

## The Icarus Deception

Seth Godin—2012

### We Are All Artists Now

- **Your ability to** follow instructions is not the secret to your success. You are hiding your best work, your best insight, and your best self from us every day.
- We've all heard this request at the end of a meeting. Sometimes the moderator even means it. Sometimes the moderator, the boss, the person with a problem, actually wants to know if the group has an untried concept or an insight to share. And the response is always the same, Silence. Sidelong glances, perhaps some shuffling of papers, but still, silence. Really? All these highly trained, well-paid, and respected people in a room and not one person has something to contribute? I doubt it
- A revolution is here, our revolution, and it is shining a light on what we've known deep down for a long time—you are capable of making a difference, of being bold, and of changing more than you are willing to admit. You are capable of making art.
- Catching the Wily Fox
  - Build an eight-foot-long wooden fence in the forest.
  - Lay out some bait and then go away for a week.
  - The fox is too crafty to be caught in a simple trap, and he will smell you and avoid the fence for days. But eventually, he'll come and eat the bait.
  - At the end of the week, build a second length offence at a right angle to the first. Leave more bait.
  - The fox will avoid the fence again for a few days, then take the bait.
  - At the end of the second week, build a third wall and a gate. Leave more bait.
  - When you come back at the end of a month, the fox will be happily prancing in his safe enclosure, and all you will have to do is close the gate. The fox will be trapped.
  - This, of course, is what happened to us. The industrial age built the trap we're mired in, but it didn't build the trap all at once; that took centuries to perfect. And we were seduced. Seduced by the bait of decent pay and plenty of prizes. Seduced by the apparent security of the enclosure. And once the gate was shut, we were kept in by the threat of shame, the amplification of risk, and society's reliance on more and shinier prizes.
  - For us, though, the situation is even more poignant than it is for the fox. As the industrial age has faded away and been replaced by the connection economy—the wide-open reality of our new economic revolution—the fence has been dismantled. It's gone.
  - But most of us have no idea that we're no longer fenced in.

### Art, the Comfort Zone, and the Chance of a Lifetime

- The safety zone has changed, but your comfort zone has not.
- **You can** go to as many meetings, read as many books, and attend as many seminars as you like, but if you don't figure out how to realign your comfort zone with today's new safety zone, all the strategy in the world isn't going to help you.

- If you become someone who is uncomfortable unless she is creating change, restless if things are standing still, and disappointed if you haven't failed recently, you've figured out how to become comfortable with the behaviors most likely to make you safe going forward.
- Creating ideas that spread and connecting the disconnected are the two pillars of our new society, and both of them require the posture of the artist.
- Art isn't something that's made by artists. Artists are people who make art.
- Understanding cutting-edge business concepts like the Long Tail and the Tipping Point and Purple Cow and GTD and the rest is worthless if you don't commit.
- I've read these books. I've written some of them. And I love them all, but the ideas are not enough without commitment. They're not enough because strategy is empty without change, empty without passion, and empty without people willing to confront the void
- Strategy and tactics live on the outside, in the cold world of consultants and spreadsheets. They are things we do without changing the way we think. Art, on the other hand, is personal, built on attitude and vision and commitment.
- An artist is someone who uses bravery, insight, creativity, and boldness to challenge the status quo. And an artist takes it (all of it, the work, the process, the feedback from those we seek to connect with) personally.
- Art isn't a result; it's a journey. The challenge of our time is to find a journey worthy of your heart and your soul.
- All we're willing to pay you extra for is what we don't assume, what we can't get easily and regularly and for free. We need you to / provide the things that are unexpected, scarce, and valuable
- What's scarce is trust, connection, and surprise. These are three elements in the work of a successful artist.
- The new, third kind of scarcity is the emotional labor of art. The risk involved in digging deep to connect and surprise, the patience required to build trust, the guts necessary to say, "I made this" — these are all scarce and valuable. And they scale.
- If your team is filled with people who work for the company, you'll soon be defeated by tribes of people who work for a cause.
- The opposite of coherent is interesting.
- If you decide that it's important to stop complying and start creating, the first thing to do is change your framework, the worldview you bring to your work. The framework changes what we see and changes what we tell ourselves is important. And the revolution is tearing your old framework down.
- It's the pain of possibility, vulnerability, and risk.
- **The easiest way to avoid** the pain is to lull it to sleep by finding a job that numbs you. Soon the pain of the artist will be replaced by a different sort of pain, the pain of the cog, the pain of someone who knows that his gifts are being wasted and that his future is out of his control.
- We're not waiting for you to tell us about your notebook filled with ideas. Tell us about the connections you have enabled and the impact you have made instead.
- Initiating a project, a blog, a Wikipedia article, even a unique family journey. Initiating something particularly when you're not putatively in charge. We avoid these acts because we've been trained to avoid them. At the same time, almost all people believe they are capable of editing, giving feedback, or merely criticizing. That means that finding people to fix your typos is easy.

Finding someone to say “go” is almost impossible. I don’t think the shortage of artists has much to do with the innate ability to create or initiate. I think it has to do with believing that it’s possible and acceptable for you to do it. We’ve had these doors open wide for only a decade or so, and most people have been brainwashed into believing that their job is to copyedit the world, not to design it.

- Do you think we don’t need your art, or are you afraid to produce it?

## THE CONNECTION ECONOMY DEMANDS THAT WE CREATE ART

- A life without craft slowing you down, a career with a focus on what you can create instead of what you must replicate.
- While technology might be a contributing factor, more than anything else, achievement comes from a culture that celebrates the achievement motive.
- After nearly a century of effort, the industrial system has created the worker-proof factory. It’s okay if the person assembling your Domino’s pizza or Apple iPhone doesn’t care. The system cares. The system measures every movement, every bit of output, so all the tolerances are in order. It’s okay if the person at the bank doesn’t care—the real work is done by an ATM or a spreadsheet. We’ve systematized and mechanized every step of every process. By eliminating “personal” from frontline labor, the industrial system ensures that it can both maintain quality and use every cheaper (and ever-fewer) workers.
- This economy demands that we spin the log ever faster—doing not the work of making the same widget faster and cheaper in a race to the bottom but the work of connecting and entertaining and amazing with our most vivid dreams.
- It’s how cheaper and more efficient to make edgy, amazing products for the weird edge cases (who are listening and talking and who care) than it is to push yet another average product onto the already overloaded average people in the middle of the curve.
- **Art has no right** answer. The best we can hope for is an interesting answer.
- We celebrate the Forbes 400 and the masters of the universe and the lucky few who have won the corporate lottery, because secretly we are celebrating our chances of winning the lottery as well. Like most lotteries, this is a loser’s game, with the odds against us. What appears to be a meritocracy is actually a rigged game and a wheel of fortune.
- We can’t suddenly quit a job and then race to find a form of art that will pay off before the next mortgage payment is due. Creating art is a habit, one that we practice daily or hourly until we get good at it. Art isn’t about the rush of victory that comes from being picked. Nor does it involve compliance. Art in the postindustrial age is a , lifelong habit, a stepwise process that incrementally allows us to create even more art
- And freelancers and soloists have discovered that doing a good job for a fair price is no longer sufficient to guarantee success. Good work is easier to find than ever before. What matters now:
  - Trust
  - Permission
  - Remarkability
  - Leadership
  - Stories that spread
  - Humanity: connection, compassion, and humility^

- No one talks about the boring, the predictable or the safe. We don't risk interactions in order to spread the word about something obvious or trite.
- The remarkable is almost always new and untested, fresh and risky.
- Leadership, though, is a whole other game. Leadership puts the leader on the line. No manual, no rule book, no uberleader to point the finger at when things go wrong. If you ask someone for the rule book on how to lead, you're secretly wishing to be a manager.
- Leaders are vulnerable, not controlling, and they are taking us to a new place, not to the place of cheap, fast, compliant safety
- If what you've done is what you've been ordered to do, then the labor doesn't seem to belong to you. The craftsman and the artist ^, "Here, I made this." The workingman is asked to follow instructions
- For the first time in history, most of us have the chance to decide what to do next, what to make, how to deliver it. Most of us won't take that chance, but it's there.
- Connection belongs to those who "get to" instead of "have to."
- Dick Clark has left the building. He's not going to be able to get you a record deal or a TV gig because he and his show are long gone. iTunes and a hundred other outlets want you to have your own gig, but they're not going to call you, either.
- When we take responsibility and eagerly give credit, doors open
- How much responsibility are you willing to take before it's given to you?
- After the revolution: A musician who sells two (two!) copies of a song on iTunes makes more money than she would have earned from a record label for selling an entire CD for seventeen dollars.
- There are more musicians making more music being heard by more people and earning more money than ever before. Now, multiply what happened to music by a million. Multiply it by consulting, coaching, and design. Multiply it by manufacturing, speaking, and nonprofits. Multiply it by whatever it is you care enough to do. That's what after looks like.
- A true story: Sarah loves to perform musical theater. She loves the energy of being onstage, the flow of being in the moment, frison of feeling the rest of the troupe in sync as she moves. And yet...and yet Sarah spends 98 percent of her time trying to be picked. She goes to casting calls, sends out head shots, and follows every lead. And then she deals with the heartbreak of rejection, of being hassled or seeing her skills disrespected. Which audience is the right one? The audience of critics and theatergoers and the rest of the authorities. After all, that's what musical theater is. Its pinnacle is at City Center and on Broadway, and if she's lucky, Ben Brantley from the Times will be there and Baryshnikov will be in the audience and the reviewers will like her show and she might even get mentioned. All so she can do it again. It's the director's dream and the theater owner's dream and the producers dream to put on the next show and gives power to the professionals who can give the nod and, yes, pick someone. But wait. Sarah's joy is in the dance. It's in the moment. Her joy is in creating flow.
- When Sarah chooses herself, when she makes her own art on her own terms, two things happen: She unlocks her ability to make an impact, removing all the excuses between her current place and the art she wants to make. And she exposes herself, because now it's her decision to perform, not the casting director's. It's her repertoire that's being judged, not the dramaturges. And most of all, it's her choice of audience, not the choice of some official, suit-wearing authority figure.

- Julie Logan at the Cass Business School found that entrepreneurs are three times more likely than the general public to have dyslexia.
- Our basic human need to be understood, respected, and missed when we're gone doesn't get satisfied easily. As a result, when genuine connection is offered, it's often taken.
- The safe place is not the sinecure where we get a good wage from the industrialist. That's eroding fast. The new safe place requires us to look others in the eye and see them, truly see them.
- The itch led us to war and to electricity, to Ionesco and to Zander.
- John Cage made a ruckus with his silent work, 4'33", which caused confusion and disdain, but again, few would argue that Cage is not an artist.
- Venture capitalists never choose company founders who are merely replacing their day jobs. They seek the CEO who is engaged at a human level, who has chosen this journey because it is the best (and possibly only) way for her to speak up and lead and connects
- While the soloists and the founders get the press, we find the same behaviors in short supply (and highly sought after) in companies and nonprofits as well. Consider the nurse who transforms the floor of the hospital where she works or the mechanic who puts in the extra effort that brings customers back again and again
- You go to work to do your work, and your work is to confront the things that scare you.
- Correct is fine, but it is better to be interesting.
- Zappos turned its customers into people who demand a higher level of service to be satisfied. Amazon turned its customers into people who are restless with online stores that don't work quite as well or quite as quickly.
- Apple is talked about more than any other company for one simple reason: They have huge aspirations for who they want their customers to become, and they deliver on them.

### MYTHS, PROPAGANDA, AND KAMIWAZA

- Hubris is the enemy of this ruling class. Hubris means that you have the voice to challenge authority and the guts to stand up and speak out.
- You have no idea what you're doing. If you did, you'd be an expert, not an artist.
- **Six Daily Habits** for Artists
  - Sit alone; sit quietly.
  - Learn something new without any apparent practical benefit.
  - Ask individuals for bold feedback; ignore what you hear from the crowd.
  - Spend time encouraging other artists.
  - Teach, with the intent of making change.
  - Ship something that you created.
- An impresario? Yes, someone who organizes, who invents, who creates art projects, who spins something out of nothing, using insight and connection more than money. If you owned a conference facility, what would you do with it? Of course, you could own it, at least a day at a time. If you could reach your audience, what would you say? Of course you can reach them, more easily and more effectively than ever before (not faster, though, but over time). If you could lead a tribe (customers, coworkers, and fellow scientists), which tribe would you lead? The ability to create connections, establish events, and make something happen is more highly

leveraged, faster, and cheaper than ever before. Your job isn't to do your job. Your job is to decide what to do next.

- Our worldview changes the questions we ask ourselves when confronted by a new situation or idea. The questions you ask yourself change the way you perceive the world.
- How do I get more? Vs. How do I give more?
- We've built a world where the only option is hubris, where the future belongs to anyone willing to act like the gods of our myths. Better coin a word for it. The Japanese call it kamiwaza.
- When we strip away self-doubt and artifice, when we embrace, initiative and art, we are left with kamiwaza. The purity of doing it properly but without self-consciousness. The runner who competes with kamiwaza is running with purity, running properly, running as the gods would run.
- Art is a commitment to a process and to a direction and to generosity, not to a result.
- Painted white, made of almost-rotted wood, and ascended via 'Atwenty-one slippery steps, the diving board was a beacon to every kid who saw it. It was dangerous. Awesome in the best sense of the word. The deal was simple: If you climbed up, you had to jump off. It was too tricky (physically and emotionally) to climb down. Day after day, new initiates to the cult of the big leap would bravely climb up the tower. Then they'd get to the top and stop. They'd freeze in place, unable to move. Sometimes for hours. One kid once sat there for fourteen hours. Here's the key question: What happened between the time a kid started climbing the ladder and the internal system failure that occurred at the top of the board? Was there new information presented? When that kid was at the bottom, he was thrilled and excited. At the top, frozen.
- Perhaps something changed. At the top, the newbie jumper saw something he hadn't seen from the dock. Nothing visible changed, of course. What changed was the volume of the argument in the leaper's head. When you're standing on the dock, part of the brain insists on going up. It'll be fun/brave/heroic/daring/wonderful, the adventure-seeking frontal lobe says. The other part, the part that worries about things like belly flops and dying, that part is not sufficiently aroused to stop the jumper from going up the ladder. Later. Later, the lizard brain says, I'll worry about this.
- At the top of the tower, though, the dialogue changes dramatically. Death, after all, is apparently imminent. Now the other part of the brain, the one that's often more powerful, speaks up and insists (demands) that this nonsense stop. It's high. This is dangerous. This is insane. Amazingly, after that first jump, the deflowered leapers always do the same thing. They get out of the water, run to the steps, and climb right back up. And do it again. Safety zone adjusted, comfort zone aligned. For now. And the opportunity is to make it a habit.
- At this rate, there will be more stuck writers than gumshoes in just a few years. Joan Acocella reports that the resistance took over for writing just as writing became important. A hundred years earlier, it wasn't unusual for writers like Trollope and Dickens to write forty or more books over a career—while keeping a day job. You sat down and you wrote and then you were done.
- Starting in the 1950s, though, when writing became godlike. When creating the great American novel had a lot of kamiwaza associate with it the drinking started and so did the blocking. It was easier to talk about making art than it was to actually do it. And that's where we are today, except that everything we're: counted on to do that's important is also fraught with risk, because it flies in the face of the easy path of obedience and blame. Everything that matters is like writing, because it's all art.

- Change is powerful, but change always comes with the possibility of failure as its partner. “This might not work” isn’t merely something to be tolerated; it’s something you must seek out.
- Faced with a choice of dying inside as the world mechanizes or confronting the fear that we have been indoctrinated with, many may choose the path of quiet desperation. Which is your privilege, of course, but understand that it’s a choice. The choice between being the linchpin (the one people can’t live without) and the cog (who does what she’s told). The choice between doing art (and forging your own path, on your own terms. And owning what happens) and merely doing your job (which y pushes all the power and all the responsibility to someone else)

### **GRIT AND ART AND THE WORK THAT’S WORTH DOING**

- The grit in your spinach is precisely the same grit that we seek out in a leader or a hero. We measure sandpaper and grindstones in terms of grit—their ability to stand up to resistance. Someone with grit will grind down the opposition, stand up in the face of/ criticism, and consistently do what’s right for their art. Mostly, they mess up the machine.
- Grit is the attitude of someone who realizes he has the power to care and is intent on doing something with it.
- The endless emergency of getting it over with is replaced by the daily practice of doing the work. This shift in attitude transforms the work and the worker.
- When you are debating with yourself about a new project, a new job, or whether or not to eat that pastrami sandwich, what exactly is going on? Who, precisely, is doing the debating? Part of you (the part that bought this book, or at least decided V to read it) is painfully aware of your potential. This part of your brain seeks respect, values achievement, and knows, truly know that you are capable of far more than you’ve done so far.
- The other part of your brain is afraid. The amygdala has evolved over millions of years to optimize its ability to turn you into a puddle of quivering jelly. This part of your brain has been amplified and I give a free ride by the industrialists in power. We have been brainwashed by school, indoctrinated by industrial propaganda, and mesmerized by the popular media into believing that compliance is not only safe but right and necessary.
- **It is never** too late to tip the balance between the two parts of your brain. It’s never too late to redefine self-control, to change long-ingrained habits, and to do the work you’re capable of. Our culture and the connection economy have made it easier than ever (but still incredibly difficult) for you to start walking the path of the gods. It’s not a cliff or a chasm; it’s a stepwise path, a gradual incline, a method, bit by bit, for getting from where you are now to where you deserve to be. Dancing. Yes, you must leap into the void. But you can always start with a little void and work your way up.

### **SHAME, VULNERABILITY, AND BEING NAKED**

- Organizational charts are filled with individual boxes connected by thin lines, each of us an interchangeable cog in a vast system of predictable behaviors.
- If not enough people doubt you, you’re not making a difference.
- As the industrial age fades away, though, a new safety zone, one for artists, is being created.
- **The watchword** of the sane artist: Shun the nonbelievers. First you must pick yourself, and then you choose your audience. After you’ve created your art, whatever it is—a service, an idea. An interaction, a performance, a meeting—it’s done. What the audience does with it is out of your

control. If you focus your angst and emotion on the people who don't get it, you've destroyed part of your soul and haven't done a thing to improve your art. Your art, if you made it properly, wasn't for them in the first place. Worse, the next time you make art, those nonbelievers will be the ones at the front of your mine.

- The kind of art I'm describing doesn't seek to please the masses. The masses (by definition) aren't pleased by the new; they are pleased by what others think. Harry Potter's first fans were enthralled by the art that J. K. Rowling challenged them with. The next hundred million readers embraced a mass cultural phenomenon, not an unproven book from an unknown author.
- Your goal as an artist is to make art that moves the audience of your choice
- Figure out who your art is for, get better at connecting with that audience, and ignore the rest.
- Make a list. Make a list of the things you can't talk about at work or with your spouse or with others you care about. The things on this list (and those that you were hesitant to even write down) point to places where you or the organization feel shame. These hot buttons are places where you'd prefer to be invulnerable. These are areas where you build armor, where you don't want anyone to go. Armor prevents connection, and shame festers. The shadow of shame kills art. When you talk about these things, when you own them, shamery starts to lose its power, and vulnerability becomes available to you again.
- But one of the remnants of the industrial age is the cultural imperative to take on what was important to our overseers. If others are busy deciding which metrics ought to matter to you, you have given up something precious indeed.
- **The resistance** is not something to be avoided, it's something to see out. That is the single most important sentence in this book.
- The artist seeks out the feeling of the resistance and then tries to maximize it. The cog, the day laborer, the compliant student—they seek to eliminate the feeling instead. That's the choice. Change your mind, right now, not later. If you determine that you will see better, make better, and most of all, dare to turn your tabula rasa into something frightening, that's when you will begin to live the life of the artist. And the artist's constant companion is the screaming lizard brain.
- As leaders we can do better than defaulting to the least risky position, to letting our lizard brain win. If we are going to say "no" we need to know what a "yes" looks like. And we need to be able to communicate that to those we lead. And when they come back having addressed our concerns and resolved our doubts, then we owe them that "yes."
- It takes guts to say yes, and you owe it to your team to be clear and consistent about what earns a "yes." Your job is to use your guts, not to hide them.
- William Goldman said that about the film business, but it's true about your business as well. Kids' books are a great example. Every parent figures he has at least one book for toddlers in him—how hard could it be? All you have to do is follow the template and get picked by a book editor. But it is hard. It's hard because every successful kids' book is a breakthrough. Every book that works breaks the rules that came before it; every one is a surprise to someone who encounters it for the first time to obey the rules, but to break them.

#### **TO MAKE ART, THINK LIKE AN ARTIST. TO CONNECT, BE HUMAN.**

- Art must be done for the first time, not repeated

- Don't think! Thinking is the enemy of creativity. It's self-conscious, and anything self-conscious is lousy. You can't try to do things. You simply must do things.
- **Rarely do** we see the world as it is. Most of the time we are so busy compartmentalizing, judging, and ignoring what we can't abide that we see almost nothing. We don't see opportunities. What fail to see pain? And most of all, we refuse to see the danger in doing' nothing.
- Everyone should learn to code. Not because we have a tremendous shortage of people who can produce things in [insert the name of your favorite hot programming language here] but because once you know how to make something, it changes how you see things. Once you know how to set lead type, typography looks different. Once you know how to assemble an electronic device, every computer seems a bit less mysterious. Once you know how to give a speech, you see things in the speeches others give. Learning how to make things turns you from a spectator into a participant, from someone at the mercy of the system to someone who is helping to run the system. Learning how to make gives you the guts to make more, to fail more often, to get better at making.
- **In the** connection economy, on the other hand, we're spending more and more time consuming what our peers make and then turning right around and making ^things for our friends to consume. If you are afraid to write or edit or assemble or disassemble, you are merely a spectator. And you are trapped, trapped by the instructor of those you've chosen to follow. Twenty people in the field and eighty thousand in the stands. The spectators are the ones who paid to watch, but it's the players on the field who are truly alive.
- Three Useless Questions
  - Where do you get your ideas:
  - What sort of software do you use to do your writing?
  - What should I do next?
  - The answers don't matter. At all. The choice of tools doesn't matter; the method doesn't matter. You don't need a guru; you need experience, the best kind of experience, the experience of repeated failure. You need the good taste to see your own work for what it is, and you earn that taste not only not by emulating those who made art before you but by failing, by repeatedly discovering what works and what doesn't.
- It's not that he doesn't know how to make a movie. It's not that he didn't have support. The problem is that he didn't see the film the way most American filmgoers saw it. It turns out that for a live action film, Andrew Stanton sees like a Russian, and it turns out that in his artistic frenzy and dedication, he refused to listen to Disney colleagues who saw what he refused to see.
- This is an expensive lesson to learn on a movie that cost about a quarter of a billion dollars to make, but it's a lesson all makers have to learn. We see, we make, and then we repeat.
- The first thing the consultant wants to know is, "What's your budget?" The second thing she asks is, "What do you think you should do?"
- A sad combination that I often see is someone who is giving up control by waiting to get picked, while giving in to the resistance and refusing to understand how their industry works. Without domain knowledge, without understanding the realities and points of view of all the players who are involved, the artist willingly becomes a helpless pawn.

- Not only aren't you going to get picked, but it's impossible to pick yourself if you don't understand how the system works. It's far easier to whine about unfair power brokers and unethical double-dealers than it is to dive into the dynamics of how things are actually made and sold.
- The unpublished author, the unsigned screenwriter, the disheartened job seeker. Sometimes these people have lost the law of large numbers. Other times, though, they are playing a game they cannot win. They don't speak the language; they are out of sync audience with the power to pick them. And if your art isn't generating the connection you seek... Make better art.
- You can risk being wrong or you can be boring.
- Only when you make art that isn't for everyone do you have a chance to connect with someone. And when you connect with someone, amazingly, you increase the chances that you've made something that many will want.
- The artist cares and so extends herself, creating new interactions to ensure that the recipient is changed and a connection is made...Which means that the industrial worker is afraid to care, because to do so would mean standing up and taking responsibility for the work. It's impossible for the engaged worker to both follow genuinely care (which means that the clerk is responsible for what happens next).
- The fact that people are artists in only one part of their lives is more proof that art isn't something you're born with. Art is an effort, an opportunity to devote enormous emotion and energy in a specific direction. It means that you care, not that you're a loner or a loon.
- **The only person** who saw every single Jerry Garcia performance was Jerry himself. The only one who has seen every memo you've written and every meeting you've been to is you. It's pretty easy to pick out your worst performances ever and compare them with the best your competition has ever done. Easy, but pointless. Your best work is a gift. Of course your work can be improved. But it is a gift first. Your generosity is more important than your perfection.
- No one ever gets talker's block. No one wakes up in the morning. Discovers he has nothing to say, and sits quietly, for days or weeks.
- In the connection economy, the true measure of your work is whether you touched someone. The generosity and kamiwaza you bring to the process are part of the process, and the ability to detach from the outcome permits you to bring more of them.
- The World's Worst Boss
  - That would be you.
  - Even if you're not self-employed, your boss is you. You manage your career, your day, and your responses. You manage how you sell your services and your education and the way you talk to yourself. Odds are, you're doing it poorly.
  - If you had a manager who talked to you the way you talked to you, you'd quit. If you had a boss who wasted as much of your time as you do, she'd be fired. If an organization developed its employees as poorly as you are developing yourself, it would soon go under.
- We are surprised when someone self-directed arrives on the scene. Someone who figures out a way to work from home and then turns that into a two-year journey, laptop in hand, as he explores the world while doing his job. We are shocked that someone uses evenings and weekends to get a second education or start a useful new side business. And we're envious

when we encounter someone who has managed to bootstrap herself into happiness, as if that were rare or even uncalled for.

- If you work for the world's worst boss, you have no one to blame but yourself. We'd have no sympathy for the marathon runner who lost every race because she refused to train or stretch. We'd never visit a doctor who wouldn't go to continuing education courses or read the journals. And yet it's easy to spend your day at a job hiding from the real work, the stuff you actually get paid to accomplish. Easier to blame it on writer's block or on not being in the right frame of mind or on needing to keep up with Twitter. If your work is to do art, then doing art is what you ought to be organizing your energy and your time around. Excuses aren't welcome; the work (your work) that connects is all we are seeking.
- Our cultural instincts die hard. Frequently, people who succeed with a breakthrough or the creation of connection then work hard to ensure that they never have to do it again. They turn one original restaurant into a chain of a hundred. Restaurants, ensuring that the insight and innovation will never have to be repeated and all the founder will have to do going forward is go to meetings.
- On the other hand, anyone with a job has the privilege of turning that job's tasks into art of one kind or another, if you transform your job into a platform for art, you're leveraging the trust and education and smarts you were given and putting them to good use.
- No, you can't walk into your boss's office and demand a clean sheet of paper and unlimited time and authority. What you can do is take responsibility. You can make small connections, small experiments, and small failures and own the results. You can honestly and clearly report what you're learning and what you're making and then do it again.
- Most of the day is spent in little work, doing your job. Clerical tasks, bureaucratic stuff, meetings, polishing, improving, reacting, responding. The obligation is to carve out time for the big work, the work of art. The big work that scares you, that brings risk that might very well fail. And we're most likely to do that work when it's least expected. When the table is small, the resources are lacking, and time is short. No need to wait for permission or the lightning bolt of inspiration. The big work is available to you as soon as you decide to do it. You though. You get to do it at the little table first, without resources and without authority. And then, if you persist, over time you'll find you can spend more of your time at your job doing your work, which is your art. And if you're current gig doesn't appreciate you. Someone else will.
- Jason Fox says, "The art of compromise is knowing when not to. To put it another way, "It's best to get as many people as possible into one room. And then go somewhere else." The meeting is a temporary collection of people waiting for someone to take responsibility so everyone else can go back to work. If you want someone else to take the blame and give you the credit, you will wait a very long time.
- Three Insights of the Impresario
  - If you weren't born with talent, that's fine. You were born with commitment.
  - Organize the talented.
  - Connect the disconnected.
- We Get Better at What We Practice So what are you practicing?
  - –barely making deadlines
  - –skeptically shooting down new ideas
  - –being generous

- –doing art
- –grumbling
- —looking for opportunities
- Nobody tells this to people who are beginners, I wish someone told me. All of us who do creative work, we get into it because we have good taste. But there is this gap. For the first couple years you make stuff, it's just not that good. It's trying to be good, it has potential, but it's not. But your taste. The thing that got you into the game, is still killer. And your taste is why your work disappoints you. A lot of people never get past this phase, they quit. Most people I know who do interesting, creative work went through years of this. We know our work doesn't have this special thing that we want it to have. . . . And if you are just starting out or you are still in this phase, you gotta know it's normal and the most important thing you can do is do a lot of work...It is only by going through a volume of work that you will close that gap, and your work will be as good as your ambitions.
- All mediocre sushi bars use electric rice cookers. They are reliable, foolproof, cheap, and easy. And they make perfectly good rice. Extraordinary sushi bars, the ones that cost two or three times as much as the average ones, never use electric rice cookers. They use gas. And a timer. The thing is, the gas is uneven and a little unpredictable. It's much harder to make good rice in a gas rice cooker. It takes time and attention and talent. But only with a flame is it possible to make great rice. It's unlikely that you'll create something scarce without doing something risky to get there.
- Your opinion about a particular employee's new idea is not nearly as important as how you'll act in the face of the things he does that don't work or might not work.
- Only industrialists in love with the status quo can insist on everything working every time. For the rest of us, the best path is to become a patron and to surround ourselves with people willing to do the undone and to take responsibility for what happens next.
- The Simple Reason That Creativity, Leadership, and Brainstorming Books and courses fail...
  - ...is that people don't want them to work. We've been brainwashed into becoming afraid of art. It's not hard to learn to dig a ditch if you believe that digging a ditch is going to pay off. People hesitate to lead or to invent or to make art because they're afraid of what will happen if they do. There are no step-by-step instructions or shortcuts in this book because those are easy to find elsewhere. I will, though, share two simple tactics that will expose your fear for what it is and let you look it straight in the eye.
- **Tactic: Problem and Solution Cards**
  - At a recent event, I handed out stacks of beautiful hand-printed index cards. One side was labeled problem and the other said SOLUTION. I asked everyone to write down their real problem, their cherished roadblock, the thing that was holding them back and keeping them from making their art. It might be the ten thousand dollars they needed to finish funding the project, or the annoying boss who wouldn't say yes, or the fact that they couldn't get an audition with a major label. What was that perfect problem, the one they just couldn't solve?
  - And then I asked everyone to swap cards with the person sitting next to them. I gave everyone five minutes to do their best and write down a solution on the back of the card. Here's the thing: I didn't really care if the solution was any good. Instead, I cared about three things: First, how did it feel to write down the problem? The act of making it

concrete, of writing it down and sharing it—did it make the problem seem bigger, or, more likely, did it trivialize this mammoth problem that you’d been polishing and cherishing and carrying around, maybe for years?

- Second, how did it feel to know that the person sitting next to you was maybe, just maybe, going to write down a valid solution? Because if she did, you’d have to act on it, wouldn’t you? You wouldn’t have your problem anymore, your bluff would be called, and you’d actually have to take action and ship your art. You’d find out once and for all if the audience was going to embrace your project, ignore it, or call you out as a fraud.
- And third, if the person sitting next to you failed to solve your problem adequately (which was likely, since everyone had only five minutes), were you prepared to admit that the problem was unsolvable? Because an unsolvable problem is almost as good as a solved one. An unsolvable problem means that you can declare defeat and move on. It means you can eliminate this excuse from your almanac of excuses, because your goal is unrealistic. No, I will never be able to become invisible or fly or even sing opera. But I accept these limits, and I’ve lived my life around them. Life without a bag filled with unsolved problems is a lot lighter, and you can get a lot more done.
- Not that kind of focus group. This is a group loosely based on the classic Mastermind idea created by Napoleon Hill. Find exactly three other artists—who work in different fields, who come from different backgrounds, who pursue different goals—and connect with one another about the process of your art. The object of this group isn’t to help you see better or make better art. The object is to remind you of your commitment and to push you to make your art more original, personal, and successful. When you know that you need to meet every two weeks and look a respected artist in the eye and tell her what you did (or didn’t) make, it will raise your game.
- Complaining is stupid. Either act or forget.
- In the idea-driven connection economy, the cost of experiments is lower than ever, the ability to coordinate is high, and the impact of being right is huge.
- Who Gets the Blues?
  - I’ve got the blues.”
  - “I have a wart on my foot.”
  - “I have a cold.”
  - “I have a broken arm.”
  - Isn’t it interesting that we never say, “I am a broken arm” or “I am cancer”? We understand that these are things that happen to us; they are not who we are. And yet we say, “I am afraid,” and “I am a failure.” Of course, afraid isn’t who we are; afraid is something that happened to us. Failure is an event, not a person. The only thing that’s clearly true is this: “You are an artist.”
- In fact, you can play a different game instead—figuring out how much you can stand. It’s the pain (and the fear of pain) that makes art scarce. If it were merely fun (and it can be fun!), then there’d be too much of it, and it wouldn’t be worth much.
- They’re missing a key truth: If the limit applies to them and to their competition, that limit will require them to compete on insight and creativity and innovation, not on racing to sell the maximum volume. The limit will also increase the life span of their customers, which is probably a good thing.

- For the marketer, the freelancer, and the entrepreneur, the challenge is to reset your comfort level, to be okay with the undone, with the cycle of never ending. We were trained to finish our homework, our peas, and our chores. Today we're never finished, and that's okay. It's a dance, not a grind.
- All important work is ridiculous until it makes an impact, and then it becomes art. Too ridiculous, though, and no impact is made. Not ridiculous— not important.
- The publish-first-publish-often magic of the Internet punishes the spectator. The YouTube video maker gets more out of making a video than you get out of watching it. The entrepreneur and the poet and the writer each benefit from making their points, and they need readers and listeners and customers and spectators. Sure, we'll always need spectators. But they don't have to you.
- If you commit to this basket (or another basket that matches your vision) and you make this your job, make this the task set you are accountable for, then the art you produce may very well take care of itself. On the other hand, if your habits are reactions and responses, if they involve processing the incoming, going to meetings, and acting on the instructions of others, you have given in to the resistance; you have sacrificed your art to the whims of others.
- And we can learn two things from this. The first is that every time you work with someone who makes your work less than it ought to be, you've made a choice and you'll need to live with the consequences. It's also worth noting how cheap it is to build a portfolio of just about any sort of work now, and you hide your most daring work at your own peril.
- Columbus did not respond to these words but asked for a whole egg to be brought to him. He placed it on the table and said: "My lords, I will lay a wager with any of you that you are I unable to make this egg stand on its end like I will do without any kind of help or aid." They all tried without success and when the egg returned to Columbus, he tapped it gently on the table breaking it slightly and, with this, the egg stood on its end. All those present were confounded and understood what he meant: that once the feat has been done, anyone knows how to do it.
- This is the failure of a new flavor of Domino's pizza or a new variation of a Dell computer or the tepid reaction to the latest Corvette. They are boring failures because there wasn't much risk in the first place. Remarkable comes from being able to risk an entirely new kind of failure, the failure that comes with a new risk. When you take the new risk, you open the door to an entirely new form of success.
- If it's work, the instinct is to do less of it. Why ask for more? If you're playing a game, on the other hand, then the goal is to keep playing. Work is a grind. It is compelled labor. It is heartless and soulless and designed to please another and generate capital, which is used to make more work and generate more capital. We give ourselves permission to opt out when we do work, to depersonalize it and dehumanize it and forgive our ethical shortcuts.
- Games, on the other hand, are voluntary. Games have rules that we choose, and we choose to play games that reflect who we are. When we play a game, we can go all in, because it's personal. Not necessarily the winning or the losing, but the playing. The way we play is part of who we see ourselves becoming.
- When we see the "work" we do as part of a game, with moves instead of failures, with outcomes instead of tragedies, we're more likely to bring the right spirit to our work. Whatever happens is part of the game—that's why we're playing it.

- And we're forgetting faster and more often than ever before. We're in love with the new, and it seems as though there will never be enough newness and that it will never arrive fast enough. We've built a post deception society, one where our future is created by those who replace the status quo, not those who defend it.
- My new favorite word in German is *funktionslust*. It describes the love of doing something merely for the sake of doing it, not simply because it's likely to work.
- The artist needs your unwavering commitment to her mission. This is the largest price you pay for being with and supporting an artist, and yes, you can probably invest even more time, passion, and money into doing this than you already do.
- The artist doesn't need to be given an out to avoid making art. The artist doesn't need reminders about reality or lawyers or regulations or even the rules of physics. The artist merely needs to be encouraged and cajoled and supported to make better art encouraged and cajoled and supported to make better art.
- Sometimes you get lucky and find yourself in the right place at just the right time. If that happens and you don't realize it, though, you will probably waste the opportunity.
- I think that's where we are right now. The right place. The right time. And you might not realize it. This is a lousy time to be an industrialist, a lousy time to hope for reliable, predictable demand. A lousy time to expect to extract unreasonable profits by making average stuff for average people. A lousy time, especially, to be a well-paid middle manager who does what he's told in exchange for a safe job.
- On the other hand, there's never been a better time to have something to say, to embrace change, and to see the world differently. There's never been a better time to make connections instead of stuff
- **Your biggest** failure is there thing you dreamed of contributing but didn't find the guts to do
- The cost of being wrong is dwarfed by the cost of not trying.
- The biggest black mark on your working resume is the road not taken the project not initiated, and the art not made.
- As I'm writing this, I'm drinking tea (made with leaves shipped through a supply chain more than three thousand miles long) out of a glass bottle (smelted at a temperature unobtainable by humans not long ago), and I'm working on a computer that would have cost a million dollars ten years ago, except you couldn't buy one at any price, and the computer is connected to the Internet via Wi-Fi (it's all a miracle). We're living in a moment of time, the first moment of time. When a billion people are connected, when your work is judged (more than ever before) based on what you do rather than who you are, and when credentials, access to capital, and raw power have been dwarfed by the simple question "Do I care about what you do?" We built this world for you. Not so you would watch more online videos, keep up on your feeds, and LOL with your high school friends. We built it so you could do what you're capable of. Without apology and without excuse.
- Willie Jackson understood that he'd ended up working to live and decided he'd enjoy the next hundred years of life on earth a lot more if he started living to work instead
- The job of the community organizer is simple: not to find the right answer but to find the right audience, the right segment of the community. Connect them, amplify the positive outliers, and repeat until change happens.