. *We* are the one making ourselves blurry. Which is both the profit and the peril of being a professional creator. Since we're the only ones here, should we fail to discipline ourselves, fall short on our goals or ship mediocre work when we know we could do better, there's no assistant to hide behind, no intern to scapegoat and no coworker to blame. Technically, it should be our fault and ours alone. Then again, who's going to find out? If we *don't* take the blame, it not like there's a boss or a supervisor or a manager standing over our desk, breathing down our necks. It's almost like our own private version of the honor system. We have to find ways to make the fuzziness our fault. *Are you building the emotional muscle of ownership along your creative journey?*

We are connoisseurs of chaos. Anxiety makes true creativity possible. If we were perfect, we wouldn't need to make art. And so, we acknowledge and accept that inner turbulence is part of the process. We give thanks for our psychological stirrings. But we also understand that the discipline of creating while anxious is essential to our success. That our sense of interior stability is what allows our work to thrive. Harry can't keep his peace from being stolen away by anxiety thieves, so he drinks and pops pills. Which certainly helps him return to homeostasis in the short term, but ultimately, it's a losing system. Because when creators give themselves a crutch they don't need, they develop a limp they shouldn't have. And so, what each artist needs is to develop an early warning system. A personal seismograph that helps us take preemptive action against impending inner turmoil, without the aid of outside influences. Because unfortunately, there won't always be a prostitute on the couch, standing by to give us a pep talk off our ledge of anxiety. Calmness is on us. *What positive coping mechanisms do you regularly use to lower your stress level?*

087 -- THE BUSKING SCENE FROM ONCE

This is what you've waited for. Watching a man surrender himself like that, screaming the top of his lungs, in the middle of the night, in the middle of the street, standing out in the cold, is the single most moving goddamn opening sequence of any movie I've ever seen. His voice isn't perfect, but who cares when you have goose bumps? Glen is a freight train of raw, naked emotion, which is exactly what ever songwriter should aspire to be. In fact, this scene ended up becoming *my* moment of conception. After we saw *Once* in its Broadway premiere, this musical was responsible for kickstarting a creative transformation in my own life. Glen's story inspired me to finally publish my original music online. Which urged me to crawl out of music hibernation. Which compelled me to start performing in public again. Which gave me a platform to play weekly concerts in my neighborhood park. Which provided me with a source of power I did not have before. Which inspired me write music that was more muscular and soulful. Which inspired me to write, produce, direct and star in my first concert [documentary](#). All from hearing one three minute song. Too bad I can't repay him. Guess I'll just have to pay it forward. Perhaps my work will inspire the next songwriter. *Which art inspires your art?*

A chance to even up the score. Glen explains that during the daytime, people want to hear songs that they know, songs that they recognize. And if he played this song, they wouldn't listen. That's a common conundrum among street performers. We're tempted to use other people's songs to lure in the crowds. Bu the reality is, there's no cover bands in the rock and roll hall of fame. If you want to make a name for yourself, you have to make your own music. And that's what the songwriter does throughout this movie. Once he lets the animal out of the cage, once he gives himself clearance to be completely free with his art, the one person who needs to hear his song, does. And she changes everything. The whole course of his life pivots on that encounter. She turns love around for him, and she does it in five days. That's the beauty of performing in public. There are no limits. It's a permissionless platform. An honest canvas where we can play and sing and purge whatever we want, as loud we want, as much as we want, and we stick around and continue to be yourself, eventually, the correct people will find us. *Will you still be around when the world is ready for you?*

There are no emergencies. I'm amazed at certain people's ability to involve themselves with every controversy, news story, celebrity scandal and inconsequential social drama the world has to offer. It's an addiction. An emotional high. A cycle of feeding off of other people's misfortune. Almost like they're leading someone else's life for a short period of time. And what's sad is, that time could be reinvested in making art. Bringing something new into the world. But instead, they allow the ambient hysteria to infect their brain and poison their creative well. They allow other people's drama to bait them into a life of worry. And that's what I love about this scene. Glen chooses to maintain a serene distance from most of life's commotion. He knows the more time he spends

participating in other people's drama, the less time he spends on himself. And so, he intentionally steps out of the current. He finds his sanctuary. He doesn't allow other people's shit to stand in the way of his art. What a great lesson for any creator. Impose your own order on chaos. *Have you found a way to prevent the world inside of you from being contaminated by the world outside of you?*

088 -- THE OPERATING SYSTEM SCENE FROM JOBS

Be okay being the only one who cares. I have a friend whose chief creative block is worrying whether or not anybody will care about his work. Which is understandable from a strategic business standpoint, but ultimately, that mindset doesn't serve his artistic efforts. It only adds a secondary layer of worries around his creative process. A smarter approach is to practice *selective indifference*. To save his hearts for the moments that matter. To care like crazy when it counts and let the rest go. To courageously say to himself, *who cares if anybody cares*, and make art because he wants to see it exist in the world. And keep in mind, selective indifference isn't about being too cool to care, it's about being discerning enough not to dwell. It's about refusing to push our creativity out to make room for all the backwards, soul killing mental traps that keep us from bringing new life to what might be. Because there will always time to be sensible later. Jobs knew better than anyone, nobody knows what nobody wants to see until somebody sees it. And people don't what they care about until somebody conjurers it into existence and makes them fall in love with it. *Are you looking to others to validate your efforts or your purpose?*

Give your work a singular quality. The greatest advantage in art is not giving a shit. Zeroing out our expectations about other people's desires. That's selective indifference at its finest, and it creates a unique brand of freedom unavailable anywhere else. Jobs became a legend for this very reason. He didn't hole up in his office, run a bunch of market research and wait around for customers tell him what they liked. He built the computer he wanted to see in the world. Instead of shipping another product that was a little bit different from the competition, he created a new standard with his art. And as a result, he captured the world's imagination with products we didn't know we needed, but suddenly couldn't live without. As it says in his [biography](#), his job was to figure out what customers were going to want before they did. *Sound impossible?* It's not. People do it everyday. Creators aren't just creating art, they're inventing entirely new genres, categories, mediums, platforms, industries, languages, classifications and styles for their art. There isn't an element of their work that isn't original. And it's not about talent, it's a matter of having the right amount of fearlessness, imagination and resourcefulness. *Are you reading things that are not yet on the creative page?*

The first sale is the one I make to myself. Our chief weapon as artists the convincing of ourselves. The internal monologue that inspires us, down to our bones, to believe in what we're making. If we don't believe that the art we're creating is the greatest thing that ever was, we're finished. If we don't think our work matters in a massive way, we're toast. And if we don't think our ideas are going to change people's lives forever, we're done. Jobs may have been a notorious asshole, but the man was sold on his own brand. And he kept making that sale to himself, every day, until he died. Did he believe too much of his own publicity? Probably. But creativity, at its most existential level, is about believing, against all odds and all evidence, that the art you're making is the

greatest thing that ever was. Jobs believed that in his bones. He personally embraced and internalized his vision. And that's why his famous new product introductions always seemed like epochal moments in world history. Proving, that if you want to jumpstart the audience, you have to make sure your battery is charged first. *How sold are you on your own brand?*

089 -- THE WOODY SCENE FROM I'M NOT THERE

Scratching itches early and often. Dylan's moment of conception is well documented. It started with a book. Guthrie's autobiography inspired him to begin mimicking the folk hero's speech patterns and songwriting style. And years later, when his idol became ill, the moment of conception continued. Dylan tracked down his hero at the psychiatric hospital, played a song he wrote just for him, and the tune was met with the legend's approval. *The rest was history.* Pardon the pun, but this scene strikes a chord with me. Growing up, I never needed to run away. I was fortunate enough to float on a tsunami of in house support. A family of joiners. People you don't even have to ask. People who believe saying yes to others is the ultimate love language. People who just want to be part of everything. Whatever you're doing, whatever you're thinking, whatever you're feeling, they're happy to be there. Physically, emotionally and spiritually. On board at a moment's notice. It's the opposite of pulling teeth. Relentless affirmation. Instant encouragement. Endless participation. Radical acceptance. You're never met with a tilted head. The point is, we all need a secure human base to operate from. People in our corner to support us. Even if it's just one person sitting in hospital bed, holding our highest vision in front of us. That can be enough to send an artist on a creative trajectory that lasts a lifetime. *What support system can you count on?*

Getting lost in somebody else's dream. The smartest move I made in the early years of my writing career was moving back in with my parents. Their support gave me something more valuable than money, namely, the ability to be brave. Since I had no debt to cover, no spouse to support, no kids to feed and no rent to pay, I could afford to invest every dollar I earned back into my business. I could take substantial risks with my creative work. And I could bear the brunt of failure without significant financial losses. Of course, that's not the norm for many creators. Dylan makes no mention of his family of origin or heritage in his own autobiography. As the movie portrays the mythology, he skipped town and fled across the country like an orphan with no direction home and only ten dollars in his pocket. And so, having grown up in a healthy, creatively nurturing community, it's hard for me to fathom the psychological damage young artists must experience when they're blinded by the dangling sword of family disapproval. Imagine trying to find your voice as an artist with a layer of disapproval over everything they do. Yet another reason to be sick with sweet gratitude for growing up with a solid support structure. *If your family would support anything you chose to do, what would you do?*

Quality is surprisingly overrated. Dylan couldn't sing. Or play guitar. But that didn't stop him from selling a hundred million records, rewriting the rule of pop music and becoming the most influential musical figure of the twentieth century. Proving, that talent is helpful, but sometimes, there are bigger creative fish to fry than simply being good. If your art represents something important, builds an emotional connection, tells a remarkable story, starts a movement, inspires a revolution, changes popular culture,

defies the norm, crosses categories, gives voice to a new generation or raises global consciousness, then *quality* is neither here nor there. Job number one is to create an exhibition of love through your art. Dylan knew that intuitively, that he didn't have to be great to get started, but he had to get started to become great. And that over time, his shortcomings would be eclipse by his mighty love. *Are you spending time increasing your talent or increasing your character?*

090 -- THE NEON SCENE FROM BLUE CHIPS

Learn to compress yourself. What I love about stiletto heels is, they concentrate a large amount of force into a small area. Mathematically, they have an area of about one sixteenth of a square inch per foot. But at the moment when only the heel rests on the ground, each foot exerts pressure of fifteen hundred psi. That's greater than that under the foot of an elephant. Stiletto heels, then, become the definitive symbol of compression. They remind us that our body of work doesn't fully serve us if we can't concentrate it into a tight little package. And so, part of our job as artists is creating *stiletto moments*, in which we demonstrate all of our skills at once. That's what makes our work stick. Because once we show people our accumulated record, not just bits and pieces; once we demonstrate the firepower of our creative arsenal, not just the weapon we're currently firing; and once we help people taste the full scope of our artistic power, not just the project of the moment, the world will know the depth of our creation. Neon's stiletto moment happens right there on that court. Within seconds, his size, speed, strength, agility and raw power are undeniable to anyone in attendance. He's mastered the art of compressing himself. *What hidden gift or talent might you have that deserves a more prominent place in your life?*

Lucky enough to get out of your ghetto. Neon has had a tragic life. He's an only child. His mother abandoned him. His father was a fisherman who got into boating accident and was eaten by an alligator. And to make matters worse, he lives in the sticks. His hood is so dangerous that people join the army just to go on vacation. But all of that tragedy is grist for his creative mill. That's why he owns the paint. Neon's raw talent is a product of his even rawer environment. Nobody's ever seen anybody like him before. In fact, he has the potential to become the most dominant center who ever played the game. But only if he's willing to play a game he's not used to playing. College hoops are a long way from street ball. And so, if he decides to compete at the college level, everything will change. Neon will have to study and take tests and practice with a coach and play nice with others and shed a false self that's made up of cultural constructs. Meanwhile, the people in community might become disenfranchised by his success. They might try to keep him in his lane forever, pardon the pun. That's what makes change so hard. It requires mourning and letting go of a portion of our identities. *Are you selling out or outgrowing your origins and changing direction proudly?*

Where my dreams begin to turn outward. Every once in a while, a player comes along who is so haunted by talent that we can barely look away. A once in a generation artist who makes us think, whoa, the world cannot be deprived of this person's magic. When I encounter people like this, I just want to run up and hug them until every drop of talent comes oozing out of their nose for all the world to see. What scares me, though, is that some of those talented people will never become as successful and happy as they could be, since they won't have the resources to take their talents on the ride they deserve. And so, it's our responsibility to show them the replay. To grab

them by the lapel and reveal what they can't see for themselves. And to tell them what they've done, why it matters, and why they need to keep taking shots, 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, they may never realize how bloody brilliant they really are. *Will you stand idly by while someone's talent gets trapped in a box?*

091 -- THE LOW RIDER SCENE FROM GONE IN SIXTY SECONDS

Inspiration is the ultimate survival mechanism. Ritual is a proven way to reduce anxiety. It's how artists mark the movement from the everyday rush of regular life into the calming focus of creative time. Randall's theme song fires up the team and prepares them for battle, but also ceremonially creates a calming environment to move them effortlessly into the trance of working. And even if they give him strange glances, they know he must be faithful to his own eccentric nature. The music is the associative trigger that creates the conditions to elicit his best work, and they have to respect that. The lesson, then, is that everything we do is part of the creative process. Even if we're sitting in stillness, entering into the appropriate state of mind to do our work, it all matters. People overlook the basics of a productive life. They try to complicate their creative processes with sophisticated systems and software programs and time saving tools, when the reality is, all they need to give shape and forward meaning to something, is a kick ass soundtrack. These are the simple rituals that reduce the experience of anxiety and lock us into peak creative performance. *Have you discover what your own inner ecology has to be in order for you to create?*

Anything that takes you back. Campbell famously said that all ritual is the enactment of a myth, and by participating in the ritual, you are participating in the myth. He was right. Ritual turns duty into celebration, turns tedium into meaning and turns disconnected events into an ongoing story. I don't know how people create without it. Personally, I can make almost any experience more meaningful by layering an intentional, purposeful and meaningful ritual on top of it. It's all in how you frame the activity. Randall's pregame ritual is a comprehensive multisensory experience. He thanks his teammates, which engages his heart through gratitude. He plays his favorite song, which engages his ears through sound. He lays out his custom tool roll, which engages his hands through touch. He unwraps his special car stealing jacket, which engages his nose through smell. And he incants an encouraging mantra to himself, which engages his spirit through meditation. That's how he creates an act of control in a moment of chaos. He may be a criminal, but he's also an inspiring example of how to ease into the creative process. *What rituals are you known for?*

Be a creator, not just an appreciator. What bothers me most about television is, we're spending thirty hours a week watching other people work. Instead of creating things from whole cloth, we're anesthetizing ourselves in front of a screen while *other* people are running restaurants, making moonshine, selling houses, designing dresses, driving trucks, writing comedy, fixing cars and chasing storms. Instead of getting to work ourselves, we're investing massive amounts of time and energy and emotion in other people's art, fetishizing *their* creative process, walking around *their* museums, engaging in endless conversations about *their* lives. Yes, being a fan is a necessary feature of the creative life. We still have to know what great art feels like. But as an artist, the only discipline that counts is the discipline to create regularly. It can have

no other meaning. Everything else is shadow work. Disciplining ourselves to publish sophisticated book reports of other people's work is commendable, but doesn't make us creators. If we want to get on with the real work of making real art in the real world, we need to create something from whole cloth. Something that's ours. Something that shows people how we see life. *Are you watching other people create or establishing routines of your own?*

092 -- THE CHUM SCENE FROM JAWS

Don't be stopped by not knowing how. Brody's expression in this scene is priceless. I remember the first time I looked into the eyes of that shark. I was horrified. They're definitely gonna need a bigger boat. What's interesting is, that particular line wasn't part of the original script. Schieder improvised it on set, and it became one of the most iconic quips in the history of film. Creativity is like that, though. From a neuroscientific perspective, acting in the face of uncertainty lights up the amygdala, the brain's center of fear and anxiety. It sends a surge of chemicals through our bodies that triggers the flight response. Uncertainty literally makes us want to run away. And yet, not knowing doesn't have to imprison the artistic spirit. In fact, it can set it free. Because once we admit that not everything can be resolved, once we make peace with the uncertain beating of our wings, we can stop wasting energy trying to find answers and start enjoying the questions. Keats called this *negative capability*. It's the skill of being in uncertainties, living with mysteries and dwelling in doubts, without reaching after fact and reason. It's the capacity of human beings to transcend and revise their contexts. The more of this negative capability we can develop, the easier it becomes to navigate the choppy, chummy waters of the creative process. *Are you converting uncertainty into fear or increased aliveness and alertness?*

We are obliged to carve their own paths. Spielberg actually thinks of himself as a nervous wreck. During a recent television [interview](#), he said that it didn't stem from fear, but more of anticipation of the unknown. A level of anxiety about not being able to write his life as well as he can write his movies. *Jesus*. Maybe he doesn't need a bigger boat, but a stronger one. Creators, after all, pay a hefty toll for their impulse to originate. The greater desire they have to create, the greater uncertainty they have to confront. The deeper their need to represent, the deeper their need to be resilient. And so, once someone gets a look at their great white for the first time, and once they accept the nature of the beast they're up against, victory is a matter of securing a strong foundation through *constants*. These are internal anchors of stability. Repeated daily experiences that allow creators to stand on firm ground. Whether they're places to return to, rituals to abide by, people to confide in, practices to rely on and structures to lean against, these constants are what keep a person's creative life stable and fruitful during times of uncertainty. They help them secure a measure of control in a world of chaos. *They build the proverbial bigger boat. Have you built a repertoire of faithful forces?*

Ambition can get expensive. Approximately three hundred million kernels of popcorn fell to the theater floor when this scene first appeared in the seventies. Cinema doesn't get much better. And yet, as I rewatched this scene a few times, a revelation occurred to me. Sometimes we don't need a bigger boat. Sometimes we need to turn the damn boat around, dock it, go home and get on with our lives. [Verey](#) famously wrote about this lack of negative capability. He talked about a man who would rather walk in false

lights than in mystery, someone who preferred the imposing completeness of a delusion rather than the broken fragments of truth. Quint's character is the prime example. He's become so enmeshed in his own survival agenda, so entombed in his complacency, and so identified with his own toughguy war hero persona, that he fails to comprehend the tangible consequences of his careless ignorance. It's not wonder the shark swallowed his ass whole. *Are you throwing a life jacket to something that's already sunk to the bottom of the ocean, or finding a new place to swim?*

093 -- THE STUDIO SCENE FROM HUSTLE & FLOW

Your mental bandwidth is worth more. Being prolific is more than what we do, it's what we avoid. It's the willingness to conserve our best energies for the activities that have leverage. Creativity, then, is a process of elimination. It's an ongoing effort to remove the constructs that stand in the way of production. There are *physical* ones, like watching television and going to meetings and attending seminars and getting sucked into the ego vortex of social media, each of which adds unnecessary demands on our time and attention. There are *philosophical* constructs, like permission and expectation and procrastination and anxiety, all of which add profound pressure and complication to our mental experience. And there are *personal* constructs, like saboteurs and drama queens and unsupportive friends and constitutionally incompatible partners, all of whom become obstacles that keep us from bringing new life to what might be. And so, the goal is to clean out as much of that plaque as we can, thus freeing up our expressive faculties to focus on principal creation. The primary unit of the creative process that requires focus and craft. In this movie's case, sweating it out in the studio, laying down tight hooks over dope beats. *Are you investing your valuable creative energy imagining personal battles, or executing physical assets?*

You don't need more you. Djay knows that trying to be creative alone is like trying to play basketball without a backboard. Without the ambient humanity of other artists, their nose gets pressed too hard against their own glass. Empathy, on the other hand, can become a profound source of creative inspiration. There's a fascinating study from the *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* which found that people are often more creative for others than for themselves. Turns out, when we distance ourselves and focus on someone else's problem, we become more expansive, our perspective broadens, and we become more flexible and abstract in our thought patterns. I'm reminded of a songwriting circle I recently attended. Each of us was sharing our struggles with various creative blocks. And then a guitarist played one of his unfinished tracks, searching for an interesting bridge idea to complete the piece. Within moments of sharing, three people almost jumped out of their chairs with suggestions for transition chords to use for the bridge. What was that you said about being blocked? And so, that's the creative potential of empathy. Once we stop stewing over our own circumstances and start contributing meaningfully to the growth and well being others, we create a tide that raises all boats. Because we cannot hold a torch to light another's creative path without brightening our own. *Are you locking yourself into concrete and rigid ways of thinking?*

Inspiration is the ultimate survival mechanism. Djay is stumbling but surviving. He's got problems with friends, family, girlfriends, prostitutes, policemen, competitors and even the radio stations. It really is hard out here for a pimp. But every artist goes through this. At one time or another, we all have a strong urge to abandon the process. Especially when the conditions are hot and muggy. But that's the difference between prolific creators and amateur dabblers. *Stamina.* Turning obstacles into aphrodisiacs.

Rekindling their persistence at a moment's notice. Despite the hideous betrayal of all our hopes, despite the persistent questions of whether it's worth the time and hardship to keep pursuing these creative project, we keep moving the story forward. We keep adding energy to the system. Because not every part of us has given up. Besides, it's certainly better than the alternative. Being an out of work artist is better than being an employed anything else. And a bad day creating always beats a good day pretending to care about somebody else's dream. *What inspires your persistence and determination?*

094 -- THE NUMBER SCENE FROM PI

Create a system for extending the mind. I've been categorizing and indexing the record of everything I've written for the past twelve years. That's my secret weapon as an artist. It's the trusted system that prevents me from holding too many ideas in my head. That way, my mind is free to think creatively about what's needed relative to those ideas. The only problem is, I feel unarmed without it. Going to work every morning without that structure is unimaginable to me. And so, I converted it into a **search engine**. A portable idea warehouse. A convenient tool for accessing my creative inventory. An external parking place for fleeting thoughts that helps keeps the flow of creative thinking going. Which isn't especially useful or interesting to anyone but me, but the experience of creating this system taught me a valuable lesson. The more outstanding thoughts that plague our consciousness, the harder is to think creatively. Hanging onto every idea is a low level task. It's not a prudent use of my brain's time and energy. Max, a man who suffers from hallucinations, cluster headaches, extreme paranoia and social anxiety disorder, is living proof that the mind is a terrible office. Unless he creates placeholders for his thinking, he'll never relieve the pressure from his psyche that frees it up for more valuable work, or, god forbid, a little peace and calm. *What's your system for clearing the deck and unsticking your workflow?*

Unprocessed ideas equal unnecessary stress. This film's low budget, blotchy visual style perfectly renders the maddening and claustrophobic intensity of living the cerebral life. In fact, watching the final scene where Max performs a frontal lobotomy on himself with a power drill, makes me never want to look at another math problem again. It's a gruesome lesson about the perils of the life of the mind, but a worthwhile one nonetheless. Truth is, until all of our ideas are collected somewhere other than our head, managed into trusted external systems, we just as vulnerable to psychological deterioration. Creators need to make room. To relieve their brain of the necessity of remembering. To free up their working memories and open themselves to receiving new ideas. And the easiest strategy for doing so is to establish a personal *ground zero*. This is the entry point into the creative processing **workflow**. The central cockpit of creative control. The primary location for offloading raw materials into the idea factory. It's the number one secret to having a healthy, productive and profitable thought life. Without a ground zero, it's impossible to move new ideas downstream so they can peacefully return to their natural state. *Are you trying to fool your own mind?*

The pedal driving your racing brain. In the final **scene** of the movie, a young girl approaches Max in the park asking math questions. But upon hearing the problem, the tortured genius actually smiles for the first time. He claims that he doesn't know the answer. And instead of obsessing about the patterns, he begins observing the trees blowing in the breeze. Max is finally at peace. He's now able to look upon the maddening complexity of the tree, but accept it as an unsolved problem. It's a powerful lesson that we can't neglect our non thinking life. Because if there's not enough whitespace around

our grey matter, our heads might explode. It's the difference between listening to the bird sing, and tormenting yourself trying to figure out what species of bird is singing. It's the difference between reading books for pleasure, and reading books to figure out the strategy and architecture and opportunities around the books. That's the mark of a mature creator. Someone who can resist the urge to snap them into thought mode. Someone who can transport themselves to mental place where they don't have to work. Someone who doesn't feel obligated to do anything other than just soak it all in. *How skilled at your at pressing the off button?*

095 -- THE VILLAGE SCENE FROM ROMANCING THE STONE

Keep adding to the collection. When you build a brand from the inside out, the market targets you. By creating enough good in the marketplace, you become the bullseye instead of the arrow. It's a simple formula. The volume of daily output, multiplied by originality of brand voice, divided by time, raised to the power of consistency, equals new opportunities that find you through the attraction of working. It's *reverse target marketing*, and it can only be created through incremental creative action. Let's use the example of an graphic illustrator. She spends two hours a day, just drawing. Expanding her portfolio. Adding energy to the system. Staying with herself as the world orbits around her. Because she trusts that each time a new piece is published and added to her body of work, that's one more brick in her foundation of experience. One more milestone passed. One more notch in her legacy belt. One more potential brand touch. One more extension of her sentiments. The accumulation of which eventually kicks open the door of opportunity. The painful part is, art takes a long time to pay for itself. There's no accounting for timing. Life has a mind of its own. Sometimes the door of opportunity doesn't swing open until we're stranded in a third world country with a gun to our heads. And so, all we can do is keep working. Keep interest up on a mass scale, and keep putting things up on the shelf. *What did you create today?*

The outflow is out of our control. Joan never could have foreseen having a loyal fan base in a small village south of the equator. But that's the experience of being a writer. Your creative river reaches places its source never knows. Which can be both a blessing and a curse, depending on your mindset. The ambient pressure of not knowing can be inspiring, but it can also spark internal panic. The process of anchoring what you create to probability can be an exhilarating dance, but it can also be profoundly exhausting. The daily shot into eternity can become beautiful horizon to point to, but it can also feel like you're just winking in the dark. And so, it's another exercise in trusting the process. Not waiting, necessarily, since waiting is remarkably taxing and provokes anxiety. But becoming at ease with the state of not knowing. Believing against all odds and all evidence that when the rivers of creative water flow out of us, they will reach in blessing to even the ends of the earth, regardless of how small the visible effects may be. *Are you giving up the moment before the miracle shows up?*

Take your truth direct to market. Anything that's a barrier to getting our work in people's hands is a problem. The goal as creators is to build as many bridges as possible between us and our audience. What's charming about this movie is, back in the eighties, authors had less to worry about. Joan wasn't laying in bed with desperation etched on her face, obsessively checking email on her phone, stressing herself out over distribution conundrums. She just wrote the books and got on with her life. Thirty years later, however, the marketplace is a little different. I recently released a series of eight digital books on the same day. But when the evil forces of technology decide to screw up my launch, I had to find a way to offer a standby version of my books

until the problem was resolved. The experience was infuriating, but it taught me a valuable lesson about giving people something to nosh on while you're scrambling in the kitchen. I learned that by intentionally creating this service event, I could deliver bonus value and come out stronger than if nothing happened. *How will you bridge the gap that exists between you and your potential audience?*

096 -- THE CHILDREN SCENE FROM ROYAL TANNENBAUMS

When in doubt, create. What I enjoyed most about this movie was seeing the kids tucked into a shell of their own obsessions and ambitions. Their collective creativity, initiative and resourcefulness was inspiring. Interestingly, this movie premiered when I was writing my own first book, which ultimately went viral before viral was viral. And so, as I started my career, I had two things going for me. A heap of attention and a heck of a brand. What I didn't have, however, was credibility. What I *lacked* was leverage. And that's why I didn't make any money my first three years in business. Fortunately, moving back in with my parents and working a part time job as a valet parker motivated me to start building assets. Lots of them. I began writing and writing and writing. All day, everyday. That was my life. I was ruthless. I lived and breathed and ate and shit writing. Because I knew that if I just kept contributing to my body of work, kept adding to the collection, kept adding energy to the system, kept building momentum, kept putting more things up on the shelf, after a few years, it would eventually pay off. And it did. Writing became the basis of all wealth. Volume became the ultimate catchall. Production became the linchpin that activated everything else. *What will you channel your intentions and ambitions into?*

Compete with yourself. Years ago, a colleague of mine advised against writing too many books. He said they would cannibalize each other. That I would saturate the marketplace. Then again, he hadn't written anything new in over a decade. Perhaps he was just projecting his own jealousy and procrastination onto me. Either way, I found the opposite to be true. Turns out, writing more books didn't cannibalize my brand, it only catapulted it. Maintaining continuity over the long haul is separated me from the pack. Proving, that the best way to beat the odds is with massive output. Margot follows the same philosophy. She's already an accomplished playwright at the age of fourteen. That's my favorite part of this scene. The wall filled with bookshelves. That image captured my imagination for two reasons. First, because I'm a collector. Books are literally part of my diet. And I never allow myself to be talked out of buying another one. Second, because I'm a creator. Books are part of my legacy. And I can't think of a more satisfying feeling than looking at a shelf filled with books that I wrote. If that makes me a cannibal, than so be it. *At what point do you no longer need other people to support the decisions you've made about your own reality?*

The formula for success is repeated failure. A few years ago, I released eight digital books in one day. The goal was to flip the digital bird to the mainstream publishing industry. Unfortunately, nobody paid any attention. Or money. Which really upset me. Interestingly, on the walk over to the chicken wing bar to eat my feelings on the day of their release, I bumped into one of my readers. She thanked me and said she had just downloaded every one of my new books. That encounter deleted the memory of the failure. It was like amnesia for the creative soul. It also taught me that failure is forgivable when you've already built a solid foundation of goodwill with an audience

who loves you. Because odds are, when the shit hits the fan, the people who matter most will respond from place of curiosity, not judgment. Instead of complaining, they'll reach out to make sure everything is okay and find out how they can help. That's the cool part about failure. When you do it publicly, people will gladly hold out their hands to help you get back on your feet. *Have you changed your mind about what constitutes failure?*

097 -- THE STANDUP SCENE FROM FUNNY PEOPLE

We all leave behind a trail of fail. I've written books that never sold, launched websites that were ignored, delivered performances that bombed, produced videos that were snubbed, executed products that tanked, even pitched a few television shows that were laughed at. *Big deal.* Creativity without failure, isn't. If you can't fail, it doesn't count. Failure is fertilizer. It's what makes us work harder, which makes us get better. And as long as we keep getting better, we become successful eventually. Besides, what's the worst thing that could happen if we *did* fail? People who never tried get to laugh at us? Fuck those people. Failure means we risked failure. Doing something makes us right. That's what I love about this character. George is a rich and successful and famous comedian, and yet, he throws himself into failure as a new and soaring creation. And nobody can stop him. As uncomfortable as this scene is to watch, it's still an inspiring reminder for the next generation of creators, people whose job it is to fail, repeatedly, until they don't. *What have your failures and missteps qualified you to do?*

Granting meaning to your failures. Shakespeare famously wrote that there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so. I've always loved that passage. It's ethical relativism at its most basic. But it's also a mature, stoic strategy for approaching failure. It's a reframing device that removes the subjective stain of judgment and expectation and projection and interpretation from our experiences. If a jewelry maker, for example, spends two hours forging a steel bracelet that winds up looking nothing like the original drawing, he could view the piece as a failure. He could allow his discouragement to globalize and devastate the whole of his experience. On the other hand, the designer could make the proclamation that there are no success or failures, only the consequences of experiments. And he could choose *not* to automatically assigning meaning to his experience, thus breaking the addictive cycle of interpretation. The point is, when you're a fundamentally affirmative, relentlessly optimistic person, failure is only as devastating as your lack of imagination. Just because you can't celebrate the victory, doesn't mean you can't celebrate the effort that went into the failure. *If your perception of and response to failure were reframed, what would you attempt to achieve?*

Fail often enough to get good. The reason standup comedy is so difficult is because it's a binary construct. It's like pregnancy. There's no preheat setting. You're either funny or you're not. The crowd is either laughing or they're not. *Period.* And so, not even the most seasoned veteran can hide behind the delusion that he's brilliant when he's bombing on stage live. Comedians are craftsmen. Their performances force them to reckon with the infallible judgment of reality, in a venue where their failures can't be interpreted away. But that's a good thing. It reminds the artist that greatness awaits, but only through the refining fire of failure. That when they fail in search of something bigger, it's easier to reconcile the discomfort of the moment. Because in the end, art is a long arc game. We can create for a lifetime. There is no expiration date on our imagination. And so, as long as we stay in the game long enough, we can eventually aggregate enough failures and experiences that failure is no longer on the table. In the meantime, we can celebrate the sincerity of the effort, the passion in its pursuits and the care in its execution. Even if nobody is laughing. *How can it be mathematically possible to fail at expressing yourself?*

098 -- THE TRAINWRECK SCENE FROM SUPER 8

Develop second order imagination. The prolific creator has a profound *opportunity agenda*, which is an inherent enterprise to notice creative opportunities, apply force and propel them into interesting directions. He is obliged to carve his own path. To build his own leverage. To penetrate his boredom with himself and engage his own interest, lest the first whiff of meaninglessness derails him as he stands in the void between projects. I remember the first time I strolled through the tunnel under the historic arch in my neighborhood park. The aesthetics were inspiring, the architecture was stunning and the acoustics were shattering. There was no way I wasn't coming back with my guitar. Three years later, I've not only become a weekly performer *in* that space, but I also wrote, produced, directed and starred in a concert documentary *about* that place. The point is, making art is work, but so is creating the opportunity to make it. Charles, the kid director of the low budget zombie movie, doesn't have that little voice inside of him that says *not you*. He's not waiting around for somebody to greenlight his creativity. He doesn't don't have to ask permission to innovate. And so, he takes his invaluable production value. That's second order imagination. *How could you manufacture your own creative opportunities?*

Embrace the importance of sustained movement. Charles may be obsessive as a director, but it's only because he's competing in a film festival against kids twice his age who have better stories and access to cars. Without production value, his movie has nothing. And while that particular phrase becomes annoying to hear over and over during the film, I can appreciate his plight as a creator. Because every project has its own version of this. Some idea, some moment, some opportunity, that's going to pass the artist by if he doesn't act on it, right now. Creativity, after all, isn't just knowing a good idea when you see it, it's executing that idea before anyone *else* sees it. Timing isn't everything, it's the only thing. That's the only way to extend your artistic reach. By grasping the significance of something, leaping on it with everything you've got, making sharp and decisive strokes without being sidetracked by secondary thought, and then trusting every purposeful action that follows, while maintaining deep belief that your initiative will be rewarded. Quick eyes, quicker feet. *What ideas do you have that you're afraid people will steal?*

Create a self to express first. If you have to resort to some gimmick to let people know you're still around, you're not really there. But if you keep doing things worth writing about, you will keep writing things worth talking about, and if you keep writing things worth talking about, you will always have an audience for your work. And so, I'm a firm believer in *gradualistic creativity*, which rejects the notion of the elusive eureka moment and favors an existential and **holistic** approach to the creative process. It's about living your life in a way that your art gets done over and over. That's something I loved about this movie. Once the train derails, a dangerous presence releases into town and strange events start happening. Every dog runs away, certain people go missing, all the electronics are stolen, and even the military comes to evacuate everyone to the nearby base. *Spooky*. But that's the whole point. The kids weren't just making a horror film, they were living inside of one. And that's why the project ultimately gets done. *Are you keeping the line between your life and your art short and clear?*

099 -- THE TELEMARKETING SCENE FROM BOILER ROOM

You can't sell from an empty wagon. Every creator should schedule time to do business. Even if you're like me, someone who'd rather be heard than paid, an artist who doesn't sell, suffers. *Period.* It's a part of the job description and it can't be coughed away. The irony is, before we even think about darkening people's doorsteps, we need an inventory from which to sell. Otherwise we're just visiting. I'm reminded of my very first website, which went viral before viral was viral. Thanks to a slew of major media interviews, the site ended up getting so much traffic that the server crashed. Which was exciting, but also frustrating, because none of the traffic was converting. No customers. No sales. No click throughs. No exciting new business opportunities. Just a mountain of squandered attention. Angry and confused, I called my marketing professor to ask what I might be doing wrong. And he said something I'll never forget. *I don't think you know what your product is.* He was right. I didn't have an inventory. I was trying to sell from an empty wagon. Seth's telemarketer wasn't. He had a great product to sell, he just hadn't yet mastered the tools to sell it well. *Are your customers asking to buy a product you don't presently sell?*

The art of creation selling. Every salesperson has to demonstrate a valid reason for their persistence. Otherwise they're just an annoying interruption. However, the economic advantage that artists have over other types of salespeople is, their inventory is as vast and varied as their imagination allows it to be. They actually kill two stones with one bird, leveraging the process of creation to expedite the practice of selling. Consider the young freelance fashion designer. She is disciplined enough to carve out a predictable, repeatable time to make art, every day. And she is savvy enough to publish new sketches and designs and ideas and experiments on her online portfolio every single day. But while her daily gift to the world builds up a huge surplus of goodwill in the marketplace and helps people discover the trail of breadcrumbs that lead back to her paid work, more importantly, she is creating an recurring cycle. With every new piece of art she makes, she earns herself another opportunity to sell. And with every new piece of art she sells, she affords herself another opportunity to create. Certainly beats cold calling strangers. *Are you bloodying your knuckles on doors that won't open, or going where the doors are already open and leaving a package on the welcome mat?*

Mattering is a choice. In the same way that the solar system is not obligated to provide us with the sun, the marketplace is under no such obligation to embrace our next creation. It's nothing personal, just an existential reality. The universe is not built to care about us. Life pays no attention to what we require for it to be meaningful. Understanding this, however, can become a powerful creative motivator. Each of us can decide to take responsibility for our creative stake in the world. Instead of waiting for the market to create our work, we use our work to create the market. And instead of waiting on other people for permission to be creative, we use our art as instruments to force our way into the world. That's why I love this particular scene. Seth is under no obligation to listen to the telemarketer's pitch, just like his customers are under no obligation to listen to his stock tips. It's all a matter of choosing to matter. *How comfortable are you creating what you create, without knowing if anyone is going to pay for it?*

100 -- THE SWIMMING SCENE FROM DR. NAKAMATSU'S INVENTION

Put something good in the story. Is it any coincidence that the people who create ideas worth spreading are the people who have lives worth living? Of course not. All prolific creators know that art is subordinate to life, not the other way around. That's why they constantly put themselves on an intercept path with interesting experiences. And not in a contrived, disingenuous, *I just did it for the story* kind of way. It's just that good art, like a good story, doesn't happen by accident. And so, it's simply a matter of expanding their field of vision, which allows them to better notice the opportunities that lead to better stories. It's not mind over matter, it's using your mind to allow more things to matter, so you can expose yourself to the best life has to offer. Nakamatsu is a master of this process. He holds over four thousand patents. And even though several sources do not list him among the world's most prolific inventors, watching his documentary is like taking your brain to a playground. You experience his creative process firsthand, as he invents products like a creative thinking recliner, a custom pushup bra, a brain enhancing cigarette, a pillow that prevents drivers from falling asleep behind the wheel, even a wig that functions as a self defense tool for women. Boring people never invent stuff like that. *Who wants to make a documentary about your life?*

All art is selfish art. Nakamatsu is eighty years old. He sleeps four hours a night. He exercises every morning. He eats dinner with the family every evening. He is never in a bad mood. He only wears custom tailored suits. He is beloved by his community. He is revered by his customers. And of course, he claims that his life is only half finished. The man is equal parts superhero, urban legend, insane person, creative genius, eccentric millionaire, comic book character and alien from another planet. *Totally inspiring.* But what I love most about the good doctor is, he creates inventions to help him come up with other inventions. He has the privilege of having himself as a client. It's a solid example *productive selfishness*, since he's scratching his own itches, making the art he wants to see in the world, using creativity to perfect the very creative process for which he is renowned. He's selfish, but in the service of the greater good. Nakamatsu channels his selfishness in a direction that benefits civilization. *What could you do for yourself right now that would be obscenely but productively selfish?*

Get a grip on your mind. Most artists are bad bosses. They beat the creativity out of their own brains. And they say things to themselves they would never let somebody else say to them. *That's stupid. You can't just do that. That'll never work. It's too late. You're not ready. That's not logical.* As a result of this negative thinking, artists smother their heart's finest impulses, dramatically shrink their creative output and eliminate hope for innovative thinking in the future. The secret, then, to eliminating these negative thoughts is to hear them for what they are and to substitute more productive ones. I have a brilliant guitarist friend who's known around the world for his innovative approach to composing music. Mike says that whenever he's working on new material, his strategy is to ask if a new song is cool, not if it's possible. That way, he doesn't talk himself out of his next great idea. What a powerful way of talking to yourself. Nakamatsu would agree. *Are you treating yourself as you wish to be treated?*

101 -- THE FISHING SCENE FROM A RIVER RUNS THROUGH IT

Define reality in a more direct way. Seinfeld once said that that the most fun game is one you've never played and you're inventing as you go along. I couldn't agree more. Creating art is one thing, but the more sophisticated experience of *categorical creation*, that is, inventing entirely new mediums, crafting innovative ways to circulate our ideas and thoughts and feelings, now *that's* really exciting. Even when you're fly fishing. Paul breaking free of his father's instruction, falling into a rhythm all his own, watching himself softly become the author of something beautiful, that's exactly what every artist should aspire to. A few years ago, I got burnt out on writing books. And I knew there were useful strategies for influencing the environment that I was not taking advantage of, so I took initiative to find a new way to do what I do. The result was a documentary that combined four of my favorite things, singing, storytelling, socializing and sermonizing. Going in, I knew the project was going to be ambitious, complicated, expensive and extensive. But I also knew that by shedding the popular view of my own artistic reality, new possibilities would emerge. And they did. Hook, line and sinker. *Where have you misread your own reality?*

Bullied by conditions, buoyed by creativity. Norman says that many of us would probably be better fishermen if we did not spend so much time watching and waiting for the world to become perfect. His words couldn't be more relevant for the modern creator. Because once we realize that we don't have to do everything right, we're free. That's the mindset that allows us to remain prolific in our work. When we admit that we're never fully ready, the work is never completely finished, and the world is never in the ideal conditions. Paul exemplifies this mindset. He literally steps out of his comfort zone, wades into deeper waters and designs his own way forward. It's an inspiring reminder that we have our own rivers to cross, our own rapids to ford. And that success is simply a matter of vision. I'm reminded of another scene in the film, where the narrator says that all there is to thinking is seeing something noticeable, which makes us see something we weren't noticing, which makes us see something that isn't even visible. Paul exemplifies this mindset too. He knows that's all creativity is. Seeing what isn't there, wading across uncharted waters and boldly bringing life to what might be. *Have you gone public with your vision yet?*

Build a permission free vocabulary. The most persistent and pernicious barrier to creativity is *permission*. It's a term that describes any mental construct of notenoughness that prevents, delays or derails the progress of creative work. And it's the number one reason so many artists die with their music still in them. They're too busy twisting themselves into psychological pretzels to actually create. I struggled with this construct for many years as a writer and performer, primarily because I was always the youngest and least experienced person in the room. But with the help of mentors, therapists and coaches, I learned an assortment of affirmations, mantras, incantations and cognitive reframing tools to shift my mental perspective. And once I started saying to myself,

I trust my resources, I am equal to this challenge, I am the person who can do this, I am worthy of this dream, it completely drowned out any trace of permission from my thinking. Paul is the hero of the film because he's his own source of worthiness. Walking across the water, you can almost hear him say to himself, who I already am is enough to get what I want. *What dream are you not allowing yourself to follow?*

102 -- THE CAR SCENE FROM GROUNDHOG DAY

Engage in possibility for its own sake. The greatest moment in a creator's life is when we realize, *wait a minute, this is art. I can do whatever I want.* It's a hard gift to give ourselves. Especially with the cacophony of critical voices drowns out our inner sense of permission. But once we realize that we have complete lexical freedom, once we discover that we are accountable to ourselves and nobody else, and once we accept that nobody is looking out for our career anymore, we enter into an environment of unlimited creative possibility. We invent not only our play, but the parameters of the world we play within. Phil knows he's trapped in a time loop, and so he does whatever he wants. He seduces women, learns town secrets, steals money, drives recklessly, attempts suicide multiple times and gets thrown in jail. But halfway through the film, his attitude shifts. He starts to help people, learns to play the piano, makes ice sculptures and befriends strangers. It's an interesting contrast. A fascinating case study about what one might use their creative freedom to accomplish. After all, that's why we make art in the first place. To do whatever we want. *How would your work be different if you created without feeling dependent on circumstances?*

Keep adding to the collection. In the first three years of my career, I experienced an asset imbalance. I had all the attention I wanted, but none of the equity I needed. And I'll never forget when my mentor told me, you need to focus on *building assets*, not just *being famous*. So I started writing. And writing. And writing some more. All day, everyday. That was my life. I was ruthless. I lived and breathed and ate and shit writing. And after a few years, it actually started to pay off. I was growing my body of work, not just my body of affection. Writing was becoming the basis of all wealth. Volume was becoming the ultimate catchall. And production was becoming the linchpin that activated everything else. Finally, new opportunities were finding me because of achievement through artistic skill, not attention through promotional savvy. The point is, time doesn't care what we do with it. We alone control the amount of work we do. We alone determine how busy we are. And so, if we're unhappy with our asset imbalance, we have to change the pattern. We have to stir the pot, practice fertile idleness, leverage downtime, cut our own path and find work for ourselves. *What did you add to your body of work this week?*

Getting restless right on schedule. Phil has what everyone craves. Complete schedule flexibility. The freedom to do whatever he wants, whenever he wants. Which is enjoyable for the first week, but after a while, purgatory starts to lose some of its charm. And that's the downside of having too much downtime. It starts to cripple motivation, heighten procrastination, activate depression, hinder direction, foster complacency and destroy perspective. As creators and communicators of ideas, we have to impose our own structures and schedules. We have to stimulate our own *uptime*, to steal a mechanical engineering term, which is the period of time when our creative machine is functioning and available for use. I have an actor friend who struggles with this

phenomenon. He works in television, so his earnings are episodic. He mainly works in small, short bursts, and often experiences several months of downtime between projects. And so, he crafts a weekly schedule that includes acting classes, community performances, writing sessions, networking opportunities, and physical training. He builds his own uptime. That way, he doesn't go crazy. *Is your creative instrument tuned for the world to move through you?*

103 -- THE GOBSTOPPER SCENE FROM WILLY WONKA & THE CHOCOLATE FACTORY

A round of inner applause. Wonka's latest product is going to crush the competition and revolutionize the candy industry forever. It's a perfect example of external motivation, and it's one of the reasons he's so successful. However, as wonderful as it is to earn money and fame and attention and glory for the work we do, the most fulfilling motivations to make art tend to be much more internal. When we create to find a home for all of our talents, to make use of everything we are, to stay faithful to our eccentric nature and to engage in projects that calls on more of our essence, that's internal. When we create to give our hidden gifts a more prominent place in our lives, to open a vein of freedom that didn't exist previously and to establish a new context from which to relate to the world, that's internal. And the best part is, when we operate from the orientation of looking within, not without, we can't lose. We can't fail. Because we're doing the work for its own sake, not for its ability to advance our standing the eyes of the world. We're working for a hearty round of inner applause, not a superficial standing ovation from the crowd. *Are you creating to receive sustenance from the act of creation itself, or from the impression it makes on the marketplace?*

Backstage passes to your dream. Wonka's inventing room is the best scene of the movie. But he admits to the group, it's the most interesting and secret room of his factory. It's where all of his most secret inventions are cooking and simmering. Slugworth would give his false teeth to get inside for just five minutes. *No touching, no tasting, no telling.* I respect that sense of containment. Every creator has to strike a balance between safeguarding their artistic vision to protect intellectual property, and passionately sharing their ideas with the world they hope to transform. And, it's not just a protective measure, it's also a productive one. Telling people about our next big idea can easily become a surrogate for doing the work to realize that idea. It's a weird form of procrastination, whereby the mouth tricks the mind into the satisfying feeling that something is already done. Wonka knows better. He won't let the vultures destroy his seed before he has a chance to harvest it. And so, it's a reminder that complacency is the mistress of inaction. Declaring victory too soon can become an exercise in creative foot shooting. *Are you blowing the lid off your next great idea by telling too many of the wrong people about it?*

Every artist works in the dark. The creative process often feels like we're standing at the edge of an uncertain world, where there's nothing to do but wait for something to happen. It's a frustrating, helpless experience. However, that's no excuse not to create. That's no reason not to hustle while we wait. That's what I find most inspiring about this particular scene. Wonka's various contraptions and bubbles and churns and whistles capture my imagination, because they represent the power of *polyamorous creation*. This is the strategy of pursuing relationships with multiple creative projects, with a full knowledge and consent of all partners involved. Notice how each of his inventions adhere to their own incubation clock. Some are on the brink of completion, others need

more time to stew in their own creative juices. Either way, we are watching a great inventor go where the ideas want to lead him, always trusting that one creation will show him the way down the road to the next. And in our own creative work, we couldn't ask for anything more. *Would your creative efforts be more productively deployed if you pursued multiple projects simultaneously, at varying stages of completion?*

104 -- THE COSTUME SCENE FROM KICK ASS

Generate your own demand. There isn't an artist alive who doesn't have some fear of the work drying up. It's just the uncertain nature of the job. Tossing coins in the wishing well, hoping bills float to the surface. But one should never curse an empty calendar, as my mentor once said. Because nobody is going to change the pattern for us. The door must be opened from the inside. *We* must stoke our own intellectual fire. *We* must manufacture the opportunities that allow us to be as creative as we are. *We* must choose productive obsessions with potential to galvanize us. *We* must generate the internal pressure required turn an idea into an appropriate reality. Because if we don't make that effort, if we don't give ourselves that authority, nothing will happen. And we'll blame everything but the person in the mirror. Dave doesn't need a trauma or cosmic rays or a power ring to become a superhero, just the perfect combination of optimism, naivety and the willingness to put the onus on himself. Even if the city wasn't looking for a superhero, he assumes that a lull in demand is merely a lack of imagination. He doesn't wait for things to happen to him, he goes out and happens to things. Proving, that demand is only in short supply if we allow it to be. *Are you waiting for your ship to come in or working to extend the reach of your dock?*

Everyone's first hello world doesn't work. Dave is an ordinary teenager who takes his obsession with comic books as inspiration to become a real life superhero. But the first time he goes out to fight crime, it's not exactly the theatrical success he envisioned. Kickass receives a severe beating and stabbing by thugs, gets hit by a car, suffers multiple fractures and has to get metal plates put into his body. Worse yet, when he returns to school after extensive physical rehabilitation, there's a new rumor that he's a gay prostitute. How's that for initial market feedback? If he were running a business, he would have quit and never looked back. And yet, he sticks with his idea. He takes his lumps and keeps moving the story forward. I'm reminded of my first six months of wearing a nametag every day. It was unbearable. People stared at me, girls avoided me, friends and family cracked jokes, complete strangers invaded my personal space, even one drunk hockey player picked fight with me. But something told me to stick with it. Something told me this was important, and that you persisted, there would be a reward waiting on the other side. *How are you turning your trials into persistence?*

Get your ass out of the basement. Kickass literally puts himself in the way of trouble. That's his business model. He goes out looking for problems to solve and people to help. And he barrels toward his work with complete single mindedness, despite suffering the slings and arrows of outrageous adolescence. Dave is interactive, reactive and proactive. Even if he *does* choose to face the world through a mask, I applaud his efforts not to avoiding the emotional risk associated with live encounters. That's something many artists struggle with. Not battling criminals, but battling their own antisocial tendencies. Getting out of their heads. Remembering to spend time with real people in real places doing real things. Putting themselves on an intercept path with

interesting experiences to inform, enrich and inspire their work. It's part and parcel of a *gradualistic* approach to creativity, one that rejects the notion of the elusive eureka moment, and instead tout an existential and **holistic** approach to a prolific career, living your life in a way that your art gets done over and over. *How many people did you go out of your way to avoid last week?*

105 -- THE PEP TALK SCENE FROM SWINGERS

Reduce anxiety by reorienting your focus. Managing anxiety is a slow, frustrating and circular process. It feels like all the work we do to become less stressed becomes the very thing that stresses us out even more. What kind of sick, twisted infinite regression is that? Fortunately, anxiety is what keeps us tuned into our circumstances. It serves a purpose because it allows us to focus our energy on the future. It's a symptom, like the engine light on the dashboard, which illuminates to let us know that something is wrong with our engine. And the good news is, like most of our emotions, anxiety vanishes once spotted and labeled. Once we name it, we claim it. Once we love it, it can't hurt us anymore. The anxiety we're currently feeling starts to subside to the point of irrelevancy. Mike hasn't figured this out yet. Rob, on the other hand, sees his friend slumped in a corner, slicing pepperoni with a pocket knife, knows the truth. That we always have a choice. We can design a way out of our anxiety, we can design a way of living with it, or we can wait it out and let it starve itself to death, trusting that eventually, anxiety will briefly let its guard down and allow happiness to take hold. *Are you prepared to do whatever work is necessary to reduce your experience of anxiety?*

Don't scratch unless there's really an itch. Commitment is more than just choosing, it's bravely dealing with the consequences of your choices. Following yourself down the rabbit hole of yes. Taking responsibility for the life you've chosen. Not always looking for the closer parking spot, as I like to say. Mike relocated across the country to follow his dreams, which meant leaving past love behind. But now he regrets the decision he made. He's become a slave to his own judgments. Instead of getting on with his new life comfortably, he's plagued by doubt, wondering about what could have been a marginally better option. Creative people struggle with this all the time. We hold ourselves to a high standard, and yet, once our experience matches those standards, we don't give ourselves permission to be satisfied with results. Schwartz famously dubbed this phenomenon the **paradox of choice**, whereby the ability to change our minds about a decision does nothing but set the stage for future anxiety and lower ultimate satisfaction. Because sometimes the best choice is the decision to stop choosing. Sometimes it's smarter to put a stake in the ground before we get seduced into the stressful spiral of perpetual improvement. *Are you focused on making the right choice or making the commitment to choosing?*

You can't fake momentum. It's something you either have or you don't. Think of it from a mechanical engineering standpoint. You need *mass*, meaning some form of creative output; multiplied by *velocity*, meaning some form of physical movement. Without those critical variables, all you've got is a pile of dirty clothes and a floor covered in orange juice containers. Mike is in desperate need of momentum, and that's exactly why his friend stops by his house. Rob is there to give him hope and courage and a psychological pat on the back. To convince him to start adding energy to the system. To inspire him to move the story forward. Because that's how momentum

works. It's built upon small, consistent victories. Of course, that's not enough. You also need to keep momentum alive. One way of doing so is with a *victory log*, which is a visual record of progress that saturates your consciousness with victory. A strategy of surrounding yourself with concrete evidence of improvement that makes you more inclined to take further action. I use mine every day. *How will you create more mass and velocity?*

106 -- THE HOSPITAL SCENE FROM OVERBOARD

A labor for which no adjective applies. Overboard is one of my top ten movies of all time. My brother and I would watch it almost every weekend. What's interesting is, as an adult, I view it as movie about reinvention. Either of your own violation, or with the help of a vengeful, sweaty carpenter. But here's the thing. Reinvention isn't about turning everything on its head for the sake of change. Sometimes, it's a simple matter of upping the creative ante. Sinking your teeth into a new project that's bigger than you. Pursuing something that's more of a gamble than a guarantee. Something that requires you to hold and nurture a large idea. Something that forces you to expand as you the idea comes to fruition. That's one of the reasons I decided to make a music documentary. I wanted to feel engaged and tested and stretched. To travel with an idea to a deeper place, one that I had never dared venture before. And as we wrap up production, the feelings of fulfillment have never been stronger. Turns out, there's a unmatched sense of pride you feel from having lived up to the higher expectations set for yourself. *When was the last time you reinvented?*

Try to surf whatever wave is out there. Joanna's real husband had his chance. After seeing her mental state and watching how horribly she treated the staff, he actually denied knowing her, walked out of the hospital a free man and returned to their yacht to embark on a spree of parties with younger women. Dean, on the other hand, has a strong opportunity agenda. As a poor widower living in redneck clutter, he exploits the situation to remedy his own domestic problems. Which makes total sense. The man is a carpenter. His job is to repair damage, install structure and efficiently contribute to the home owner's total satisfaction. The only difference is, instead of swinging a hammer, he's stealing a human. Which is definitely immoral and probably illegal, but you have to admit, it's also deviously creative. Dean may not have a lot of money, but the man knows how to be resourceful. And that what creativity is all about. Wherewithal. Buttressing the opportunity to make art with whatever knowledge, resources and courage are available to you. Even if that means breaking the rules once in a while. *When was the last time you felt fully resourced, and abundant?*

Mutual musedom magic. Joanna struggles to adapt to her new lifestyle, but eventually she masters her responsibilities with wisdom and grace. The best part is, she ends up helping her new husband's dream come true by working with him to design a miniature golf course based on her untapped knowledge of the Seven Wonders of the World. Which proves, a good muse is hard to find. But if you're lucky enough to fall in love with one, that person's work becomes a labor for which no adjective applies. Tom Waits frequently espouses the benefit of marrying your muse, pardon the pun. He famously said that as a songwriter, he's often in a stroller waiting to be pushed out into traffic, but his wife is the one that will do it. That she has a remarkable imagination, and that's the nation where he lives. In another bizarre and heartfelt [interview](#) about the secrets of their collaboration process, he also said that his wife doesn't like the light of the business we call show. She stays hidden, but that's where she likes it, and that's why she's an amazing collaborator. *If your family would support anything you chose to do, what might you try?*

107 -- THE TAXI SCENE FROM FAME

Don't chase the high, follow the heart. During a recent podcast interview, I heard a hugely successful actor offer a great piece of advice to young performers. *Don't be famous, be legendary.* Fame is the industrial disease of creativity, he said. It's a sludgy by-product of making things. What a bold statement. Considering we live in a world where attention trumps accomplishment, where a person's fame tends to eclipse their actual contributions as a creator, his advice is sorely needed. And yet, that doesn't give us permission to hide from the world. If we insist on keeping our music locked up inside ourselves, we'll always be winking in the dark. There's a balance. That's the theme in this movie. Not just fame, but shame. The crippling fear of creative vulnerability. The willingness to stick yourself out there, quite literally, even if that means dancing with your friends down a crowded avenue. Because even though the father and son constantly argue over the boy's reluctance to play his music publicly, the kid's gotta learn to love what's good for him eventually. That's the only way to become legendary. *How much time did you spend working on your legacy today?*

Don't be stopped by not knowing how. This scene represents the **herald** in the hero's journey. The act to signal change. The moment that invites the character to answer the call to adventure and motivate into action, despite his frequent desire to maintain the status quo. Bruno resists, though. He complains that his tapes aren't ready yet. That they're not supposed to be played. But his father is right. Look at the people. They don't know it's not ready. They *like* it. Is he really going to try and argue with a dancing mob of teenagers in the middle of the busiest street in the nation? Do the math, kid. And that's what I love about the creative process. You're never really ready. If you always waited until you were ready, you'd never produce anything. Just aim for eighty percent and jump. You're the only one sweating over the twenty. The point is, whether you're writing dance music, making abstract paintings or hosting your own cooking show, finished is better than perfect. Failure stems less from poor planning and more from the timidity to proceed. Don't make gods out of your plans. Just go. *What inner conflict is slowing your creativity down?*

All love is saying yes to something. Bruno was right, that lunatic stole his tape. But it's still the best thing that could have happened to his career as a musician. He doesn't know it yet, but the whole course of his life will pivot on this encounter. People *will* remember his name. And in five years, he's going to look back and think to himself, boy am I glad that my dad blasted that song from the roof of his car. In fact, every artist should be lucky enough to have a parent like that. Relentlessly affirming, instantly encouraging, endlessly participating, radically accepting. That's the kind of support system that makes or breaks an artist. This scene actually reminds me of my own family. Growing up, we seven grandchildren were never met with tilted heads. Whatever artistic endeavors we pursued, whatever magnificent obsessions we turned our brains over to, there wasn't an elder in the room who wasn't on board at a moment's notice. And that's the reason each of us went on to have unique and interesting and meaningful creative lives. *What are the characteristics of the most supportive possible environment you can think of for your own creative work?*

108 -- THE MANICURE SCENE FROM LEGALLY BLONDE

An ocean under a fickle moon. Life has a funny way of raising our fuel grade. Elle's original incentive to pursuing a law degree is to win back her ex, but once she finally realizes he will never respect her, she's determined to succeed on her own. It's the classic story of how the rules we navigate by at the beginning shift by the time we get to the end. How what we think love is differs from what we find love to be. But it's not just a pattern in couples, it's also a phenomenon in creating. My original motivation for making a documentary was purely creative. I just wanted to share my art with the world. To build a visual archive of ideas things that were important to me at this stage of my life. But that was a year ago. And now that we've entered into post production and can see the light at the end of the tunnel, new motivations have surfaced. Bigger ones. Better ones. More mature ones. Now I'm making the movie because it's an opportunity to fire on all cylinders. To engage in a process that draws out my full ingenuity. To take hidden skills and talents I have not yet tapped into to create value. And to up the emotional, psychological and financial ante, trading in my current success for something better. I believe that's why the process has galvanized me in such a profound way. It's demanded that I move to a courageous place that I rarely occupy. *How do your original motivations differ from your formed motivations?*

Be responsible for your own evolution. We all get trapped on the creative treadmill eventually. Running but never getting anywhere new. Executing but never elevating the work. And when we do, there will always be a ceiling on what we can accomplish. Success will remain asymptotic, always approaching infinity, but never actually getting there. And unless we break the pattern, unless we change the user interface of our realities, we will fail to develop as creators. Elle breaks the pattern. She could easily blend in and bow to the common will, using her beauty and money and personality to live a charmed life. But she'd rather aim herself in the direction of her own creation. And so, instead of becoming a washed up suntan lotion model, she goes on to become happily married and a successful lawyer and politician. *Not bad for bratty cheerleader.* That's the thing about going your own way. You have to leave room for the unexpected. Elle probably never could have predicted she'd grow up to become an attorney. But when she looks back on her life, odds are, she'll think to herself, that sounds about right. *How can you design and develop a future that you really want for yourself?*

You don't have to compromise your originality. Harvard has never seen a colorful student like this before. Elle sprays perfume on her college application and records a video essay in a hot tub while wearing a string bikini. Not exactly ivy league material. But although the board of admissions is bewildered at her style and approach, they're still impressed. So she gets accepted. Now, what's interesting about her character is, the value proposition evolves. Elle proves to the university that she's more than just a pretty face and a cute dress when she taps into her extensive expertise in cosmetic surgery, fashion merchandising and perm hairstyling to expose multiple lies in the

murder trial, thus exonerating the falsely accused fitness instructor and identifying the murderer. Beauty and charm may have opened the door, but intelligence and judgment keep her in the room. It's a helpful reminder that if you have shtick, support it with substance. Otherwise it's just empty calories. You're multiplying the brand by zero. *Do you understand the fine line between purpose driven human uniqueness and a patchwork of weirdness?*

THE PROLIFIC GLOSSARY

A LEXICON FOR REWRITING YOUR CREATIVE VOCABULARY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

31. **Digging your creative well.** Accumulating ongoing **reference** files for your brain to work on through a passive, unconscious process.
32. **Discipline transplant.** Doable, less threatening **strategies** to enable your ideal mental, emotional and existential space from which to create.
33. **Distributed cognition.** New ideas that arise from combining many **disparate** pieces of information or concepts over an extended period of time.
34. **Distribution.** Anybody or anything who has influence on someone who can buy your work.
35. **Domain transferring.** Bringing ideas from one field of knowledge into another by asking, *what else is like this?*
36. **Early warning system.** A personal seismograph that helps us take preemptive action against impending inner turmoil and anxiety.
37. **Ember of initiative.** Instead of taking things personally, you channel them productively, using emotion as **oxygen** for your creative fire.
38. **Exhaling.** The creative season of expression, or **output**, meaning shipping work out of the factory.
39. **Existential anchor.** Portable, purposeful and private **sanctuary** that brings you back to center to reconnect with the self, the body, the spirit and the heart.
40. **Faithful forces.** **Routines** that keep your creative life stable and fruitful when circumstances get a little too overwhelming.
41. **Fertile idleness.** Hustling while you wait and leveraging downtime into something creative, productive and meaningful.
42. **Firing blanks.** A period of work in which you're running on fumes, soaring past point of diminishing returns and need to reload the creative chamber.
43. **Fragmentary associative process.** Creating ideas in a **piecemeal**, nonlinear fashion, without the constraints of chronology, sequence, rational order and narrative.
44. **Going perpendicular.** Intentionally walking away from your current work to engage in something **unrelated** to the flow of activity.

45. **Good low.** When life hands us a pile of shit, we strategically convert that experience into creative resources of energy, fertility and happiness.
46. **Gradualistic creativity.** Rejecting the notion of the elusive eureka moment and practicing an existential and **holistic** approach to a creative life, living your life in a way that your art gets done over and over.
47. **Gravitational order.** Using motion to create **equilibrium** so your work finds its place in the universe, thus conspiring towards some unifying geometrical situation.
48. **Ground zero.** The entry point into the creative processing **workflow**, the primary location for offloading raw materials into your idea factory, the central cockpit of creative control.
49. **Homebase.** A place or community where you can commune your fellow artists and lock into the historical, societal and institutional frameworks of your creative world.
50. **Hyperfocused expression.** The little world you **investigate** to a great, high level, something that fascinates and ignites you.
51. **Identity based creation.** Tapping into your **native** endowments and limitations of creativity, motivation, inspiration and intelligence and channeling them in the service of making your ideas happen.
52. **Incrementalism.** Building a body of work based on a practice of patience, delayed gratification and continuity.
53. **Industrious revolution.** The initial calorie burning experience of unpleasant and inconspicuous production that fortifies an artist's appreciation delayed gratification.
54. **Inhaling.** The creative season of inspiration, or **input**, meaning listening for what wants to be written.
55. **Inspiration framework.** Metacognitive, ritualistic or recreational **tactics** for finding inspiration where no one else is looking.
56. **Integration.** Employing the **whole** of your personality, talents, gifts and experiences to contribute the highest amount of value and firepower those around you.

57. **Internal revolution.** Updating the identity story you tell yourself after spontaneously doing something you didn't realize you could do.
58. **Intrinsic triggers.** A unique set of inputs that stoke your creative fire. Little moments that let you clothespin a piece of stimuli onto your psyche for further evaluation.
59. **Limitation leverage.** Identifying your deficiency, deciding how to exploit it and then restructuring everything in the creative process around it.
60. **Making room.** Relieving your brain the necessity of remembering, freeing up your working memory to open your mind to receive new ideas.
61. **Meaning context.** Making motivation significantly easier by reframing an activity as being existentially painful not to do.
62. **Medium agnostic.** Instead of forcing our own expectations upon the work, you allow patterns to emerge and open our work to becoming more dimensionalized, in whatever form it needs to live.
63. **Mini sabbatical.** The opposite of ambition, the antitheses of labor, in which you leave the creative land alone for a given period of time.
64. **Moment of conception.** The single spark of life that signals an idea's movement value, almost screaming to you, something wants to be built here.
65. **Momentum device.** An elegant excuse just to have ideas and validate the process with a sophisticated piece of office technology, building your confidence, commitment and competence.
66. **Movement value.** The discipline of recognizing conceptual beginnings, witnessing ideas in their nascent state and fully fleshing out your work.
67. **Natural collaboration.** Creating a more visceral and spontaneous contact with your work by designing systems and structures that invite nature as your collaborator.
68. **Neighbor.** Something that already exists the audience's head that becomes a mental hook upon which you can hang future ideas.
69. **Operational farsightedness.** Due to our utter dedication to wider market demands, we fail to note the needs of our intimate ecosystem.

70. **Opportunity agenda.** A form of second order imagination, it's the inherent enterprise to notice creative opportunities, apply force and propel them into interesting directions.
71. **Organizing principle.** The core **assumption**, central reference point or guiding pole, which governs action and allows everything else in its proximity to derive value.
72. **Paper thinking.** Experiencing your ideas kinesthetically by writing down whatever is rising up from within your depths, saving judgment for later.
73. **Pause buttons.** A personal, portable toolbox of strategies for reducing the experience of anxiety on a moment's notice.
74. **Pausing.** The creative season of intermission, or **throughput**, meaning managing your ideas as an inventory system.
75. **Peripheral creation.** The **secondary** activities of your creative process that involve more speed and less skill, i.e., editing and formatting or networking and billing.
76. **Permission.** The mental construct of notenoughness that prevents, delays or derails the progress of your creative work.
77. **Permissionless platform.** An honest canvas where you can be completely free, expressing whatever you want, as loud you want, as much as you want, in the way that you want.
78. **Physical displacement.** A problem solving technique whereby working in unusual **settings** helps you see patterns you wouldn't have noticed otherwise.
79. **Placeholder.** A surrogate piece of content that helps budget time and keep production going until a better idea comes along.
80. **Polyamorous creation.** Pursuing relationships with **multiple** creative projects, with a full knowledge and consent of all partners involved.
81. **Portable creative environments.** Any alternative **workspace** that functions as a transportable lightning rod, tailor made to your artistic tendencies, which enables you to snap into work mode and make the word flesh.

82. **Proxy.** A contextual prototype that does a lot of the strategic heavy lifting before you open your mouth.
83. **Positive tension.** Painting yourself into an accountable corner through eustress, which forces you to reckon with the infallible judgment of reality.
84. **Preliminary trigger.** A simple, easy and incremental tool that activates the creative process and grows your executional victory bank.
85. **Premature cognitive commitment.** When people become emotionally or intellectually bound to a course of action, a form of mindlessness that results after a single exposure to an idea.
86. **Primary creative environments.** The essential environment asset that reflects who you are and what's important to you, so that the ideas flow as a natural consequence of that workspace.
87. **Principal creation.** The primary work unit of your creative process that requires focus and craft, i.e., putting words on paper or clicking the shutter.
88. **Proactive unconscious.** Viewing your mind as idea processor, waiting at your beck and call, begging you to assign it a problem so it can immediately go to work for you.
89. **Productive selfishness.** Scratching your own itches, making the art you want to see in the world and channeling creative selfishness in a direction that benefits civilization.
90. **Progress rich environment.** Surrounding yourself with concrete evidence of progress to emotionally invigorate yourself and make you more inclined to take further action.
91. **Prolificacy equation.** An incrementalist, easy does it approach to creating a body of work, which is everything you create and contribute and affect and impact.
92. **Promiscuity.** Providing multiple entry points for your audience through a continuous, voluminous level of output.
93. **Prototype.** Something that gives your mental obsession a physical expression, a physical thing that adds energy to the system, moves the creative ball forward and gives the creator the psychological pat on the back.

94. **Reverse providence.** Helpless situations where the world seems to be orchestrating the ideal conditions to prevent you from reaching your goal, creating a web of incidents and meetings and material assistance whose sole purpose in life is hold you back.
95. **Ritual of leave taking.** Microstructures that celebrate the completion of a period of work, slow down the creative process and set healthy boundaries to demarcate the line between work and nonwork.
96. **Ritualized vomiting.** A daily ritual of emotional release where you metabolize your experiences, make serious mental headway into your ideas and get the creative faucet flowing.
97. **Runway.** Your first creative output that builds momentum, paves the way for prolificacy and does the talking for you.
98. **Safety container.** A space without circumference where judgment can't enter, a free venue where ideas can run free without the scrutiny of readers, critics, editors and yourself.
99. **Selective indifference.** Being discerning enough not to dwell on meaningless matters, conserving your best energies for your creative efforts.
100. **Self organization.** Some form of global order or coordination arises out of the local interactions between the components of an initially disordered system.
101. **Side door.** Increasing output by expanding the definition, changing the context and lowering the threat level of your work.
102. **Solvitas perambulator.** Using rhythmic, repetitive exercise or action to clear your mind, stabilize your emotions and increase the production and release of endorphins to pump the well of creativity.
103. **Stalling maneuver.** Buying yourself time in group meetings, interviews and presentations, so that you can collect your thoughts and build anticipation around your message.
104. **Stiletto moment.** Concentrating our portfolio of talents into a tight little package that demonstrates the full firepower of our creative arsenal.
105. **The shove.** The decisive interaction in which a trusted friend eventfully compels and artist to make a key change or take a massive risk in their creative life.

106. **Thievery muscles.** Respectfully and ethically other people's ideas as sparks to **superimpose** your own meaning and take the idea somewhere else, somewhere different, somewhere better, until the original idea can no longer be identified.
107. **Tourniquet.** Creating a healthy sense of distance from your work by damming up the creative flow, compressing the circulation and applying enough pressure so there's an explosion waiting for you when you're ready to return.
108. **Unconscious rumination.** Allowing your inner mind to get to work **mulling** over, sorting out, organizing and categorizing material that has been previously absorbed, ultimately generating an idea at a time when the mental spotlight isn't on it.
109. **Unfinishing.** Approaching the creative process as a fluid experience, viewing each piece of output as a constantly evolving organism, within the ecosystem of my larger body of work.
110. **Uptime.** The period of time when our creative machine is functioning and available for use.
111. **Victory dance.** A small, customized reward that commemorates the fruits of your motivation and equips you to be what the moment requires.
112. **Walking the factory floor.** Creating the ritual of an established **parcel** of structured curiosity, whereby you casually and thoughtfully peruse every idea you've recently accumulated.
113. **Wherewithal.** Everything creator need to buttress the opportunity to make art, including knowledge, resources and courage.
114. **Whitespace.** Defining yourself by the work you decline, so as to avoid the erosion of your time, the decay of your focus and the meaninglessness of your work.
115. **Working modular.** Treating each thought as an uncategorized **chunk** of creative material, an objective, portable piece content that accumulates and categorizes into its own structure.