



MAKE MORE

ART

A NO BULLSHIT GUIDE TO BECOMING A PROLIFIC CREATOR

AN UNMISTAKABLE MEDIA PRODUCTION

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BOOK 1: A PROLIFIC MINDSET



CHARACTERISTICS OF A PROLIFIC CREATOR

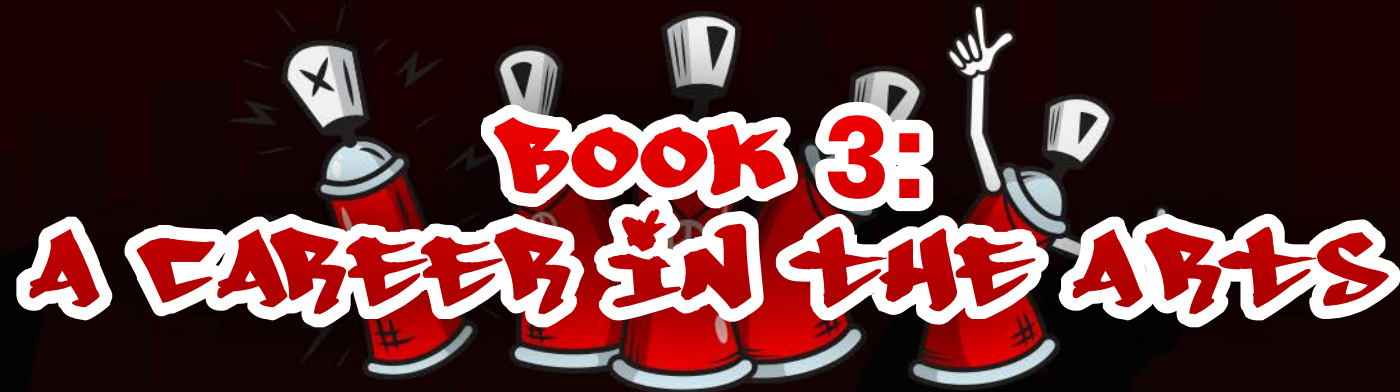
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AN UNMISTAKABLE SIGNATURE

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I've been writing 1000 words a day for almost 10 years. I've recorded more than 700 interviews. I've written 4 books. I use the internet to make things.

All this has led to unexpected surprises like a book deal with a publisher; a career that was never my goal; and a life that hasn't gone according to plan. But that's not why I do it.

I do it because it's therapeutic. It's cathartic. It's a release of all my baggage and bullshit.

Sometimes it's verbal vomit. Occasionally, I write something worth reading or create something worth consuming.

I have a resume of failures that's more like a rap sheet.

I've screwed up everything from running a business to romantic relationships.



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BUT THERE'S ONE THING I CAN THINK OF THAT MADE UP FOR MY DEFICIENCIES AS A HUMAN AND AN ARTIST. **I'M PROLIFIC.**

There's a scene in the movie *With Honors* where Joe Pesci finds Brendan Fraser's senior thesis and tells him, "This stuff is really coming out the wrong end." You might feel like that when you create. I do most days. That's the price of admission for being prolific.

There's nothing that will do more for your art than becoming prolific. You're aiming for base hits instead of home runs. Once in a while you might launch a home run into the nosebleed seats. But it's hard to be prolific when that's your focus.



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Being prolific isn't about Oscar nominations, Grammy awards, Pulitzers or best-sellers. It isn't about accolades, accomplishments, attention from strangers on the internet, or vanity metrics.

It's about the work.

It's about focusing on the process instead of the prize.

It's choosing your soul over your ego.

It's about saying what you need to say.

It's about discipline, habits, consistency, and commitment.

It's about mastery, deliberate practice, and deep work.

It's about progress instead of perfection.

It's about building a body of work.

It's about making good art and leaving the world a bit different for you having been here.



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The beauty of being prolific is that it's in your control. Anybody can be prolific regardless of their status, income, race, or religion. If you have a body, you have the ability to be prolific.

Artists who are prolific stand the test of time.

- Seth Godin has been blogging every day for more than a decade.
- AR Rahman has composed so much music that it would be difficult to go through it all.
- Bob Dylan was prolific. He has written 100s of songs. But even if you're not a fan, you know one of them.
- Ryan Holiday has just published a new book. But he's already started working on the next one.

This is a short book about a simple idea that can change your life, and the trajectory of your career in the arts. It's a book about two types of people: those who are prolific and those who are not.



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IT'S ABOUT PEOPLE WHO SHIP AND WHY YOU SHOULD **BECOME ONE.**

You don't have to spend any money, go to a workshop, or hire a coach. You don't need to be an artistic genius, protege, or genetically predisposed for artistic brilliance. You don't even need any talent.

You don't need any additional resources, just resourcefulness and consistent effort. The inevitable byproduct of those two things is that you'll be prolific. Along the way, you might even become more talented.



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The more prolific you are, the more seeds you plant, and the more message you put in bottles. The more likely your seeds will bear fruit and the more likely your message will reach its intended recipient. Make more art and you'll make better art.

THAT PATH OF
LEAST RESISTANCE
IS TO BE AN
**ANONYMOUS
CRITIC.**

THAT PATH OF
MOST REWARD
IS TO BECOME A
**PROLIFIC
CREATOR.**

THE PATH OF
MOST REWARD IS TO
**MAKE
MORE
ART.**



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THE SPORADIC CREATOR VS THE PROLIFIC ONE.

The sporadic creator waits to be inspired.

The prolific creator acts in anticipation of inspiration.

The sporadic creator believes in the "I've made it moment."

The prolific creator knows there's no such thing.

The sporadic creator lives in an imagined future.

The prolific creator does what he can today.

The sporadic creator is waiting for a big break.

The prolific creator does the work that eventually leads to one.



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The sporadic creator announces what he's going to start.

**The prolific creator knows that nobody gives a shit what you're going start.
He only announces what he's finished and starts what's next.**

The sporadic creator waits for permission from a publisher to write his book, from a label to record her album, from a television network to launch her show.

**The prolific creator starts, ships, builds, entices the
gatekeepers to knock on her door.**

The sporadic creator confuses attention with accomplishment.

The prolific creator knows the difference.



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The sporadic creator is fame oriented.

The prolific creator is career oriented.

The sporadic creator procrastinates under the delusion of achieving perfection.

The prolific creator ships in touch with the reality that progress is better than perfection.

The sporadic creator focuses on the outcome.

The prolific creator focuses on the process.

The prolific creator is in it for the long haul.

The sporadic creator lives in perpetual risk of being a one-hit wonder. Better to be Bob Dylan instead of Kris Kross.

The prolific creator concerns himself with depth and touching someone's heart.

The sporadic creator obsesses over reach and only gives a shit about eyeballs.



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BOOK 1: A PROLIFIC MINDSET



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My Year of Becoming Prolific

My year of becoming prolific was kind of like Steven Pressfield's year of Turning Pro. It was in 2013.

I picked up freelance gigs wherever I could get them.

I wrote things I didn't want to write. I wrote for publications I didn't really care about. But it paid the bills and I paid my dues. I built my chops.

I learned to produce on a deadline, create on a schedule, ship consistently, and ship things that my friend, Alice, describes as just the right level of imperfect.

Sometimes you build your chops by paying your dues.



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Bill Belichick paid his dues by logging game tape. So did Eric Spoelstra. Tom Brady paid his dues as the fourth string quarterback for the Patriots. The grunt work is a prerequisite for the glamour. Sometimes your dues are the foundation for your greatness.

Julien Smith told me he wrote 1000 words a day. He had one of the most popular blogs on the internet. So I started doing the same. I've never stopped since.

I wrote 1000 words a day when I was sober.

I wrote 1000 words when I was hungover.

I wrote 1000 words if I spent the previous night shitfaced drunk.

I wrote 1000 words if I woke up in a funk.

I wrote on airplanes, in hotel rooms, and coffee shops. I wrote in notebooks, on the back of napkins, on my laptop and in towns across America—from Fargo to Lake Oswego. If he were still alive, perhaps Dr. Seuss would be beaming with pride.



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I carried the War of Art with me everywhere I went. The pages were dog eared, passages underlined, and it was so beat to shit that it was if the book itself has been through a war. I read it like religious fanatics read the bible every day.

I stopped caring that I was still living at my parents house.

I stopped waiting for permission from a publisher, validation from my parents, and the approval people who would never live with the consequences of my choices.

I developed a point of view. I poked boxes, tipped over sacred cows, ignored best practices, broke rules and went so far as to call the bulk of what was happening in the online world an unsustainable mimicry of an epidemic. I pissed some people off and resonated with others.

I wrote two books. The first sold 1000 copies. The second became a Wall Street Journal best-seller.



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I didn't even know it hit the list because I didn't bother to look. I didn't know until a friend told me, "Dude, you're on the WSJ Best-Seller list." My only concern was to remain prolific. I took a picture of the digital version of WSJ Best-Seller list and got back to work.

I don't even have a copy of the paper from the day my book hit the list. I was too busy writing.

I met my first mentor. I planned an event and started the Unmistakable Creative. I planted lots of seeds that year, many of which didn't bear fruit until very recently.

It wasn't like I'd suddenly become a more talented writer. I still had all the same flaws, deficiencies, insecurities and inadequacies. I still do. The only difference was that I'd become prolific.

**THIS YEAR HAS ALWAYS STAYED WITH ME AS ONE THAT
CHANGED MY LIFE.**



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Learning to Walk

Nobody falls out of the womb knowing how to walk. We're helpless, speechless, reckless, persistent and curious. We hit our heads against walls, cry when it hurts, and set out on our next adventure to discover the world. It isn't long before our parents can't take us to restaurants, are sleep-deprived, and getting a workout from chasing us around.

My friend, Sarah Peck, told me a story about her son who was learning how to walk. He tried for an hour and at the end of the hour, he threw his arms up in frustration. Leo was determined, and Sarah said, "Of course you're tired. You've been at that for an hour."

You become prolific the same way Leo Learned to walk. You try; you go the point of exhaustion; throw your arms up in frustration; and start over when you regain your energy.



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The Fear that Paralyzes Us The Most

The greatest fear that we have to manage as creators is how the audience responds. And for most of us, the audience isn't just the people who listen to our music or read our books. It's mom, dad, brothers and sisters, and that family member who thinks your art is a waste of your education.

I've taken that last family member off the guest list for the wedding I haven't planned.

But you can't control what other people think. The moment you realize this, the fear loses its power over you. You can get back to what you're here to do. Make more art.



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Nothing is Guaranteed and Anything is Possible.

There's no guarantee that your art will lead to its intended outcome. But that doesn't mean it's not worth making. Sometimes art leads to unintended outcomes.

Parents homeschool their children with content from our podcast. Therapists use it to counsel their patients. Coaches use it to help their clients. You can't always measure the impact of unintended outcomes.

Without intending to, I told stories that helped people kick eating disorders and get past crippling, near suicidal depression.

To make art is to open your heart to the idea that anything is possible.



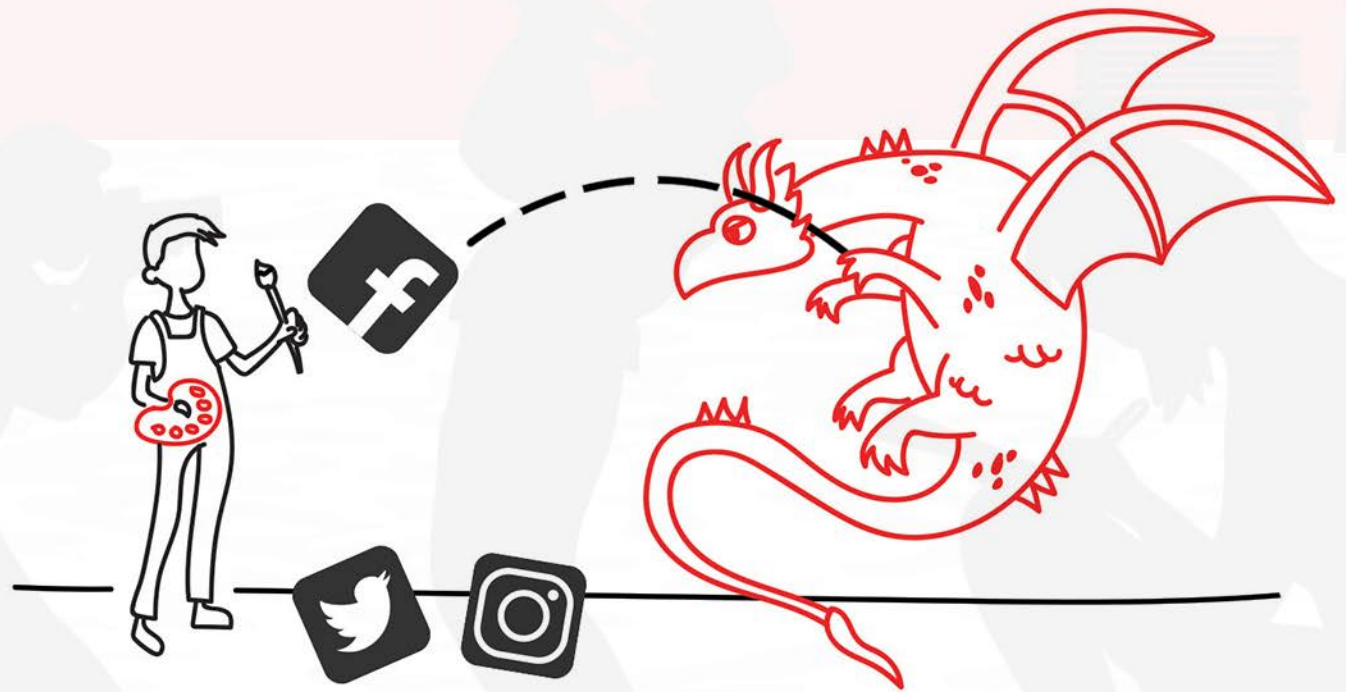
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Resistance

Steven Pressfield writes about resistance. Resistance is the dragon that stands between us and the destination we're trying to reach—between who we are and who we want to be.



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Resistance defined the first 20 years of my life. I quit every hobby, got fired from every job, got drunk as often as possible and wasted my time. The whole time my desire to write was buried under layers of self-indulgent bullshit, masks, stories, and labels.

Sometimes it takes some wisdom from the School of Hard Knocks before you realize it wasn't bad luck. It was all resistance.

Resistance shows up as a distraction, doubt, fear, the critic who hates your work, and the lover who starts a dozen conversations with "Don't take this the wrong way, but" or anyone who makes you question your conviction and cause you to consider abandoning your calling.

But, as Pressfield says, "Resistance is always lying and always full of shit."

Why would you listen to anyone who is full of shit?



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Daily Battles

Steven Pressifled writes about the war of art. To win the war, you have to fight daily battles against distraction, resistance, assholes on the internet, and the bullshit in your own head.

Resistance comes in all shapes and sizes. But there a few types of resistance that will destroy you.

Distraction is kryptonite for anyone who wants to be prolific. Twitter, Facebook, email, and anything else you find mildly entertaining are the modern-day supervillains in a prolific creator's life. Focus is what happens when Superman goes into the chamber in his ice castle and fools Lex Luthor into thinking he's giving up his powers. Grab the villains by the hands; squeeze them until they break; and kick their asses out of your home.



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Assholes on the Internet: The culture of anonymous feedback, Amazon reviews, and comments on blog posts is a breeding ground for assholes on the internet. You can feed the trolls, engage your critics or you can get to work. As Seth Godin likes to say, "Anonymous feedback from people who I have no relationship with will cause me to do nothing but hide." You're not here to hide. You're here to be prolific. Get back to work.

The Voice in Your Head: I have a voice in my head. He's an asshole. Here are some his greatest hits:

- Shouldn't you be further along by now?
- What if this never leads to anything?
- You should really be making more money.
- Maybe you should get a day job.
- If you were any good at this, you would have sold as many books as those guys and girls on the best-seller list.
- Where exactly is this all going?

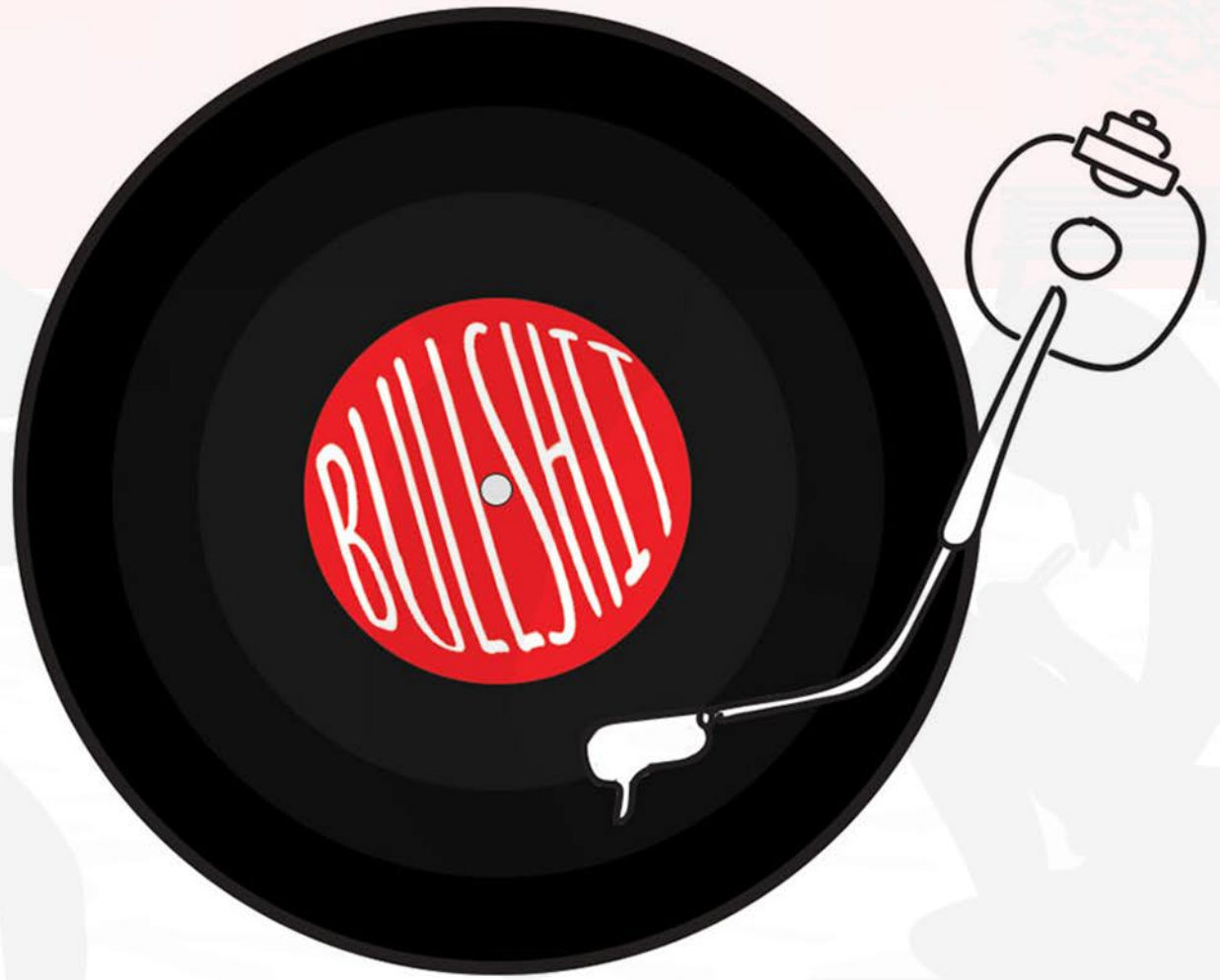


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If the greatest hits of the voice in your head were turned into an album, a perfect title would be Bullshit. When it comes to being a prolific creator, you have to consider the possibility that the voice in your head is full of shit.



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Peripheral Activities

Change your profile picture.

Tweak your Twitter bio.

Upload a glimpse of your glamorous life to Instagram.

Talk about the novel you're writing on Twitter.

Peripheral activities cause people to confuse activity with progress, and motion with momentum. Think about all that art that people have yet to create because of the time they're spending on peripheral activities.



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A Growth Mindset

We quantify and measure our lives from the time we're in school.

- Your grades measure your intelligence.
- Your college measures your potential for success in life.
- Your job, the size of your bank account, or the attractiveness of your partner determines your status.

All of this is the antithesis of what Carol Dweck calls a growth mindset. If you believe any of those labels are permanent, it's hard to have a growth mindset.

There's more to you than can be expressed through a bunch of labels. Once you realize that none of those labels are permanent, you're free. If you're prolific, you'll start to see just how fluid those labels are. Being prolific leads to a growth mindset.



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A Game of Inches

Tom Brady doesn't take his first snap and conclude that he's a failure if he doesn't throw a touchdown on the first pass. He's focused on gaining yards. It's two steps back and 20 forward. It's a game of inches.

That's how being a prolific creator works. You ship, ship, ship, and then you score. But unlike the Super Bowl, the work of a prolific creator is an infinite game. Every time you score, it gives you the opportunity to keep playing. You get to keep being prolific. That's the whole point.



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Shit Hits the Fan

Just because you're prolific it doesn't mean that life doesn't continue on around you.

Your boss might fire you.

Your girlfriend might dump you.

The stock market might tank.

I'm 2 for 3 on the above.

No matter who you are, shit hits the fan. When shit hits the fan, you can continue to be prolific or be pissed off. Professionals choose the first. Amateurs choose the second.



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A Normal Life

I used to lament to one of my best friends about wanting to live a normal life. He said, "Srini, your life will never be normal." I've thought a lot about what a normal life would have looked like every now and then. I even fantasize about how great it would be.

If I'd never been fired from all my jobs, hired after my summer internship at Intuit, promoted or climbed the corporate ladder, I'd be living a normal life.



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But the day I signed up for a career in the arts, the ship headed to the destination of normal sailed and I boarded the one headed somewhere interesting.

NORMAL

MIGHT BE SAFE, SECURE,
COMFORTABLE AND PREDICTABLE.

**BUT IT MIGHT COME AT
THE COST OF INTERESTING.**

INTERESTING

IS WHAT GIVES YOU
COLORS TO PAINT WITH,
MATERIAL TO WRITE ABOUT,
THE CIRCUMSTANCES THAT
ALLOW YOU TO MAKE ART
THAT HITS SOMEONE
IN THE FACE.



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The Amplifier of People Who Pick Themselves

The gates of the gatekeepers have fallen. The authority of the people in charge is being revealed for the illusion that it is. The internet is a fountain of knowledge, and an amplifier of people who pick themselves.

But aspiring artists all over the world are all sitting around waiting to be discovered, waiting for a big break, waiting for permission to do something extraordinary, waiting in the words of Seth Godin to be picked.



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- By the popular podcaster to have you as a guest on their show.
- By the thousands of anonymous strangers on the internet to spread your work.
- By the curators of TED, Davos, Summit, or elite gathering of your choice.
- By the venture capitalist who will finance your startup.
- By the publisher who thinks that you have something important to say.
- By Forbes, Fast Company, or Inc. to be on the lists they make.

But it's impossible to do something extraordinary if you're waiting for permission to do it. As my editor once said to me about gatekeepers, "We are looking for the opportunity to say yes."

Nobody can say yes if you're sitting around waiting to be picked.



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Start Whatever Is Next

When you're prolific you don't end up putting all your eggs in one basket. You diversify risk. You recognize the value of a long tail. If your book doesn't sell enough copies you write another one.

- If you didn't sell enough albums, you go back to the studio and lay down tracks.
- If people hate your book, write another one.
- If nobody liked your latest film, land another role in a different one.

When Steven Pressfield defeated resistance for the first time and finished a book and went to his friend Paul Rink's house. He said, "Congratulations! Now start the next one." Ryan Holiday said the same thing to me.

I didn't have another book deal. But I started the next book. I wrote an outline for one. I published *The Scenic Route* and started work on what you're reading.



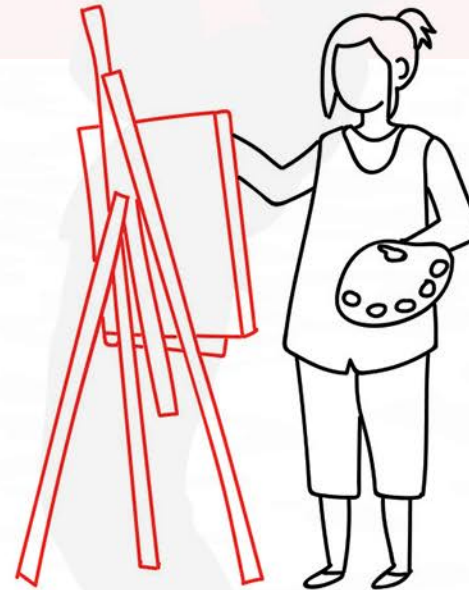
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You leave the reception up the Gods, Universe or whatever higher power you believe in. If it exceeds all your expectations, start the next one. If it fails to meet your expectations, start the next one. That's your only job.

Close the door. Sit down. Put pen to paper, brush to canvas, hands to clay. Make More Art.



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CHARACTERISTICS OF A PROLIFIC CREATOR

The Prolific Creator is Self-Motivated

My parents never had to force me to practice when I played the tuba. In fact, they often had to ask me to stop. I was so self-motivated I drove them crazy.

The prolific creator doesn't need anyone to hold him accountable. Nobody has to tell him to make his art and master his craft. He's willing to drive the people around him crazy if it means becoming world-class.

The Prolific Creator has a Bias Towards Action

The prolific creator doesn't spend his life making plans. He spends it making art. He takes action on his ideas.



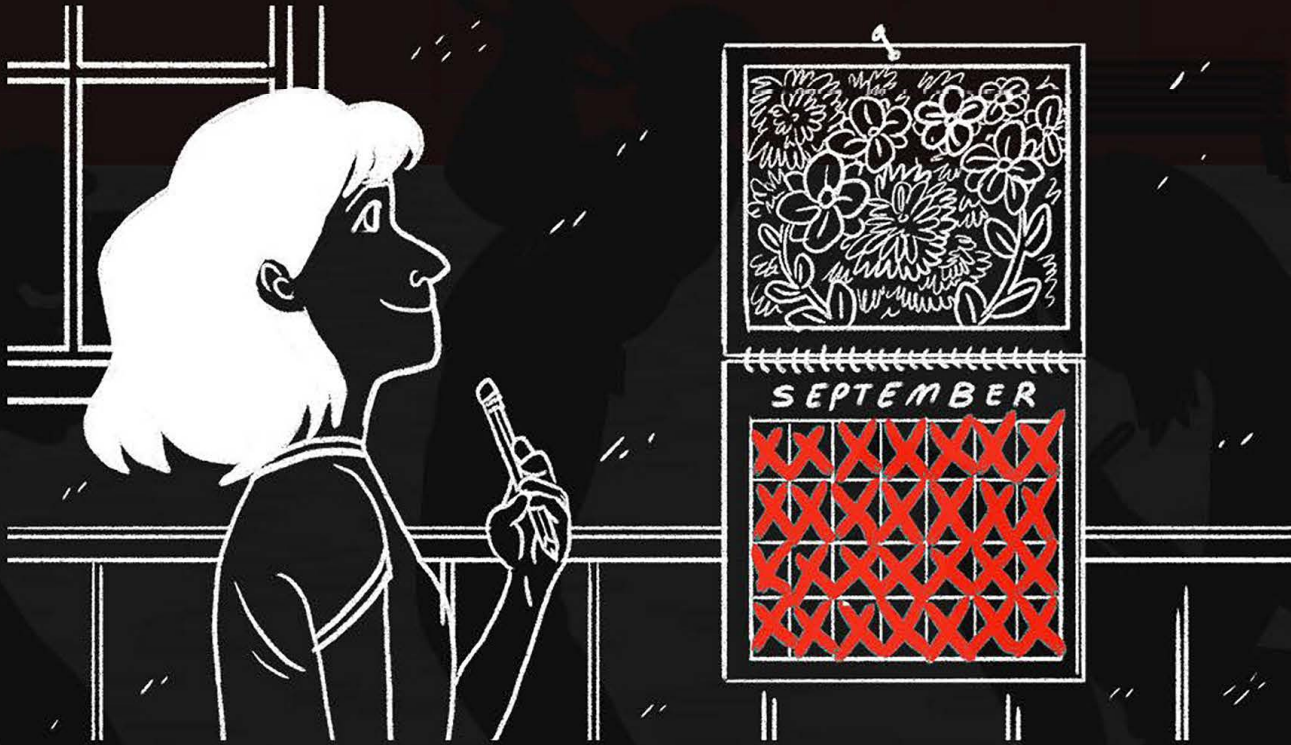
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The Prolific Creator is Consistent

He understands the *profound power of consistency*. He honors his commitments. He shows up at the same time in the same place, day after day, month after month, year after year.



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The Prolific Creator is Resourceful

You don't need more resources. You need more resourcefulness. And resourcefulness comes from within.

Hassan Minaj drove from Sacramento to San Francisco to perform at open mic nights. On the way home one night, he crashed his parents' *Altima*. When he auditioned for The Daily Show, he didn't submit a reel. He created something just for them. He didn't have an abundance of resources. He had an abundance of resourcefulness.

Your resources might be limited, but your imagination and creativity are not. Resourcefulness can turn a struggling wannabe into a thriving gonna be.



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The Prolific Creator Gets up After He Falls

At some point in your life, things will fall apart. A lover will leave, your bank balance will dwindle and bridges will burn. These are all gifts from the universe that comes disguised as a punch to the face.

Right after the most successful year of my career, I had the worst year of my life: a breakup, a near bankruptcy and suicidal depression. Most nights, I went to sleep hoping I wouldn't wake up the next day. Seasons of adversity are part of the course in any life. But like all seasons, they eventually come to an end.

So I did the only thing I could think of. I kept writing. The thing that saved my life was to make more art.



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The Prolific Creator Believes Talent is Overrated and Practice is Underrated

Some prolific creators have a natural talent. They sit at the piano, pick up the guitar, and magic just flows. But there also plenty of talented people who don't amount to anything. Every prolific creator knows that talent is overrated and practice is underrated. Practice can lead to talent, but vice versa isn't true.



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The Prolific Creator has a Bold and Compelling Point of View

**"IF YOU HAVE A BOLD AND
COMPELLING POINT OF VIEW,
YOU'RE PROBABLY GOING TO
PISS SOME PEOPLE OFF."**

- JUSTINE MUSK



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The prolific creator is willing to piss people off. He's willing to alienate the wrong people to make room for the right ones. What resonates with one person might piss another person off.

Every week, I piss someone off. I lose a listener or a subscriber. My work has been called everything from pointless bullshit to hateful leftist propaganda, and a disservice to humanity (my personal favorite).

My mother says that I should consider developing some filters. I told her, "I'm 41 years old. The apple doesn't fall too far from the tree."

Every one of my books has one-star reviews and five-star reviews. If you're afraid to poke the box, zig when other people zag, and stand out when everyone else is trying to fit in, you'll never have a bold and compelling point of view. Work that resonates is not for everybody.



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Prolific creators don't cater to anonymous critics. They focus on raving fans. Or as James Victore says, "We're not for everybody, we're just for the sexy people."

WE'RE NOT FOR
EVERYBODY,
WE'RE JUST
FOR THE

SEXY
PEOPLE

- JAMES VICTORE



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The Prolific Creator is Fully Self-Expressed

We hold back, play it safe and water down our work and polish our rough edges in the desire for external validation. This paradoxically has the opposite effect.

When you are fully self-expressed, you defy the limitations of your medium. Don't apologize for your point of view. Paint with every color. And play with every note. Your imperfections are gifts. Your inadequacies become illusions. Your work is a no fucks given, no bullshit expression of who you are.

The Prolific Creator is Patient

The internet is littered with life hacks, fast paths, and fool-proof bullshit formulas for success. The prolific creator knows deep down that the greatest work of his life and the great American novel will take more than 140 characters and more than a day.



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The Prolific Creators Doesn't Wait

To be inspired.

Until they're in the mood.

Until the perfect time or all their ducks are in a row.

For permission from a publisher to write a book, or a label to record.

All the reasons you're waiting are excuses that keep you from being prolific. As Steven Pressfield wrote in *The Artist's Journey*, "Put your ass where your heart wants to be."

I didn't wait for my agent to tell me whether or not she thought this book was a good idea.

I just kept writing it. I already had a plan for what I'd do if my publisher didn't want it.

That's why you're reading it.

For 5 years, I waited for permission. I waited to be picked by a publisher. If I'd kept waiting I might still be waiting. No reason for you to make the same mistake.



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A Prolific Creator Creates More Than He Consumes

There's no shortage of information coming at us every day. The prolific creator is deliberate about his consumption. He doesn't click on every link that rolls through his newsfeed. He doesn't subscribe to a million newsletters. He creates more than he consumes.

The Prolific Creator is Rebellious

He zigs when other people zag. He starts trends instead of following them. He's willing to let his work scream with disdain for authority. He challenges the status quo and then he redefines it.

The prolific creator is an instigator and a misfit amongst misfits. The prolific creator knows that some people will think he's batshit crazy. It's a price he's willing to pay if it means he'll make something unmistakable.



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The Prolific Creator Doesn't Focus on Byproducts

Book deals, downloads, leading roles, IPOs, and fuck you money are all byproducts. The prolific creator is focused on the work that leads to the byproducts. He's focused on the process instead of the prize.

The Prolific Creator is Detached from the Outcomes of His Art

Once you become prolific, you'll become less attached to outcomes. It's hard to be attached to the outcomes of your art when you're making so much of it. When you know you'll be back tomorrow, you won't spend much time lamenting how it turned out yesterday.



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The Prolific Creator Doesn't Rest on His Laurels

After a self-published WSJ Best-Seller and 2 books with a publisher, I still wake up and do the same thing every day: write 1000 words. I still self-publish books that a publisher won't buy. Those things are what got me here in the first place.

The prolific creator never stops doing what got him to where he's at today. He maintains the working habits he developed when he was a struggling nobody, lingering in obscurity. When he does this, he maintains his momentum, makes visible progress, and lets his working habits fuel his motivation.



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The Prolific Creator Expects Nothing

A.R. Rahman famously said, "When you expect nothing everything comes to you." He's the most iconic composer in India. He's sold more albums than Britney Spears and Madonna combined. If I ever made a Bollywood movie, it would be just for the opportunity to work with him.

You can't control if any of what you expect. But people waste insane amounts of energy imprisoned by their expectations. The prolific creator expects nothing because expectations waste the energy he could put into making more art.



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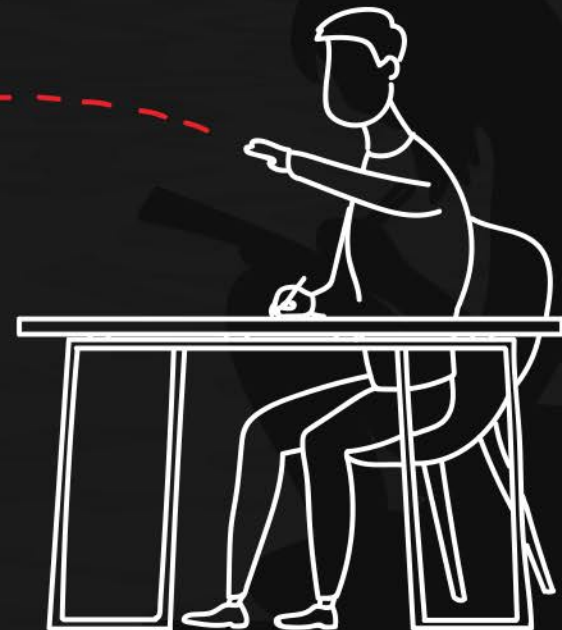


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The Prolific Creator Creates for The Trash Can

Erik Wahl coined the term "creating for the trash can." You have the freedom to toss your work in the trash if you don't like it. I toss plenty. My creative work is like my creative life. It's filled with half baked ideas, false-starts, messy middles, dips and dead ends.

You're not painting with blood. There's always more paint in the can, ink in the pen, and film in your camera. Toss what you don't like in the trash and start over. The well of creativity is infinite.



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The Prolific Creator Never Has a Shortage of Ideas

You don't either. As I said in my last book, "Nobody has a shortage of ideas. We just lack the discipline to capture them." It doesn't matter if you have bad ideas or good ideas. The only goal is to have a lot of ideas. Whether it's half baked, brilliant or bat shit crazy, write it down.

15 years ago, people said, "Don't get in cars with strangers. You'll get murdered." Today that's how we get around.

**WHAT'S BATSHIT CRAZY TODAY MIGHT LEAD TO
BRILLIANCE OR BILLIONS TOMORROW.**



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The Prolific Creator's Work Speaks for Him

Prolific creators are too damn busy doing their work to tweet about it, compose status updates, or upload pictures to Instagram.

- Ryan Holiday wrote 6 books in 6 years. By the time I finish reading one, the galley for the other one shows up at my house.
- Cal Newport doesn't even have a social media account. The only reason he got a smartphone was that his wife insisted after he had kids. He's written multiple books on the side of a demanding day job as a professor.

As Seth Godin brilliantly put it, "The Mona Lisa Doesn't tweet. Yet, millions of people talk about it every day."



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Being congratulated for what you're planning to do is one of the most insidious forms of resistance. You get the high of the accomplishment without the blood, sweat and tears required for it.

It's the digital equivalent of cocaine and it makes you the cognitive equivalent of an athlete who smokes. And you don't even get to smoke or do any cocaine.

The prolific creator is committed to his art because he knows that the most valuable thing he can do for his audience is to make more of it. Shut up, close the door, sit down. Make more art.

Let your work speak for you and you won't have to spend so much time talking about it.



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The Prolific Creator is Focused

When my most prolific friends are in their creative cave, you get an autoresponder from them that says something along the lines of:

"I'm making a piece of art. It's more important than anything else I'm doing right now. Unless this involves you paying me some insane amount of money (i.e. speaking at your event, writing a book for your publisher), or it's a matter of life and death, please don't expect any response). It's not personal. I'm busy making more art."

They might be more polite than I've suggested. But you get the idea. If it's not essential, it's not important.



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The Prolific Creator Runs His Own Race

Chris Brogan says, "Nobody ever won a race by looking sideways." Around you is a world that leads to constant comparison. Inside of you is a world that leads to infinite creativity. The second is how you win the race.

The Prolific Creator Aims to Defy The Expectations of His Audience

AJ Leon first defied the expectations of his audience with a free e-book that looks nothing like a free e-book. It's a work of art. He did it again when he custom-illustrated the name tags of every attendee at his conference.

It's not efficient to work this way. It might be less profitable and is harder to scale. But it defies the expectations of an audience and overwhelms them with joy. It leaves an unmistakable mark that stays with them for the rest of their lives. Hopefully, I've defied yours.

Before you ship, ask yourself, "How could I defy the expectations of an audience?"



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The Prolific Creator Takes Matters into His Own Hands

Two young actors were struggling to find work. So they took matters into their own hands. They wrote a movie script to create work for themselves. After that, Matt Damon and Ben Affleck became household names.

You can sit around waiting for your big break. Or you can take matters into your own hands. The prolific creator does the latter.

The Prolific Creator Ships

The prolific creator knows that the only way his art will get better is if he ships. He has to open himself up to feedback to decipher brilliance from bullshit.



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The Prolific Creator Goes the Distance

Steven Pressfield spent 19 years working on his craft before he got paid for anything.

Seth Godin received 900 rejection letters his first year.

It took me 7 years to get from blog to book deal.

The prolific creator has grit. He goes far past where the average person quits. He's goes the distance.



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BOOK 2: THE ART OF WORK



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If you intend to create a work of art, then you'll need to master the art of work. They're birds of a feather. One can't happen without the other. In no particular order, these are things that will transform you into a prolific creator:



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Treat It Like a Job.

The prolific creator treats his art like a job.

- He sticks to a schedule.
- He has a target.
- He creates a list of things to do.
- He sets an intention.
- He does the work.

If you want to be prolific, you must above all things learn to silence the voice in your head. You must be able to do things that you say you can't do. You have to put pen to paper and get to work.



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Groundhog Day

I wake up at the same time every day. I do the same thing for the first 3 hours. I read for an hour; I write for an hour or however long it takes to hit my word count. That's my schedule. It's my sacred rhythm. Unless the surf is up or woman invites me back to bed, there are no exceptions.

Prolific creators all stick to a schedule. A schedule gives you control over your time and attention. Every day is Groundhog day.



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Set a Target

A target gives you something to aim for, a destination to arrive at.

- I write 1000 words a day.
- Matthew Monroe took 25 pictures a day until he became an amazing photographer.

A target helps you stop judging your work. It takes your emotions out of it. It gives you an objective to measure. You hit it or you didn't. It allows you to focus on what you can control and forget about what you can't.

It also gives you a sense of progress and accomplishment. When you hit a target day after day, you teach yourself that your words have power, and you learn to honor your commitments. Even if everything you produce for the day is absolute crap, at least you hit your target. You get a little victory for the day.

With each little victory, you gain momentum. You go from being an immovable object to an unstoppable force. Over a long enough timeline, you reach escape velocity.



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Make a Get Done List

You have a thousand things you could do every day. But there only a small handful worth doing. To-do leaves you open to the possibility that it may not happen. Get done means makes it more likely to happen.

Ryder Carroll uses a simple 3-question filter to determine his list.

1. Is this vital?
2. Is it necessary?
3. What would happen if I didn't do this?

You'll be amazed how much shorter your list gets and how much more you'll get done.



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Set an Intention

I don't mean an intention the in the new-age gift shop type of way. I mean something you intend to actually fucking do.

I intend to make a dent in the chapter of this book.

I intend to nail this measure in the piece I'm learning to play.

The difference between your intention and your get done list is simple. The get done list increases likelihood of realizing your intention. If you have a thousand words on your get done list, it's more like you'll make a dent in the chapter of the book you're writing.



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Do The Work

Put pen to paper, brush to canvas, take out your instrument. Shut the door, and start.

- Write shitty first sentences and shitty first drafts.
- Play cacophonous and chaotic sounds on your instrument.
- Litter the canvas.

The work isn't something you do when you feel like it. You don't skip it because you're not in the mood. You don't wait for inspiration to strike. Doing the work means you're acting in anticipation of inspiration.

The people who make their art a habit are the ones who become prolific and successful creators. The ones who make their art when they feel like it remain amateurs. Waiting until you're in the mood is a bit like waiting to die.



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Make It a Habit

Every creative expression is the result of action. Every action is the result of a habit. Habits are the foundation of every prolific creator's body of work. Over a long enough timeline, habits become default behaviors.

They go from an item on your to-do list to something you don't have to think about. If you can change your behavior, you can become a prolific creator.

**IF YOU WANT TO BECOME PROLIFIC, START BY MAKING
YOUR ART A HABIT.**



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Work Like a Mechanic and Think Like an Artist

The process for a prolific creator is mechanical, routine and predictable. You know what you're going to do, when you're going to do it, and how long it will take. But, you have no idea what the results will be.

Develop a Signature

Every artist has a voice, a style, a signature. It's in their DNA, waiting to be expressed, to emerge, sing, and resonate with the people you can change and the hearts you can touch.

But this signature gets buried by the expectations of society, and the people who blindly defend the status quo.



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To uncover anything that's buried, you have to dig, excavate, and more art until you're not who the world expects you to be, but who you are destined to be.

You can't do this in one fell swoop. This kind of resonance is years in the making. It takes practice, patience, persistence, commitment and consistency. It happens brick by brick, one drop of paint on the canvas after another until you uncover that thing that nobody else could have done but you. It's unmistakable.



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Focus on the Process

Outcomes are out of our control. Process is not.

- You control whether or not you write. But you can't control how the readers respond.
- You can't control how the movie does at the box office. But you can control how you show up on a movie set.

If you want to be prolific, you have to be process-oriented. When you're attached to outcome, that's hard to do.



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Have Non-Negotiable Parts

Every artist under the sun has non-negotiable parts of what they do. Fred Rogers wouldn't allow networks to show advertisements to kids (even if it would have increased his income).

There are a few non-negotiable parts of being a prolific creator:

- Uninterrupted creation time
- Commitment
- Discipline
- Consistency
- Effort without immediate reward
- Persistence and grit

Tom Brady didn't get 4th string to the best decision Bob Kraft ever made without a few non-negotiable parts.

If you want to get paid like a rockstar you have to play like one before you are.



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Bad Days

If you're prolific, you'll have bad days when:

- The writing feels like it's coming out the wrong end.
- The actors can't seem to nail their scenes.
- The music sounds like shit.

I have bad days. I wake up with a hangover. A customer service person has pissed me off. A jackass I've never met sends me a scathing email. People won't leave me alone.

As writer Dani Shapiro says, "It's one stitch in the tapestry of days." The best thing about being prolific is that bad days don't matter all that much. You'll be back at it again tomorrow.



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Measure Your Progress

It's useful to measure your progress. But if you measure your progress based on outcomes, you'll believe you aren't making any. Being prolific changes the way you measure your progress. You shift your measurement to metrics you can control.

- 90 minutes of interrupted creation
- 1000 words
- 30 minutes of deliberate practice

If you measure progress in the right way, you'll still be heading to where you want to be tomorrow, a year from now and 10 years from now. You might even have some interesting detours along the way.



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Shovel a Mountain of Shit and Find an Ounce of Gold

If you're prolific, you will create work that sucks. Most of it will be shit.

When I sit down to work, it might take 500 words, 2000 words, or 2 hours of tapping away at the keyboard before I stumble on something that doesn't make me want to gouge my eyes out.

Maybe there are writers who sit down at their desk and watch brilliance flow from their fingertips. I'm not one of them. I don't think there are many of them. And the rest of us secretly hate those people.



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My average writing session starts with incoherent psychobabble. Each sentence has nothing to do with the one before. Other days, I just bitch and scribble.

But if I persist, eventually the work reveals itself. To be a prolific creator, you have to shovel a mountain of shit to find an an ounce gold. That's why it's called a shitty first draft.



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Flow

If you spend enough time making art, you'll eventually hear someone talk about flow. "Flow is what makes life worth living," says Steven Kotler. It's addictive but productive.

Those moments of insight, those sparks of brilliance, and breakthroughs all happen when you're in flow. I had the idea for this book while I was in flow. When I started writing that morning, I had no idea I was going to write another book.

Flow causes artists to be prolific.

A writer's word count skyrockets.

A musician's music resonates.

An actor's monologue hits the director in the face with a crowbar.



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It's why writers return to the blank page after writing best-selling books; musicians return to the studio; and professional surfers go to the beach and get in the water after coming back from a world tour.

If focus is the fire of a prolific creator, flow is the Molotov cocktail.

Eat More Kale

Your two most valuable resources as a prolific creator are time and attention. How you spend your time and what you pay attention to will determine your creative output.

- Tweets, status updates, and Instagram pics are like donuts and cigarettes.
- Books and anything that requires a large investment of your time and attention are like kale, broccoli or whatever all the vegan hippies say makes you healthier.

If you want to be a prolific creator, eat more kale.



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Apple Trees, Apple Vodka, and Apple Pie

A few years ago, Julien Smith shared this very simple yet profound insight with me: "If you have an apple tree, you can make lots of things from that apple tree."

You can of course eat apples. But you can also make apple juice, apple pies, and apple martinis if you please.

Everything you create has byproducts. Everything you don't use can be used for something else. This book started out as a series of rants and riffs. I didn't even know I was going to write it. Just because something ends up in the cutting room, that doesn't mean it won't be useful later.

Every piece of creative work you do plants a seed. Eventually, that seed might become a tree. With that tree, you can make more art, different art, art that might not have occurred to you. What's your apple tree?



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1 out of 100

The prolific creator is inspired by possibility but works based on probability. Making more art increases the probability of your success. If one of out hundred things succeed, you can make 100 pieces of art, or you can bet the farm one piece of art. The first increases the probability of success, but it also opens you to the possibility that anything can happen.



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How Do I Know If It Worked?

Before Seth Godin starts any project, he says to himself, "This might not work."
Two questions should come before this:

1. How do I know if it worked?
2. How do I know if it didn't work?

This book might not work. If my criteria for whether or not worked is hitting The New York Times Best Sellers List, it definitely won't work. It's self-published and free so it's automatically ruled out.

On the flip side, if I'm aiming to strike a chord and say something that resonates with one reader, maybe two, three, and then a thousand, it worked. If I want to create something I'm proud to put my signature on, it worked. You have the power to define whether or not something worked.



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Treat Failure Like a Scientist

My father is a scientist. The bulk of his work is coming up with a hypothesis and testing it. Sometimes he's wrong. But when he's wrong, he doesn't tell himself a story about why he's not a good scientist or cut out to be a professor. He collects data, changes his hypothesis accordingly and conducts another experiment.

Scientists treat failure as data. Artists make up stories about themselves, about their work, and what they're capable of. That's the blessing and curse of our ability to turn facts into fiction. The power we have to imagine what doesn't exist also occasionally malfunctions, causing us to imagine catastrophes, disasters, and debacles.



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Nobody Gives a Shit What You're Going to Start

There are a lot of people who spend a great deal of time talking about the work they plan to do and the art they're going to make. At least once a day, I see an announcement that somebody is starting the book they're going to write, the podcast they're going to launch, etc.

As Ryan Holiday once said to me, "You're being congratulated for something you haven't even done yet." He never talks about his books until they're finished. He's written 6 in 6 years. Do we really need any more evidence? The day I wrote this, I was on Amazon and saw that Ryan's next book was already available for pre-order.

2.4 billion people use Facebook every day. That's a lot of people who are talking about what they're going to do instead of doing them. Talk about the things you've finished instead of the things you're going to start. Status updates are where dreams go to die. Doing the work is where they come to life.



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I don't give a shit what you're going to start. Tell me what you've finished. Show me what you've shipped.

**STATUS UPDATES
ARE WHERE DREAMS GO TO DIE.
DOING THE WORK
IS WHERE THEY
COME TO LIFE.**



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BOOK 3: A CAREER IN THE ARTS



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The life of a prolific creator is a journey of false starts, new beginnings, detours, dead ends, debacles, and events that force you to deviate from your itinerary. I never planned to be an author. I made plans for a normal life. But two recessions forced me to deviate from my itinerary. You couldn't have planned such bad timing if you tried. It forced me to take the scenic route.



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Obscurity

Lingering in obscurity is a rite of passage for every iconic artist. Nobody falls out of the womb and into a leading role in an Oscar-winning film. But if you're prolific, you'll reduce the likelihood and length of your obscurity

Struggle

I said in my first book, "Art that rewards its creator longer after the average person would quit is admired, but rarely encouraged." You have to let go of many of the things you've been conditioned to believe. The beauty of being prolific is that there's no expiration date for your most ambitious dreams.



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Success

"WE DON'T MAKE MOVIES SO WE
CAN MAKE MONEY. WE MAKE
MONEY SO WE CAN MAKE MORE
MOVIES"

- WALT DISNEY



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I had my first taste of commercial creative success in 2013. Then I proceeded to fuck it all up in 2014. I almost ran a business into the ground and burned a dozen bridges.

My moment in the spotlight led me into the depths of darkness. You can only ride the winds of success for so long before you realize that your life has to be about something else.

You never know when it will happen. For some people, it happens in their 20s and for others, it happens in their 70s.

When your lingering in obscurity and struggling, you think what you want is success. Then you get a dose of it. The high fades and what was once a distant dream is your everyday existence. You realize what you're really after is fulfillment and longevity.

The whole point of being commercially successful with your art is so you can make more of it.



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The Price for Being in the Arena

You have to develop a thick skin for a life in the arts.

- Gatekeepers will reject you.
- Family members will question your sanity.
- People on the internet you don't even fucking know will vilify you.

But as Tony Keppelman said to Steven Pressfield after his first big failure, "You're taking a few blows. That's the price for being in the arena."

Unless you're willing to pay the price for being in the arena, you can't play the infinite game of creativity.



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Occupational Hazards

As you become more prolific, you'll become less tolerant of anything that prevents you from making art. Should you choose the path of the prolific creator, you should be aware of its occupational hazards.

Impatience

You will become less patient. Whether you're waiting in line at the grocery store or dealing with an incompetent service person on the other end of the phone, you'll be annoyed by anything that gets in the way of doing your work

Depression

I've wrestled with bouts of depression on and off through my time as a prolific creator. At moments, you'll wonder if it's all for nothing. But I know that when I'm not prolific, I'm not happy.



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Criticism

If you make a lot of art, someone will hate it. The more people you reach, the more likely you are to reach someone who hates your work. One of my books has almost 300 5-star reviews. The only one I remember is from the woman who said, "I hope this guy is a better surfer than he is a writer."

Material

When you're prolific, everything and everyone in your life is at risk of becoming material for your work. Once you start to see the world through this lens, it's impossible not to. People in my life appear in my books and my creative work all the time. When you're an artist everything and everyone is a possible muse.

Sidenote: If you intend to write a memoir that involves how insane your family is, in the words of my cousin, "Just wait until they're all dead."



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Ego

This is the most dangerous occupational hazard. You'll be tempted to look down on those who are not as prolific. You'll wonder why they can't get their shit together. But as Ryan Holiday says, "Ego is the enemy."

Entitlement/Narcissism

When people become successful, they begin to feel entitled to more and more of the fruits of their labor. In the process, they plant the seeds for their own demise. They forget about:

- The role that luck played in their accomplishments.
- The people who bet on them when they were nobody.
- The people behind the scenes who don't appear in the movie credits or cover of the book who made their accomplishments possible.

Becoming entitled will undo all the work you've done to become prolific.



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The "Rockstar Lifestyle"

As a prolific creator evolves, he masters his craft; becomes more well-known; and becomes more successful. With success comes temptations: groupies, booze, drugs, and the misconstrued sense of invincibility.

But rockstars end up in rehab; celebrities commit suicide; and the greatest artists in history fall from grace when the lifestyle becomes synonymous with their work.



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Complacency

Complacency is the kiss of death to a creative career. The moment you stop doing what got you to where you were in the first place is the moment you start to slide backwards. The harsh reality of a creative life is that you're always going to be judged by your most recent work.

Insecurity

Learn to separate the audience's response to your work, from the work itself. Otherwise, you'll be paralyzed by insecurity. If you have a prolific career, it's inevitable that you'll create something that doesn't resonate with someone. You can make it mean something about who you are as a person. Or you can make more art.



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A SERIES OF FALSE HORIZONS

There is No Field of Dreams

Life in the arts is not the field of dreams. The "If you build it, they will come" mentality is not a strategy. It's a pipe dream. But millions of aspiring artists sit around waiting to be discovered, waiting for a big break, hanging out in a mythical field of dreams.



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As you've seen throughout this book, prolific creators have a different way of doing things. They take matters into their own hands.

- When a publisher doesn't want to publish an aspiring author's book, he self-publishes.
- When two actors are struggling to find work, they write their own script and star in their own movie.
- When the record label won't sign a musician, she rents a studio, lays down tracks, and ships.

If you're prolific, if you ship, if you master your craft, and become so good—they can't ignore you, then they will come.



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Fame

As a culture, we're starstruck. We set fame as a standard for accomplishment. Let's dispel the notion that being famous on the internet means anything.

My barista doesn't care who I am. My grocery clerk has probably never heard of Seth Godin.

- I'm a brown dude in a town full of white people who wish they were Indian.
- Seth is just a bald dude with glasses.



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Most people who are famous didn't make plans for it. It was a byproduct of doing something they love.

- The Beatles's fame was a byproduct of 10,000 hours of practice.
- Matt Damon's fame was a byproduct of hundreds, if not, thousands of auditions.

**FAME IS A BYPRODUCT OF BEING PROLIFIC. BETTER TO
FOCUS ON BEING PROLIFIC INSTEAD OF BEING FAMOUS.**

**IF YOU NEVER BECOME FAMOUS,
AT LEAST YOU'LL HAVE THE WORK.**



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Dissatisfaction

Every artist has a list of dreams that haven't come true, checkboxes they haven't crossed off or goals they haven't achieved:

- The Oscar
- The Grammy
- The Best-seller

The illusion of the "I've made it moment" causes people to suffer for years. But the moment an artist "makes it," he's confronted with the realization that he's been chasing false horizons. He becomes aware of the eternal gap between who he is and who he wants to be.

He might move to a nicer house, dress a little better, or drive a nicer car. But the carrot for what success looks like keeps moving. As Josh Radnor brilliantly said, "A successful career in the arts is rigged for dissatisfaction." The prolific creator sees the only lasting satisfaction will come from making more art.



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The Work Doesn't Stop

The greatest delusion of artists who are not commercially successful is the assumption that work stops when you become successful. That's when the work begins. If you're serious about a career in the arts, there's no moment where you're going to sit on your ass and watch the money roll in.



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WHY WE MAKE MORE ART

Freedom

Being prolific is the path to creative freedom. You're free to try things that might not work. You're free to take risks, push edges, and do whatever you want. When you're prolific the work that you're destined to do will reveal itself. If it doesn't work, come back again tomorrow and make more art.

Mastery

If you want to become a prolific creator, focus on mastery instead of metrics. If you focus on mastery, the metrics will eventually take care of themselves. If you focus on metrics, you might temporarily inflate your ego while permanently decreasing your likelihood of success.



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Who You Become

The point of making more art is not what you get at the end of it. It's who you become as a result.

When I started this journey, I was like a criminal, with a list of places in the corporate world where I'd served my time.

**MY BIGGEST CRIME WAS BELIEVING THAT I WASN'T DESTINED
FOR MORE THAN SHOWING UP AT A JOB I HATED.
DOING JUST ENOUGH NOT TO GET FIRED.
SPENDING MY WEEKENDS DRINKING AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE.
AND USING THE WORKWEEK TO RECOVER FROM THE WEEKEND.**



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But making more art changed me. It changed when I went to sleep, and when I got up. It changed how I spent my time, and who I spent it with. It gave me a reason to get up in the morning. I learned to slay the dragons of fear, doubt, distraction and resistance. In the words of Steven Pressfield, "I turned pro." With that came a different life, a better life —one that would allow me to look back and say:

"I was here. This is what I made. I hope you like it. But if you don't, no worries. I'm still going to make more art."



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AN UNMISTAKABLE SIGNATURE

Defy the Limitations of Your Medium

Most artists have a canvas, a blank page, a camera, an instrument. But some artists defy the limitations of their medium.

- Walt Disney continually defied the limitations of his medium. He saw beyond the page, beyond two dimensions and into three. And beyond the screen and into the world.
- Caigo Shang used fireworks as his paintbrush and the sky as his canvas. Defy the limitations of a medium and you can build a ladder into the sky.



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Just because something is in your zone of genius, that doesn't mean it's all your capable of. I'm in my zone of genius when I interview people. Writing is how I defied the limitations of my medium.

I've planned an event, been the executive producer of an animated series and did things that I was completely unqualified for.

Defy the limitations of a medium and you might end up defying your own. Or as Al Pacino more bluntly said to Chris O'Donnell in *Scent of a Woman*, "What are you, some kind of chickenshit who sticks to job description only?"



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Draw a Line in the Sand

A couple of months ago, a guest pitched himself for the Unmistakable Creative. I said no. He mentioned the millions of pageviews on his site and his appearance on a major media outlet. I still said no because it wasn't a story I wanted to tell.

A few years ago, I drew a line in the sand. I'd never choose a guest based on what it might do for our metrics. I'd also never agree to an interview where the guest wouldn't give us an hour. I've also been ruthless about cutting interviews in the middle or choosing not to publish.

It's cost us in terms of our metrics and lost us potential guests. I've said no to famous social media celebrities and passed on people everyone else said yes to. I've pissed off a few people along the way. But, sacrificing meaning for metrics is a slippery slope.



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The assistant of a really famous author pushed back. She'd never heard our show and said, "He'll provide more value than in 30 minutes than all your guests have in an hour." It was bullshit. He didn't. Then we spoke with Bushra Azhar, an expert on the same subject as the famous author (now you probably know who he is). She delivered, and we realized that our line in the sand should never be negotiable, ever.

Sometimes people will test your line in the sand. When you stand firm, they'll change their mind. The publicists at my own publisher tested my line the sand. They said an author THEY pitched for the podcast didn't have more than 30 minutes. I said, "No problem. Good luck with the launch. But we'll have to pass." An hour later they found the time.

AJ Leon drew a line in the sand when we limited the number of tickets to his conference. He held it in Fargo, and kept the prices low enough for people to attend, and took a hit to his own pocketbook. Maybe it's bad business, but those who were there will never forget the experience.



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Oprah drew a line in the sand when she decided not to compete with the typical trash that litters day time talk shows. It cost her ratings in the short term, and paid off in a big way in the long run.

Drawing a line in the sand polarizes. It's not about being an asshole. But it's a clear indication of your values, what you are and what you're not willing to do. It's a signal that my work is for you or it's not.

It's not easy to draw a line in the sand because you will offend people. But for every person you offend, you'll turn another from a fan into a fanatic. I was happy the day I got my first 2-star review for my recent book. The message was polarizing enough to draw a line in the sand.

When you draw your line in the sand, followers become fans, and fans become fanatical members of a small army to help you fight daily battles in the war of art.



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Make Something Noteworthy, Remarkable and Hard to Ignore

Mars Dorian creates art that's edgy, provocative and sometimes makes people uncomfortable. Some people don't like it. It screams with an utter disdain for authority.

An iconic brand might think twice about hiring him for their next campaign. My publisher didn't want him to design my book covers because they wanted to create something that was "upmarket." I still don't know what that means.

His work is *noteworthy, remarkable, and hard to ignore*. It hits you in the face. It might not be for you.



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Nobody's head is going to roll over the book cover design, logo or ad campaign that's safe, familiar and proven to work. But it's almost never noteworthy. It's easy to ignore.

Remember the advertisement on the last billboard you saw?
What about the one the in parking garage at your local shopping center?
What about the last book cover on display at Barnes and Noble?

It's impossible to stand out in a sea of noise when you do what's safe, comfortable, and predictable.

Standing out is not matter of success. It's a matter of survival.



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You're not Here to Become a One Hit Wonder

If you grew up in the '80s or discovered pop culture in the '90s, you might remember these two musical acts: The Spin Doctors and Kriss Kross.

For about a year, their songs were on the radio all the time. Kids wore backward jeans. CD stores sold lots of their singles. But they didn't stand the test of time. I can't help but wonder if they'd still be here if they made a commitment to being prolific.

By definition, something that is a trend is temporary. There was time when bell bottoms and mountains of hairs spray were trendy. It was trendy in 2009 to start a blog. Today, it's trendy to start a podcast.



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Can you capitalize on a trend? Yes. But you can't build a legacy or create a perennial seller from it. You can follow a trend or set one. You can follow an example that's been set. Or you can set an example to follow.

If you choose to follow a trend, you'll make a long term sacrifice for a short term gain. If you set one, you'll make a short term sacrifice for a long term gain. Don't underestimate the impact of what appears to be a simple choice. It's the difference between whether you'll be a one-hit wonder or someone who stands the test of time.

Better to be a prolific creator who spans a few decades than a one hit wonder with a moment or two in the spotlight.



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Your One and Only Life

If this is all you get, it's worth asking what you plan to do with it? Are you going to keel over, wondering about all you could have done, could have been and might have accomplished? Or are you going to leave behind a series of movements you instigated, projects you shipped, and art you made?



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The Long Game

Sam Altman, president of Ycombinator, tells founders that their greatest competitive advantage is a long term view. His timeline for a long term view is 10 years.

If you make your art every day for 10 years, it's inevitable that you'll be prolific. You'll grow and evolve in ways you can't possibly imagine. You will make a large statement with your work that can't be ignored. You will have a massive body of work. In the words of Neil Gaiman, "You'll leave the world a bit different for you having been here."

Your status update with 1000 likes, your Instagram picture with 100 hearts, and your clever tweet with 100s of retweets are all fleeting. Nobody gives a shit about the great American status update. Remember mine from last week? Or the woman who was "freaking out because JK Rowling liked my tweet." I didn't think so.



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We care about art that stands the test of time. We care about perennial sellers. Art that changes the culture. Art that touches our hearts. Art that moves us is a long game. It takes time, determination, persistence and effort.

It rewards its creator long after any sane person would quit. It's sometimes dismissed by the pundits and written off as a failure by the people who funded it.

If a book doesn't sell a million copies shortly after its launch, a publisher will move to what's next. An editor at a publisher told me that the head of the publisher thought giving one of their most successful authors a book deal was a mistake. A few years later that author made them a fortune.

But you can't control any of these things. That's the beauty of being prolific. You can put your energy and effort into something that's worth your time; something that might just start with an audience of one and eventually, an audience of millions.



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Claim Your Birthright to Make More Art

Becoming successful as a creative person requires a combination of both internal and external skills. You have to overcome resistance, let go of your need for validation, and develop the confidence to believe in the value of your work. But that's only half the battle. That's the inner layer.

The inner layer is a mental game. You'll have to lick your wounds and heal them in therapy. You might read enough self-help books to open your own therapy practice. But at some point, you'll see there are no external solutions for your internal wounds.

You also have to do the work. You have to develop habits, design systems, learn to manage your attention, finish the things you start, and master your craft. If you're serious about it, this will take a minimum of 5 years of focused action. But it's more likely it will take 10 years of showing up whether you're inspired, drunk, sober, or hungover.



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You will take punches in the face. You'll have to overcome critics, naysayers, and people who doubt your capabilities. Sometimes they will be the people closest to you. Other times, they'll be strangers on the internet.

If you're driven by the desire to prove them wrong, your work will get tainted with that energy. The desire for external validation can be toxic to the creative process. Those who do their work solely with the desire to impress an audience rarely do.

You'll also have to learn to create work that stands out in a sea of noise. Everybody has a microphone. Many people have one bigger than yours. Shouting louder isn't going to get the job done. Mimicry at best will make you a pale imitation of your predecessors. At worst, you'll be completely ignored.



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Thus, the only viable long term strategy to become a successful creative is to be so good they can't ignore you. You get that good by focusing mastery of metrics. You have to be driven by meaning instead of money, fame, or external accolades.

Make art you're proud to put your signature on. If it doesn't succeed commercially, as Neil Gaiman says, "At least, you'll have the work."

When you do finally get that thing you think will make you feel whole, complete and vindicated for all the people who didn't believe in you, you'll realize it won't. There's no I've made it moment.

Dax Shepard asks his podcasts guests, "You're rich, you're famous, and successful. Has it solved all the problems you thought it would?" NOBODY has said yes.

You realize that creative success is not an outcome, but an infinite game. The main benefit of being commercially successful with your art is that you get to keep making more of it.



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It won't make you more enlightened or a better person. If you're an asshole, you might be a bigger one. If you're kind, you'll be kinder. Even if you make The New York Times Best Sellers list, you'll realize you're not that famous.

To your barista, you're just another schmuck ordering coffee. To your grocery clerk, just a guy or gal in line at the store. Nobody on the internet is as famous as you think they are.

You may receive lots of digital validation in the form of hearts, likes and vanity metrics with creative success. But this worthless social currency can't pay your rent or put food on the table.

Remember that you, like Gods, were born to create. Creativity is not a trait. It's a habit. In the words of my friend Chase Jarvis, "It's your birthright. Claim it and turn your life into the masterpiece it was meant to be."



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Fuck the Critics. Make More Art.

Being prolific means coming to terms with the fact that not everything you do is going to be a hit. In fact, most of it won't. Prolific creators fail, fail and produce commercial flops.

- Readers will hate some of your books.
- Concertgoers will hate some of your albums.
- Moviegoers will hate some of your movies.

Bono isn't sitting around crying because I hated *Discoteque*.

Kevin Costner didn't stop acting after *Waterworld* (No offense, Kevin).



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You might not win an Oscar, a Grammy or make The New York Times Best Sellers list. You're not going to knock it out of the park every single time. But you can always make more art.

Lick your wounds, drown your sorrows, retreat to the cave, close the door and make more art. If you do that, your failures and flops will get buried under your success.

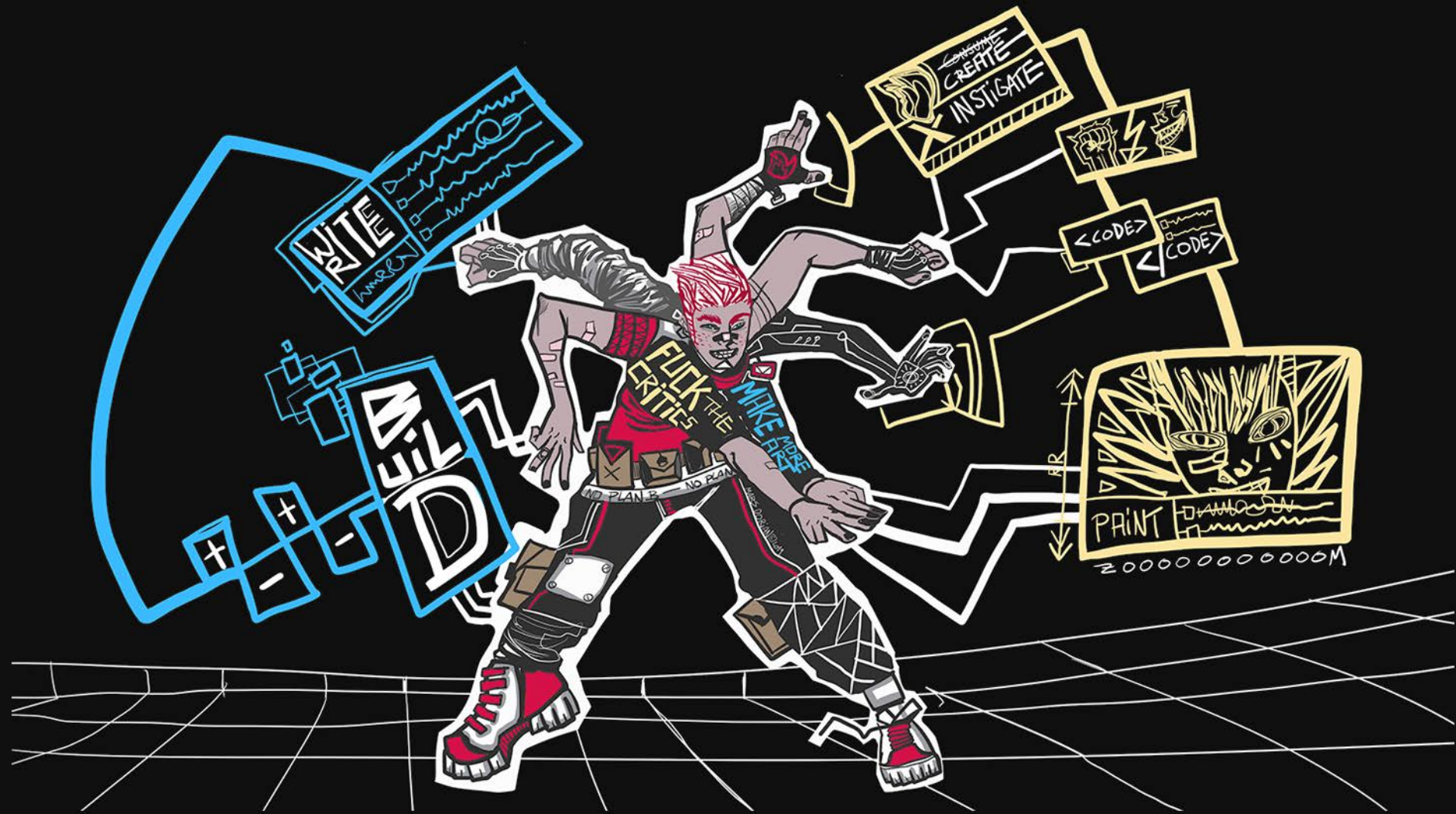
You can wallow in the pain and bullshit of the people who hate your art. Or you can make more of it for the people who are eagerly anticipating what you're going to do next. If you want to navigate a life in the arts with guts and grace, leave the world a bit different and better for your having been here, and live a life that you're proud to put your signature on...



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The Prolific Creator's Toolkit

You'll need a few weapons in your arsenal and tools in your toolbox to become a prolific creator. These are some that I've created and a few that have helped me along the way.

My Body of Work

- [*The Unmistakable Creative Podcast*](#)
- [*An Audience of One: Reclaiming Creativity for Its Own Sake*](#)
- [*Unmistakable Animation*](#)

Books Every Prolific Creator Should Have on Their Shelf

- Making Ideas Happen by Scott Branson
- Bird by Bird by Anne Lamott
- The War of Art By Steven Pressfield
- The Rise of Superman by Steven Kotler
- Little Bets by Peter Sims



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My name is Sriniv Rao. I'm a prolific creator who makes art, instigates projects, and has a pathological inability to accept the status quo. I host a *podcast*, *plan events*, and *speak to organizations about how to bring ideas to life*. If someone you know could benefit from reading this book, the greatest gift you could give me is to forward it to them.

SRINIVAS RAO



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