

# INTRODUCTION

Inspiration isn't something you're born with; a perpetually filled tank of awesomesauce fueling you with confidence and motivation. You need to be reminded. Even if you consciously accept positive self-affirmations, some part of your unconscious self may not be totally convinced that you're as cool as you want to be.

But you *are* freaking awesome. I can tell, because you're reading this book. And I have psychic powers. And because, even if you've only experienced a little bit of your awesomeness personally, by the end of this book, you'll have a much deeper understanding of what it means to use your awesomeness in a meaningful way.

Maybe you have a yearning to be doing bigger things, and have spent years creating stuff, but you're tired of being unappreciated. What you need is someone to kick you in the ass and tell you to get to work. That's what the "freaking" is for. Swear words are strong and empowering. They flip a psychological switch of courage and daring. Go ahead, try saying "I'm a creative genius" or "I am brilliant"

... and then look yourself in the mirror and say, “I’m freaking awesome.” Does your heart beat a little faster? Do you believe it a little more? *Good.*

Unfortunately, as you’re going to find out very soon, being freaking awesome isn’t enough. It isn’t even enough to get a sharp kick in the ass and do the work. You can do a great deal of work that nobody ever gives a crap about. Doing a lot of work that you think might be cool without considering what other people are going to think isn’t noble, or “pure”, or inspired by little angels that whisper in your ear. It’s vain, egoistic, pig-headed and self-absorbed. It’s fine to realize that you’re a freaking awesome creative genius. It’s not OK to assume that whatever you make will be applauded and change the world just because you made it.

Hence the second part of the title: “Do something that matters.” My philosophy of art and creativity isn’t as spiritual as the productivity gurus that are popular these days. They talk about the struggle between creation and paralyzing fear and self-doubt. They say you should just push through and finish the work. If you only want to finish the work—fine. You can stop reading this book right now. But I’ll bet you are secretly hoping that after you finish the work somebody else is going to be impressed by it, and maybe even give you some money for it. In fact, I’ll bet you dream of fame, fortune and being carried down the street on people’s shoulders, with champagne corks and streamers flying around you.

There's a distasteful hypocrisy in doing the work without thinking of whether it will matter to anybody, and then expecting it to matter to everybody. The pundits and gurus will tell you to make art in a cave, and not think about the end product or the purchasing public. This advice has value: you need to finish the work, and often believing your work is of critical importance—that it *needs* to happen; that it is the universe's dearest wish—can empower you to push through and get it done.

But work done this way by no means guarantees success. In fact it's far more likely you'll fail, because you've made something you think is great without ever wondering whether anybody else is going to like it. A few people will have made something with overlap between the areas of personal passion and universal appeal; these outliers will find smashing successful and propagate the myth that creative work done for pure passion is profitable.

In my experience, however, the beliefs you cherished during the production of the work have very little to do with the work's success. Sure, they continue to be important in how you talk about the work. It helps to say you were inspired, inflamed, and felt forced by an invisible hand to get the work done, but in the end it is the work itself that matters, which will stand or fall on its own after it has cut its metaphorical umbilical cord to you, its creator.

When that happens, and you're ready to let go of the work and watch it gain traction or disappear under all the

noise and confusion, you will face this perplexing dilemma: if the work was inspired, why doesn't anybody want it? And: I just spend years working on this thing... don't I deserve some recompense?

The idea that true creative inspiration happens in an isolated bubble or vacuum is the ruling paradigm of creativity these days (even though it's a nineteenth century invention that doesn't fit with the reality of our times). I'm constantly dealing with frustrated artists and authors who want to know how to market and promote their work – and it can be done, sometimes. But other times, there's simply no market for what they've made. The time to learn that is *now*. Not after you've spent years building something.

So while this book may seem negative, pessimistic, grumpy or skeptical, I hope it will also offer a much-needed reality check in a world filling your head with a lot of optimistic nonsense. Passion, optimism, enthusiasm—these are necessary, but they aren't enough, and energy without focus is dangerous. Toaster ovens, coffee makers and blenders are cool. High powered, unfiltered raw voltage is not so cool. Most other books are trying to get you to crank up the voltage, because they know you're losing 90% of it in actions and projects that don't matter, and draining yourself of positivity by forcing your ideas onto people who don't want them. So you need more inspirational books, more self-help CDs, more empowerment... always filling up a vessel with more holes than a colander.

I don't believe art has to be a mad struggle to fill yourself with inspiration and then produce something before the enthusiasm drains away. I don't believe artists necessarily have to become poor or crazy.

I think smart people can use creativity responsibly, harnessing it into stable systems that produce reliable and measurable effects. And that's nice. But I expect more from you. Because you're freaking awesome. That means, with clever planning, you can generate far more income than you need, completely sever the connection between time and money, and become a one-person super patron and champion of Important Things.

I can teach you a lot about how to start a creative business, how to attract clients, charge high prices, build a platform, sell yourself like a rockstar, become a media darling and make a lot of money. But all that stuff will be so much easier if you *make something that matters*. A couple years ago "make epic stuff" was the groundbreaking catchphrase – but it really just means be innovative and make amazing, interesting and novel stuff that gets noticed. That's fine for getting attention to you and standing out. It's probably the easiest way to go viral and get your stuff shared. You can make "epic stuff" to get traffic back to your real work. But it isn't enough to grow a successful business. You have to do something that matters to other people. You have to make stuff that transforms lives, melts hearts, inspires souls, and shifts paradigms.

In this book I'm going to take you on a short journey through a six-step process that will allow you to use your creativity to make things that matter, and finally shift gears from creating as a hobby to creating as a career. I'm making it a short journey, because I started this guide three years ago and have somehow amassed over six hundred pages of research on the nature of work, creativity, philosophy, sociology and history. I've written so much I had to split it into ~~two~~ three separate non-fiction books. But I don't want you to have to read all of that material (even though it is fascinating) until you're ready. I want to lay out a brief guide to creative independence, so that you can read through it in a couple of ~~days~~ hours, grab your scepter (you have one, don't you?) and begin changing the world.

# YOU ARE FREAKING AWESOME

## *PART ONE*

YOU ARE FREAKING AWESOME. You are a unique snowflake made of pixie dust and moonlight. You are a unicorn; leaving a trail of rainbows and magic behind you. You are an amazing, talented, creative genius. There is nothing you cannot do. You are far more powerful than you dare to imagine. You are full of awe, mystery, potential and possibility.

***You can do ANYTHING.***

There is no one on earth just like you. The universe is conspiring to support you. Everybody wants to be your friend. You are a helpful and supportive person. Opportunities come easily to you. You quickly master new skills. Your innate talent for greatness is only getting stronger with experience. You are wise, capable, and competent. You make the earth tremble in response to your stunning marvelousness.

***You can be ANYTHING.***

You make your friends feel honored and privileged to know you. You connect people and overwhelm them with your positive helpfulness. You look for ways to bring them closer into their true selves, and help them past their self-imposed limitations by sharing your confidence in their abilities. The more you give, the more you attract magnificent episodes of synchronicity. You deserve success in all things.

***You can have ANYTHING.***

You are the solution to every problem. You abound with enormous ideas, and fuel your projects with passion in a way that magnetizes others into action. You build communities of world-changers. You light a match of smiles that burns through the heart of humanity as it spreads; a bonfire of smiles that destroys apathy and

creates space for purpose. You run amid the thickets of melancholy hearts and make a bonfire of all sorrows.

**You exist. You are perfect.**

There is absolutely nothing you can do to make me love you any less. *Thank you for being a beacon.*

**Now what?**

Now that you know you are limitless, unrestrained, completely free, a magician of incredible power, and that the world is your sandbox, what will you choose to create? How will you live your life?

If you enjoy working in a cave and want to be buried with your creative works, never to be remembered again, that's your choice. I don't believe you should be forced to share your light with others. It's yours, and you can do with it what you will. On the other hand, I would encourage you not to hide your light. Let it shine – and use it to illumine the path of the others, groping in the darkness behind you.

Before he died, Kafka made his friend promise to destroy all of his writings; his friend disobeyed the directive and shared a profound, world-changing body of work.

**Do the work, and share it.**

Creative energy is like electricity. You can harness it and use it to do things. You can do Big Things or Little Things.

You can spend a weekend tinkering with your car or washing the windows or writing a novel. You can go for a hike or watch a movie or learn to paint. There are lots of things you can do with your time and energy. How do you choose what's valuable? How do you choose what matters? You have to consider what will make it meaningful to other people.

### **Isn't that selling out?**

Yes—but that doesn't make it the soul-crushing creative prostitution that you think it does. It only means you're thinking of how your creative work can provide value.

There was a time I refused to sell out. I made stuff I liked and waited for the world to get it. When I was painting bizarre surrealistic oil paintings that poked gentle fun at the underbelly of society, galleries asked me to paint something a little nicer, like abstract flowers – something they could sell. I refused.

I was this comic.



I was painting things that Gertrude Stein would have called *inaccrochable*: a picture that a painter paints and then he cannot hang it when he has a show and nobody will buy it because they cannot hang it either.

I did that for years, trying to force people to appreciate or buy my art. But I started seeing what was selling, and began to adapt my style to something a little less aggressive and a little more crowd-pleasing. Those were the paintings that got sold: with no explanation, no groveling, no price justification... if I hung it up, somebody would buy it.

Balzac said, “A grocer is attracted to his business by a magnetic force as great as the repulsion which renders it odious to artists.” And he’s right. If you hate your job, you shouldn’t be doing it. You should be doing something creative. But if you want to make a living as a creative genius, you need to split your time between making something that supports you, and make the thing that you want to make. Otherwise, you’re just asking for charity, or a patron – why should someone else pay you to make things that they don’t want? Although few will admit it, all successful, working artists began by floundering around and experimenting until they found one thing that people really liked: then they made it their “style.” And they probably make a lot of it because it sells, while secretly working privately on more meaningful work.

You can *do* anything. What you cannot do is force someone else to do something for you – like give you money. Which means, just because you are a spectacular creative being, does not mean the universe will conspire to send money your way.

We believe in a creative mythology that rewards outliers—but even among our greatest examples of creatives who stuck to their guns and refused to crowd please, many stories are horrific.

Melville thought he was a failure until his death: Moby Dick didn't catch on until a century later. Van Gogh died mostly alone and miserable. We remember them because their work became important representations of their times and the creative movement they were part of. Yes, they were part of a movement. Artists that weren't part of a larger movement, that can't be fit into a neat history of creative progression, have been mostly discarded. Even if the work is beautiful. Even if it is as good as or better than Van Gogh's. They made stuff that mattered to them, and hoped it would catch on, but it didn't.

Picasso and Dali, in contrast, copied the crap out of anything else they could, trying to get their pulse on the next big thing, shamelessly stealing from other artists, until they finally did something that resonated... and then they stuck with their thing, mostly for the rest of their lives.

We love tragic artists, but we also love successful artists. Picasso is not more or less creative than Van Gogh. But he was focused on positioning, platform building, and

fame: he built an empire, and increased the value of his works in his lifetime.

*You don't have to be a starving artist.*

There is nothing inherent to creativity that demands anonymity, failure or poverty. But know that if you only make what you want to make and don't think about other people's reception, you are gambling. You might get lucky, but you might not.

I find it more responsible to use your gifts to deliberately become successful. With your newfound influence and financial freedom, you'll focus much less on trying to "make it." You'll waste less time on events doing desperate self-promotion. You'll be able to use your platform for bigger, more meaningful projects that help other people.

# DO SOMETHING THAT MATTERS

## *PART TWO*

There is absolutely nothing you can't do. But you have to make choices. Do you want to do things you enjoy, or things others enjoy? Do you want to be selfish or selfless? For example; two magicians, Paul and Silas. One gained terrible powers for his own gain. The other used powers for healing and growth. (For a more modern example, think of Dumbledore and Voldemort). I don't claim that either one is intrinsically better or more powerful; I won't tell you one is good or evil. But I will say this; in today's connected world, the lone creative genius working in isolation, tapping into the mysterious forces of the universe, may live an extraordinary life, but is unlikely to leave a global impact.

Are you happy to do creative work as a healthy hobby, a passion project, for your own personal gain, self-healing

or self-exploration? Great! No problem. But maybe you you'd also like to sell your work and quit your job and do your passion full time, as a job. I would strongly encourage you to do so. Any other time you're trading your time for money, you are wasting the precious uniqueness that only you can bring into existence; this is a disservice to yourself and the world. But I also don't think you can quit your job and just be successful automatically, not without a major mind-shift, and the mind-shift is this:

*It is OK to make things that people like.*

I need to repeat this because you've probably heard otherwise, that all art starts from a vacuum, and you should never consider the end user. That ideology can keep you safe and comfortable so that you finish the work. It's affirming to wrestle with your creative blocks and push through to completion. It builds your confidence and skill set.

Unfortunately it's a very, very bad way to start a business. In fact it's the direct opposite of the core basis of entrepreneurial action, which is: *find a need and fill it.*

I want you to be happy, and confident, and fulfilled, but in my experience spending years making things and then spending more years trying to sell them or market them is a very destructive way to be creative: it leads to frustration, feelings of unappreciation, loneliness and even broken relationships. At your worst, you may ask all of your friends and family to support you: to buy your books

or art, to help you share them, to like your Facebook page. You're doing everything you can to get noticed, to have a shot, to turn this body of work you've spent years producing into capital so you can do more of it... but nobody gives a crap.

There are just too many tens of thousands of similar artists or writers or creative people. There's too much noise. Even if you find clever ways to cut through it, even if your website and sales funnel and everything else is set up beautifully, it will be very difficult to scrape out a living, and that's because:

*It doesn't matter to anyone else.*

Your work doesn't matter. It doesn't resonate with them. They can't connect it with the things that they love or care about. It doesn't hit any buttons that they are passionate about. It doesn't tell a story that moves them. All they see is you and the work, and they may feel like it might be nice to give you a little money to support you. But why give a handout to a grown artist who has enough money to buy supplies, and not to the guy down the street who can't afford a sandwich?

*Don't ask for handouts!*

If you do the right kind of work, it will sell itself. People will beg for it. It will be cool and innovative and connect with pressing social issues. You'll be representing a

movement, a community, a viral idea. People will throw money at you. Sponsors and organizations will want to work with you. Other artists or writers will be eager to collaborate. Because it's not really about the work: it's about the story the work tells. The work is the souvenir, the reminder, of the Big Idea behind it. This is true in visual art.

In fiction, things are a little different: the work itself is the most important thing, but what is often overlooked is that the *story* matters more than the *writing*. Nobody really cares that much about your writing. So don't spend years learning to be more clever and wordsmithy. Learn how to tell a great story. It's not a *creative* skill: great stories have similar features. All genres have recurring themes and elements. Learn them and add them to your book. You want a bestselling book? You do it by figuring out what elements of your target genre will satisfy your readers. Do you truly believe it would be better to go into a cave and surprise or astound your readers with something new and fresh, without satisfying them? If you disappoint your readers, who are you writing for anyway? Yourself? Then why publish at all?

*Make something that matters.*

That doesn't mean you have to make crap. You can learn the rules; what's popular now, who's making a living, what kinds of things are they making – and then you can come up with your own unique idea, use your personal style, and

build your platform around the things that you care about. You don't have to sell your soul. You don't have to make stuff you hate just to make a buck. The trick is to make sure you position yourself well, so you can maximize the profit on the work you don't enjoy, and leave more time for the work you love.

I've found that, as someone who likes to write or paint, I can enjoy the process no matter what I'm working on (with the exception of somebody telling me exactly what to do). Working on commission or doing custom work can be lucrative but unsatisfying. But I can still decide, for example, to write a paranormal romance rather than a space odyssey because the reader base is three times as large. I don't see it as "selling out." Maybe I've written some space odysseys already, and people like them. But only people who like space odysseys. But why should I only share my writing with a small group of people? Why not write in another genre, both to challenge myself, and also to produce work that another group of people can enjoy? The more value you produce, the easier it will be to support yourself. The easier it is to support yourself, the more time and freedom you will have to focus on more meaningful work.

# HOW TO MAKE MONEY

## *PART THREE*

There's a lot of books on how to be more creative, how to produce more great work, how to have self-confidence as an artist or writer. It's great to have the motivation and inspiration to get started.

But in my business, I'm surrounded by people who *want* to be a writer or artist but can't make any money at it. They have the website; they offer coaching or books or products or prints, but they get no traffic or traction. Nobody is buying. So they keep going to the job they

hate... until one day they are laid off, and they post on Facebook asking for help.

I did that for a few years too. Then I realized it would be so much easier to be creative if I didn't have to work for a living. So I learned to focus on the money. Because the money is a great gauge of *how much value you are providing to the world*.

I've been location-independent Creative Person, making money online for over a decade. I have over 20 blogs and websites that collectively get about 5,000 hits a day. That's not a ton of traffic, but I've positioned myself well as a publishing expert and make over 10K a month in book design or marketing services. But I'm quitting: I don't love doing services for other people, so from now on I'm not going to hire myself out. Instead I'll focus on the work that I'm passionate about. I'll be taking a big hit in income, but I also know enough about business, writing, art and online marketing to build up passive income assets that earn money for me, while I work on the things I enjoy.

I like to think of money in terms of **reach vs. impact**.

Reach = The number of people your work gets in front of. Hopefully some of them like it.

Impact = The actual impact you're making on a per-person basis.

If you're making funny memes or inspirational quote pictures that get shared millions of times, you have a very wide reach, but less impact (unless, you do it repeatedly, and people get to love and expect your pictures). Reach is great, but doesn't matter if it has no impact at all.

If you're a coach, maybe you have a very small reach. Maybe you're only recommended via word of mouth, to a few people a month. But you make a *tremendous* difference in the lives of the individuals you work with. Not many people will be paying you money, but those few people should be paying you a lot of money.

***Note:** Not everybody has money. If you want to serve people with no money, the easiest way is to first serve some people with money, get a bunch, and then spread it around.*

Making money online means balancing reach and impact. Maybe you have something amazing, but nobody can find you: that's your fault. Fix it with content marketing, guest posts and partnerships. Maybe you can reach 1 million people but nobody gives a crap about your work: that's your fault too. You're not making things that matter to those people.

For me, I have been doing high-impact services for a few people a month. I'm irreplaceable, so I can charge a lot. I'm switching to lower impact products (templates, courses, books) that have more reach. So instead of selling one cover design for \$829, I hope to sell 10 cover templates packages for \$87 each, and make the same

amount of money with no client work. It will take time to build those assets and templates up, but when I'm done I'll be able to focus 100% of my time on my writing. But I'm only able to do that because I've built up a platform.

If you want to be a full-time artist or writer, I would consider following the same trajectory: starting with services, and ending in products (or doing a healthy mix of both). I've outlined some action steps below. This is a brief, crash course to:

*Making something that matters (and earns money)*

Firstly, you need to know who you're serving. Find a community – probably one of *your* communities, and find a way to help them. Discover what they need, what problems they face, what their pain points and frustrations are. Try to fix them. Write blog articles. Make templates or tools or resources. Don't make crap stuffed with keywords: spend time making something that's really, really useful (or funny/entertaining). Focus on giving. Don't think about the money yet. Make some articles that are so amazing and generous people can't help but share. Blow people away. If you don't get comments like "Holy crap, this is so amazing and useful!" then you aren't trying hard enough.

Case in point: I got a letter this week from someone who had found some of my resources.

I just wanted to say ‘Thank You.’

I am relatively certain that you receive these messages frequently, nevertheless, I just wanted to take a moment to express my most sincere appreciations for your DIY offerings.

I won't bore you with a lengthy story, but suffice to say that I have been writing for my own enjoyment my entire life. I recently made the choice to pursue writing as a career and was immediately overwhelmed by the enormity of effort required to simply educate myself on self-publishing.

I was lost. Ready to go back to my darkened corner and return to my introverted life, when I stumbled on to your site while searching DESPERATELY for writing templates and cover help.

You have been a godsend. I am still lost but at least I know that there are people like yourself out there acting as a beacon of light for us wayward souls.

As I read through your site and gather information, the haze is lifting and this process is beginning to make sense.

I don't get that many thank you letters, actually, but I do get several like this a month. I focus on producing helpful

content. I don't charge for most of it. I write expert roundup posts linking to other people in my field. I try to be honest without being negative. But I didn't just share the letter to demonstrate my awesomeness: I also share it because it's a great way to start a dialogue with someone with a platform. Don't just email asking for help, or for someone to share your stuff, or give you a review. Never start a relationship by asking for something (sometimes it's OK to ask for advice, and I give a ton of that away for free as well – but a letter like this that makes me feel good, I'm going to remember. And next time the author does something or publishes a book, I'll remember, and I'll probably take time to help him out).

The more people you serve, the more you give, the more people you help, the easier it will be to build your platform and make money. Don't worry about giving away too much for free. Read *The Curve* to understand how business works these days (give a lot of stuff away for free to most people, in order to reach your audience; then charge higher prices for special services or products that your true fans will pay for.)

I would shoot for earning \$1000 a month from your business or side-hustle. That's enough to know that your idea is feasible and people are willing to pay for it. If you can earn \$1000 a month, you can scale up to \$10,000 a month. But if you can't earn \$10, then your idea isn't good enough: other people don't want what you've got. You may have a problem with positioning, or traffic. You may

have an ugly website. Your offer may not be enticing. Maybe people just don't "get it."

Before you spend a year and invest thousands of dollars developing an idea, make a simple landing page that describes the idea. Add a buy button or email sign up. People may tell you they love the idea, but that doesn't necessarily mean anybody is going to pay for it. I'm a big fan of "pre-launches"—basically selling the thing you haven't made or developed yet, in order to validate the idea and also give you the money to actually make it happen. If you adore your idea, but nobody else gives a crap, then you have to take a step back and reflect: Do you want to do the hard thing, and force your Value on others, swimming upstream, fighting tooth and claw, until it gains traction? Or do you want to figure out what people really want, so you can actually be helping them?

If you have a decent idea, you can get to \$1000 a month pretty easily. That's an accomplishment. You can have a creative, small business. It may keep you busy and pay the bills. You may feel successful. *But you can do better.* That lifestyle isn't worthy of you. You are so much greater than that. You can build an enormous vessel of creative energy that changes the world. How can you tell a story that matters? By doing something remarkable enough. If you have the right idea, everything will be downhill. Not, "Oh, this is really nice," but "OMFG this is awesome. How can I help you? How can I support you?" That's the kind of vision you need to have.

If you've read *Go Bold*, you know that it's *easier* to do something really, really big than it is to do something small. For example, starting a book editing company took some work. Starting a book cover design company was easier because it's visual – you don't have to convince or sell; people look at my samples and know the quality I can produce. But a services business or product isn't big enough to start a movement. It isn't sexy or exciting enough to get people to really share it.

My other big idea is to buy a castle to use as a writer's retreat. I have a decent plan and I may pull it off; but that's not usually the thing I lead with. However, people don't get that excited when I tell them I do book design and marketing. When I tell them I want to buy a castle, *that's* what they remember. That's how they introduce me. That's an idea they are eager to share with their friends. I've had total strangers come up to me and say, "You're the guy who wants to buy a castle!" It's become my thing.

Will it happen? Not sure yet (I'm still shopping for the right one). But even though it's a crazy big goal, I feel like it could also be the easiest thing I've ever done.

# WHAT'S YOUR STORY

## *PART FOUR*

Let's say you know who your people are, where your community hangs out, and you have something to offer them – maybe a service, product, course, etc. But you can't get any traffic or traction. You're working too hard. You're not seeing any breakthrough.

That's an indication that you don't matter to people. And that means you're *not telling the right story*. People buy from people they trust and like. Maybe you have been trying to be too professional or corporate. Maybe you don't have anything remarkable about you. Even if you

haven't *done* anything yet, you can still talk about what you *want* to do, and that can become part of your story.

I've put together a quick little process for building a profitable creative business. It's different from the more in-depth platform building stuff I teach on my blog ([www.creativindie.com](http://www.creativindie.com)), but it's enough to get your head in the right place.

1. Thinking bigger
2. Co-creation
3. Serving people with less
4. Increasing the love
5. Practical improvements
6. Epic Crap

I'll break it down into actionable chunks so you can focus on developing your own answers.

## **What's your Big Thing (and why does it matter?)**

What can you do that's novel, interesting, challenging, incredible or remarkable? Think of the things you see on BoredPanda... funny, interesting, crazy things. It must be something remarkable that will appeal to your target audience, your people. They will see it and think, "Damn, that's sweet!" It should be something nobody else has done before.

***But wait!*** I don't think doing Something Big is enough. Because the next thing everybody is going to ask is, so what? Why are you doing that? What's it for? When Forrest Gump starts running back and forth across America, and people actually notice, everybody wants to know *what he's running for*. When they find out he isn't running for anything, they forget about him.

I made this mistake when I first started painting: I painted weird, symbolic works that seemed charged with meaning, but I didn't want to tell other people how to interpret my work. So I asked "what does it mean *to you*?" They would look at me like I was insane, thinking "You're the freaking artist – you painted it, how should I know what it means?" The point is, sometimes you need to give your work meaning, even if you didn't make it with specific meaning in mind.

If you're going to run across the country, build the world's biggest tree house, live on Twinkies and Kool-Aid for a year, don't just do it for fun or personal satisfaction. Other people may want to support you, but you have to make it meaningful for them. They need a cause they can get behind. So pick a big cause; it can be an established organization, or maybe you just want to "raise awareness" on an issue. Make it something that your target audience cares about (or should care about).

## **Co-creation and Partnerships**

It's very difficult to build a platform from scratch and grow it. It's very easy to build a community around shared vision. Connecting with a cause and giving your mission meaning makes it much easier for people to support you. Then you're not like, "Hey can you tell people about this awesome thing I'm doing so I can get famous?" instead you'll be like, "Hey I care about this topic, and I think you also care about it, I'm going to do this crazy thing to raise awareness, and you can get some social coolness karma just by sharing my crazy thing and support the cause without actually doing anything yourself."

Turn your thing into a charity, a cause, a non-profit, and it will be easier for people to support you. If you don't want to do that, you're basically asking for handouts – *unless* you find a way to make it worth other people's time. For example, I've seen a bunch of big "online summits" and workshops this year. You know how those work? Somebody with a small platform organizes a free online event and asks 20 people to give up an hour of their time to teach something. Those 20 people get to be seen as "experts"—and a big collective event will draw a lot more eyeballs and reach new markets. That's a win for them: free marketing. But the guy organizing the event is the real winner: he's going to walk away with a large percentage of everybody else's email list.

Make a Facebook page for your art or writing and you might get past 1000 likes. But make a page "To help amazing visual artists who want to change the world!" and

you might get 100,000. Make something people can be a part of.

Sometimes being the connector, the visionary, is enough. Think of Santa and the 13 reindeer; the deer are magical creatures, they can go anywhere. They can fly. But they aren't doing anything with that energy. Santa is a fat old man, but with a vision to bring presents to kids all around the world. The reindeer support him in delivering his mission of positive value, and they get to be a part of something greater than themselves. Find your people. How could your project include or applaud them; how can you help them grow what they are trying to build, and harness the power to achieve greater things together?

If you're building a course, or a book, or something else, the easy way to succeed is to quote a bunch of high profile famous people (ideally, you'd contact them and ask for an answer to one question). Do that 50 times and you have a bestseller, because those people will probably share the book that talks about them. I do this for "link-bait" posts all the time (which don't have to be crappy or spammy articles). I'll usually do a series on a topic, and each article will include an "expert roundup" which quotes well-known people in my field, and links to their site, and probably includes a picture of them. They are getting free promotion on my site, and are grouped together with other experts. I push myself up to peer level, by surrounding myself with that kind of company; and they are likely to share the article since it talks about them. It's a great way

to “ground” a blog in the beginning, with some good content and backlinks.

This all may sound cynical and sinister to you. Leveraging other people’s platforms may sound yucky. But it depends on what you do with it. If you are building a big email list to sell more crap, then yes, it is a little distasteful. But if you’re growing a platform from which you can do good things and change the world, then you should *do it quickly* and *change the world* already. The world needs you. And my point is this: if you’re trying to build something, don’t just go around asking for help and support.

Find a way to get the influencers in your field on board, without asking them for favors. They have the platform. You are approaching them. You need to be able to offer something that they don’t have to think about. Again, it helps to be Thinking Big; to have a Big Goal and connect it with a Big Cause. But even so, don’t ask for charity or financial support from the influencers: all you need is for them to share – and make sure you give them back a ton of thanks and recognition in exchange. (If you’re offering services or products, I’ll usually find a way I can personally improve their business or platform, and also offer a free prize they can giveaway to their followers).

## **Serving People with Less**

If you want to start an online business so you can make money and focus all your attention on your creative work, that’s fine. It’s not actually that hard to do, if you have

small goals (making enough to support yourself). Interestingly, it will be *so much easier to do* if you make it your focus to help other people. Everything that you're learning, you should be sharing. Every challenge that you overcome, you should be blogging about, to help others trying to go down the same path. Be a trailblazer. Make the most accurate, in-depth, how-to articles on the internet for accomplishing exactly what you've set out to accomplish.

Doing the thing isn't all that great: but being the first to do it, because you have the time and resources, and building the road so that other people with less can follow in your footsteps... that makes you a hero. I know a lot of people who say "I don't know what to blog about," because they think they have to be experts, or they have to know everything, or they have to be right about everything. That's bull. Just be where you are, and record the struggles you are facing. Even if you can't defeat them at first. Even if you do everything wrong. Seeing you wrestle with problems in the attempt will be invaluable for those who are afraid to get started. The more inexperienced you are, the more you screw everything up, the more motivational you will be (people will say, "damn—they are doing it, maybe I can do it too").

My "people with less" are writers. I help indie authors write and publish books on the cheap, and try to help them make money with it. I hope to do the same with artists. That's separate from the services I offer and my profitable businesses; but the more well-known you

become, the easier it is to charge for personal attention and help, or to make money in other ways.

## **Increasing the Love**

Treat everybody like it's their birthday. Everybody is fighting their own battles. Be kind. That doesn't mean you have to give away your time for free; it doesn't mean you have to say yes to everyone or help everybody. Don't be a martyr, you'll never get anything done. But do be polite and respectful: love is mostly about the attitude. Make them feel heard, respected and loved. If you can't help, take a second to recommend a good book or resource. Put them in touch with someone they should meet.

*Give a damn.*

Sending a nice thoughtful reply by email may take you a few minutes and be life-changing for the person on the other end (I've had a few people tell me I "saved their life" just by replying when they were in a dark place). Increase the love. Focus on people, connections, relationships. You can do more in person than through online business and Facebook groups. Make real world connections. Set up a local event, a Q&A, a rally. Make a superteam of influencers in your field and your immediate area. See what amazing things you can dream up together.

*You can never be sending out too much love.*

In entrepreneurial circles, we talk about “high-touch” and “low-touch” actions. High paying clients are used to “high-touch” interaction; things like extremely personal attention and feedback. A personalized video just for them, for example. But these are things that make people feel appreciated. Taylor Swift showed up at a few of her fans’ houses with Christmas gifts in 2014; a small effort that made her queen of the internet and stoked the ardent flames of her supporters. Even if you don’t have any high paying clients yet, think of who you could serve with “high-touch” actions that would make a huge impact.

### **Practical improvements**

You have to put something out into the world, to figure out what it’s going to be. The makers of Angry Birds made 51 failed video games, before pushing through and making one “last” one – which got 2 billion downloads.

A lot of creative people get stuck for years on the One Big Idea that they want to get perfect before sharing. Almost always, it’s a bad idea. It’s usually an idea that will suck up hundreds of hours of effort, and thousands of dollars in investment, and will never catch on. If it’s a passionate idea you have trouble letting go of, when people suggest you move on or try something else, take a step back. Perseverance isn’t noble when you’re chasing an idea that doesn’t matter to people. Sure, sometimes you may be “before your time.” But in this age of hyperconnectivity, if you can’t explain something in one

sentence and have people “get it”, then it probably isn’t going to do so well when you scale it big. You don’t need 2 million dollars to launch a platform and see whether or not people use it.

Start small. Start with what you have. Build a blog and start writing. Write about your process and struggle. The first blog may very well just be practice, so you learn how to build stuff online. The first big idea you have may be a failure. But you have learned invaluable skills. Fail big, fail fast, fail often and you’ll be a success before you know it (which doesn’t mean, pick bad ideas and fail on purpose). Pick the best ideas you have, but execute as soon as possible. Even a Facebook post can be enough validation. I’ll usually put up the book cover and title of a project I’m working on. If nobody likes or shares or comments, it’s probably not a great idea. If I get dozens of positive comments, I know I’ve hit a topic people care about.

Think of an idea and put it up. If it doesn’t work, you need to tweak it. You need better design, or branding, or positioning. You need a better “About Page” that resonates with people. You need to be telling your story better. You need a bigger and more meaningful cause. You need credibility (testimonials or support from well known figures in your field – something you can often get by doing some free work for them).

Tweak and fix. You should see more sales, more orders, more email subscriptions, more shares. If you don’t, you’re probably trying to build up an idea nobody cares about. That’s fine: pivot! Find another idea, use all

of your newly discovered skills and abilities, and try again. It gets easier and easier. The “runaway success” idea is almost always something that comes up later, something you can’t even imagine now, something you never would have reached if you didn’t float some not so great ideas first. But you’ll never get to that point if you spend time worrying the one idea you are obsessed with, but too afraid to launch.

## **Epic Crap**

A lot of people think “Do Epic Crap” is a good life mantra. I disagree... but only because people are abusing the term “Epic.” Properly speaking, Epic Crap would conform to the classical standards of epic literature: there would be a quest, a hero’s journey, a bit of tragedy and comedy, a reckoning, a dark night of the soul as the hero’s worst fears and failures are realized; the hero would give up but an ally would convince him to get back up and try again...

Firstly, as I mentioned in the last section, most epics begin with a quest for something, but the hero’s goals change as he gets lost, and grows in wisdom. The first goal was important to launch the ship, but it isn’t the real, ultimate goal that matters. Plans change.

*Epic = the journey, not the achievement.*

All too often, people talk about doing Epic Crap and they mean a crazy, funny Buzzfeed posts that took them

six hours to make. Or they do Epic Crap like visiting every US city that starts with an A or a Z (crap that seems funny or interesting, but ultimately you're thinking, who the Hell cares? Why the Hell spend your time and money doing something that doesn't accomplish anything or make the world a better place?)

Epic Crap should not be the goal of your life. Epic Crap, on its own, is still crap. You can do incredible, huge, amazing things, that don't actually matter to anybody. *However*, even if you do have a worthwhile, world-changing, well-planned Big Idea, focused on helping people and solving problems, you'll still fail if you are boring.

I could start a writer's retreat locally, and do free training or meetups, and help a lot of people one-on-one, but I want the apparatus of my writing retreat to extend behind the limitations of the people who physically attend. I want it to be a symbol: a representation of what self-publishing authors can achieve together. I want it to reflect and draw attention to changes in the publishing industry. Doing it small doesn't appeal to me because it doesn't have a big enough impact. So I want to buy a castle. The goal to buy a castle turns my ordinary, pretty good idea into something crazy and epic; something it will be much easier to actually achieve, because people will be excited about sharing it (which doesn't guarantee, of course, that I can actually pull it off... but *even if* I fail, I'll still be the guy who tried to buy the castle, and most of my ideas will reach my target audience anyway).

My point is, sometimes you need to do Epic Stuff just for people to pay attention. Recently, people started calling it “content marketing.” Content marketing can be small; it doesn’t have to be epic. It can be useful. There is nothing that grows a platform faster than guest posts paired with a great opt-in offer, tailored to your audience. You can start a blog with three articles and a great free resource, write ten guest posts for more popular blogs, and get 10,000 signups in under a month.

That’s easy, stable platform building (and the articles should be really good, and really useful – but don’t have to be *epic*.) But you should also experiment with Epicity (yes, it’s a word... look it up in the Urban Dictionary, which lists the example, “Chuck Norris is covered in epicity.”)

My mom makes beautiful upcycled skirts out of old sweaters and sells them on Etsy. She does pretty well, makes a few grand a month, and people like her work. But she’s not *crushing it*. I gave her two pieces of advice that she’s yet to implement:

#1. Start a social cause, whereby she and other artist-peers donate 10 skirts/dress each to some organization. Partner with Goodwill (who will donate hundreds of old sweaters) and make it a Big Thing.

#2. Make some crazy, audacious stuff that people love, but wouldn’t actually wear. 95% of her goods could be stylish, understated, fashionable clothes people feel comfortable in, but 5% should be insane dragon armor, technicolor dreamcoats, invisibility shrouds, and other fun

stuff. Things that may or may not sell (though they probably would, and for more money), but that would *get shared*.

You need Epic Stuff because that's what gets shared. Your "business"—your books, coaching, training, products, etc... the money earning stuff—are probably not things that people will want to share. Nobody likes sharing a business with their friends. But they will share your Epic Stuff, if it's awesome enough. They'll share it even more if you do something clever with it (like make Epic Stuff to giveaway in a contest, or send to a celebrity, or make a whole set for a hip band). Epic Stuff is free advertising and marketing. Increase the Epicity by media-hacking: associating it with current events, trends or celebs. It can cost very little, and have an enormous reach.

### **What about the money?**

If you focus on making money too early, you may lose your following. I would focus on getting more traffic. If you can get traffic, you'll always be able to make money later. For example, about a year ago I put up a whole bunch of free book design templates on [www.diybookformats.com](http://www.diybookformats.com). Nothing fancy. It's not a great site. But there are a lot of people searching for book design templates, and that site gets over 500 hits a day now. I'll change it soon, probably to limit the "free" package to a few designs and charge for the "pro" package with lots of designs and resources. But if I'd started the site with just the paid resource, people wouldn't have shared it as much, and it would get far less traffic – so I would have to advertise a lot.

Focus on providing value. Focus on filling a need and solving problems. Focus on really big, long, helpful how-to articles. Give 95% of your stuff away for free. Don't worry about holding back your secrets. Even when you tell people exactly what to do, a lot of people won't take the time to figure it all out. There will still be plenty of people willing to pay for your help, or your advanced package, or for you to do everything for them, or for 1-on-1 support. Giving away everything for free makes you the *person they find*. If people looking for something keep finding your site, they'll associate you as the #1 expert for that thing (that's the funny thing about Google; people will always assume that site-ranking and visibility is associated with skill and quality). If people find you, and your free resources are helpful, and they don't feel you're just trying to scam them or get their money, they will feel comfortable paying you for things.

# GET STARTED

First, write down your vision. Who do you want to be? Who do you want to serve? How do you want to change the world? What does your perfect day look like? What would you do if you could do anything? (The lines below are just for show: you should do these exercises on notebook paper so you can put them up in your workspace).

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## 1. **Think Bigger**

Think about how you can take that idea and double it's impact. Triple it. If it doesn't feel a little scary and impossible, it isn't big enough yet.

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## **2. Co-creation**

Find people in your field who have audiences you'd like to reach. Think of ways to get them involved without asking for their help (offer them something valuable that takes little or no effort on their part). Find a way to help them achieve their goals. Be supportive.

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## **3. Serving People with Less**

Starting a business so you can Be Free and Travel More is good personal motivation, but not meaningful enough to get other people to help you do it. If you are free and wealthy and travel often, what else could you be bringing with you? Art supplies to rural schools? Free comedy classes? Photographing Third World conditions and building a system to bring them things they need?

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## **4. Increasing the love**

Think of a way you can personally demonstrate your love and gratitude for everybody you come in contact with. It could be a kind email signature or a handwritten thank you card. Public gratitude videos on YouTube can be fun.

It could be a daily Good Turn that you do for strangers, without recognition or reward. It could simply be a commitment to putting a smile on everybody's face. Leave each person *better off* through interaction with you. Make it an integral part of your brand and platform.

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## **5. Practical improvement**

Start it now. Set a deadline. Put up a landing page or wordpress site. A simply mission statement is enough; what do you want to achieve? Make it public and share it. Measure the response. You'll never reach perfection if you're afraid to start with an unprofessional mess. Do the best you can with what you have. Hire someone on Fiverr.com to make some simple graphics (to make it seem more "real"). Don't spend months on the design. You'll redesign everything in a year anyway. Get something up and focus on developing the content. Don't worry about the content; you'll revise it all in a year anyway. I like to start a new blog with 100 articles (about 500 words each; they take 15 minutes to write; I can write 4 a day and finish in a month). This idea might be a Failure. The next might be too. But you're digging for gold: you might have to dig several different pits before you hit a vein; and each pit you dig increases your skills and knowledge.

*What are you going to accomplish by the end of this week?*

1. \_\_\_\_\_.

2. \_\_\_\_\_.

3. \_\_\_\_\_.

*What are you going to accomplish by the end of this month?*

1. \_\_\_\_\_.

2. \_\_\_\_\_.

3. \_\_\_\_\_.

## **6. Epic Stuff**

What's something crazy and fun you can do that people will love to share. A funny video? An infographic? A prank or public art project? A fresh collection of research on a topic from a novel angle?

1. \_\_\_\_\_.

2. \_\_\_\_\_.

3. \_\_\_\_\_.

# STAY INSPIRED

Even if you know what you have to do conceptually, you need some external motivation or positive reinforcement; so I made you a postcard you can put on your front door or near your workspace.



To get yours, just post a review on Amazon (or wherever you got the book), then send me your address on this page:

**[www.creativindie.com/awesomesauce](http://www.creativindie.com/awesomesauce)**

If you're against posting reviews on Amazon or other big sites, you can do me a favor and just share it, link to it, or review it from your own blog. You'll still get a postcard.



## ABOUT ME

I studied art in Florence and philosophy in Malta, before moving to Taiwan for a PhD in English Literature. I built up an editing company, then became a book designer, and have spent the last few years making it easier for authors to self-publish.

Now I'm dedicating myself to writing and publishing 100 books, selling a million copies, and crowd-funding a castle, where I can invite creative people to come and do their greatest work. My main blog is:

[www.creativindie.com](http://www.creativindie.com)

I'm working on two longer books about creativity: *Paid to Create* and *The Creative Brain on Drugs*. If you want to learn how to make more money with your creative business, or how to supplement your creativity with brain-stimulating nootropics and psychotropics, you can sign up on my mailing list and I'll let you know when they will be available.

