

Self-Command: How to Get Yourself to Do Things

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- It is also intended for accessibility purposes, not only if a reader may be hearing impaired, but also if English isn't someone's first language, such that the written form may be easier to follow, or if the speed of my speaking in some places might be tougher to follow.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Hey folks! Chris DeLeon here.

In this audio, we're going to focus on a ridiculously straightforward technique that's going to help make it easier to get yourself to do things. That applies to making small steps of progress on a bigger goal, getting yourself to start, or to do a thing you've been putting off - to get across that line of not doing it - or, also, to continue keeping focus on a task. If you

find yourself getting distracted, find yourself getting kind of steered off course, the technique we're focused on is going to help address all of those areas.

Now, some basic setup stuff: this is *Self-Command: How to Get Yourself to Do Things*, created by, like I mentioned, Chris DeLeon. This book is split into 14 chapters, total run time of the audio version is about five hours. There are a couple places where I'm going to encourage you to pause, to apply the techniques for a week or two, before you continue. It's meant to be interactive and spread out a bit, for the same reason why you wouldn't just slam together all the lectures in a course from a whole semester back-to-back. It wouldn't stick. There's only one or two of those points though, and I'll explain it as we reach them.

Speaking of which, quick overview of what's ahead. Chapters basically fall into four major parts. Though there's 14 chapters, you can kind of think of it as four different phases. Chapters 2-4 provide a little bit more background on the need for the material, and how it came about. 5-8 will dive right into the technique that's at the core of this method. Chapters 9-12 build on that, by focusing on the strategies for how to apply it in different phases - what I mean by that, is whether you're starting something new, when you're trying to stick with something long enough to get results from it, recovering from disruptions, or using it in a way that works for you long-term sustainably. Chapter 13 is kind of in its own category, almost a supplemental part. It's important in that my focus there is on helping you untie some mental knots which, I've found if left unaddressed, can needlessly limit the ways in which you'll be able to apply these strategies to make lasting improvements in your life.

That is, by the way, both my purpose and my promise here. This isn't just about being an informational set of ideas to give you something to think about, or talk about. My real goal is that through applying this material, you can get the real world equivalent of a stat upgrade to your ability to get yourself to do the things you mean to do.

Chapter 14 is a relatively short concluding chapter, basically to remind you that by completing this material doesn't mean you've hit the end of using it, but are instead embarking on an all new beginning, with a new ability that can bring you new opportunities. As another way to frame that, since my background is in game development: for those of you familiar with the "Metroidvania" genre of games, there's something called "ability gating." (If you're not familiar, all that means is that there's areas of the game world that can't be accessed until your character gains the ability to swim, to climb, to turn into mist, to fly.) My objective here isn't just help you do things better that you were going to do anyway. My objective is to help give you abilities that can push down gates that, before, might have seemed inaccessible or outside of reach.

But, nor is this technique only for people who feel like they've been having major difficulties.

When I was testing this material out with different people, several who already were very focused still found, and reported back to me, that using this method helped them identify several cases where they were actually more easily distracted than they thought they were, due to jumping between things in a way that this technique helps reduce. The approach will be talking about here is really something that anybody can benefit from, not just if you feel like you've been having specific problems in this area.

The reason why this has become such a problem today, is that a generation or two ago - in fact, for most of human history - the problem was being able to find some sort of plan, some sort of path, some sort of material that could work. Anymore? We are drowning in it!

There is an essentially infinite amount of content surrounding us, that we always have access to, that we can easily get our hands on, we can easily put in front of ourselves. Instead, our barrier becomes not, "Is it available to us? Can I find it? Can I get at it?" In many cases, we've got tons of them bookmarked. We maybe even paid for some Udemy courses we haven't been through.

One of the reasons why this has been kept so focused, as well as why it's audio, is when I was first developing this material, it kept growing in scale. It kept trying to cover all the different possibilities. It kept becoming a tome, literally hundreds of pages of text, multiple times. What I realized is that if someone's difficulty is getting themselves to do something, you can't begin with reading a few hundred pages of text.

So I made this [originally] audio, so it's easier for you to fit all of it in. Whether you're getting ready a mornings, whether you're driving on a commute, while you're exercising, while you're doing something else, hopefully you can pipe through this. Audio also makes it easier if you want to go through it again. Sometimes, things when they're said out loud, we're zoning out for part of it, we're distracted for part of it. I find when I have audio materials, I'll listen multiple times. That helps catch me at the right time when a certain part relates and connects to where I'm at with something. [Added note: if you received this ebook transcript without / separate from the audio, you can obtain the audiobook files from self-command.com at no charge.]

I want to give specific thanks to some of the members of our online game development club who helped give feedback and piloted this program, testing it out in their experiences, in our club, going through our intro materials, assigning themselves tasks on projects, pitching and leading projects in some cases. I want to thank Vaan, H, Stebs, Kornel, Brian N. Klaim, Anthony J. Spad XIII, Mike L., Trent P., Jeremy K, Simon H., McFunkypants, Osama A., Marcel S., Andy K., Terrence M., Dominic A, Gonzalo D., Praneil K., Michelle. O. Iwei C., Jose S., Ryan G., Baris

K., Matt S. and Bilal C. All of your feedback during the piloting phase was really instrumental in helping get this material as strong as it is, to help as many people as it's going to help. Thank you so much for your input and feedback.

Also want think my wife, Laura, for her support and encouragement over the years, for Gamkedo's business agent, Maanie Hamzaee, for his support since the beginning. For Gamkedo Club's - now HomeTeam GameDev's - mentor-in-residence Christer Kaitila, and all of our trainers, my friends and family. Many strategies I'm passing on here began as seeds planted by their advice.

I also want to give a quick thanks and shout out to the Spin Wires, an incredible band whose music I'm using [in the audiobook] with permission. You can find their latest album at spinwires.bandcamp.com

Lastly, and you'll hear a reiteration of this and clarification at the end of this material, I want to stress that this book exists on a license that includes sharing with friends or family. If you've received these files from somebody else who said "hey, check it out, this might work for you." I want to emphasize: you haven't stolen it, they haven't given you something they shouldn't have, it's yours. Make use of it.

In fact, if there's someone else in your life who you think would benefit from it, the license passes on to who receives it, so feel welcome to pass this along. If you find that there's bits and parts that are helping you out, feel free to share it.

We all benefit when more people around us are better able to get themselves to do the things that they mean to do, through the exercise of self-command.

Chapter 2: On Getting Yourself to Do Things

I've always been fascinated by the trope from fiction where there are characters that can write something down, and make what they write down a reality.

When I was a little kid, this was an aspect of *The NeverEnding Story*. It's also what happens in the *Myst* universe. It's been a part of *Once Upon a Time*. It's kind of how things worked in *Inception*.

Sometimes there's a special pen, special language, special book, or special way of describing.

Part of what drew me to game programming, in my own path, was realizing here was a way that, through specifically writing down clearly enough a description what I'm trying to make happen, I could write it into existence!

I mean, on a computer screen, but objectively enough I could share it around the world, without much loss in the signal.

What I write, is what I get.

What this audio is really about is a kinda micro form of that in the real world. It's not quite the same as being able to write that you're going to be able to fly on a dragon, or anything like that. It, instead, deals with being able to write down something in the present, to control the present by what we write. It's something that allows us to be much more conscious, much more deliberate, in what we're doing, and how we're going about it.

While perhaps not to the same magical extreme as we see it in fantasy and fiction, we can begin to write our future simply by writing our present, one task and one day at a time.

As you gain proficiency in this, as you gain momentum in your ability to follow through on your intention, to write something down and get yourself to do it, this sets you up to build a queue. You can build out a plan, with trust that you'll actually be able to follow through this time.

You can even try out some other, more complex systems—not under any expectation that they're all going to work, any more than every shoe is going to fit—but at least with a firmer sense that you'll be able to give it a fair shake by following its steps, using the materials, making use of opportunities around you.

Just like if you're writing in the language of D'ni in the universe of *Myst*, or dreaming in *Inception*, there's a very specific way we can go about doing it that gets maximum effectiveness. What we're going to be exploring here is (A.) the set up for it, (B.) some tips about how to do it

well, and then (C.) the mind state to be in that really helps it work, to get yourself to do the things you've been meaning to do.

The Stoic Epictetus wrote, "first say to yourself what you would be, and then do what you have to do." The focus of this entire audio is going to be on how you can better get yourself to do what you have to do. Picture who you will choose to become, when you're better able to direct your own action, when you're better able to follow through on your intentions, when you're more consistently going to be able to make more efficient use of whatever limited time and energy you have to work from. It's something where even a small gain, even a little more consistent control over your energy and over your use of your time, can over time have a huge effect on your life. It can really lead to a big difference down the line, because it's got a compounding effect.

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Our focus here isn't even going to be on what to do with it. Our focus here is going to be on how to do it. It's going to be up to you to decide how you want to use it to become a little bit more who you want to become.

Let's look at some ways that you're going to be able to write the present into reality.

Chapter 3: Why Am I Teaching This?

A perfectly fair question to be asking at this point is, "Chris, who in the heck are you to be suggesting to anybody else how they can get themselves to do things?"

In my background, I've actually got quite a few examples of where I've been able to get myself to, if nothing else, do something that I wanted to be doing, consistently, and with follow-through.

That applies to a podcast I've been running consistently for over four years. That applies to hundreds of daily YouTube videos, including more than a year of them. That includes, in the case of game development - which is something many people find difficult to stick to - I've released four or five games every year, for now more than 20 years in a row. That includes starting two different businesses with no outside funders, no outside capital, no outside guidance for that matter. Really having to be my own boss, in that circumstance. As well as blogging weekly for five years. Lots of these kinds of examples.

This eventually led to hundreds of thousands of students in my Udemy courses, nearly a hundred thousand YouTube subscribers, millions of views for the videos I've released. But in each one of those cases, it came out of persistence. It came out of picking what I needed to do, deciding, making up my mind to do that thing, and finding a way to get myself to start doing it, and then to keep doing it until I got what I wanted out of doing it.

Most important is actually less about me, and more about the people that I've worked with. They're why it's become so important for me to figure out how to package, distill, and communicate these techniques, these ways of thinking, in as simple a form as possible.

One of the things that I currently do is run a game development training company. We have people around the world who build games together for practice. Part of what I've come to realize, as we've continued to address the needs of our membership, is that for many people out there it's no longer a challenge that they can't find an answer that question, or they don't know how to do something. The information's there. They may even know how to do it. Yet, for some other reason, they have experienced difficulties getting themselves to do the thing that they mean to be doing, to use information that they have found, to do something that they know how to do. I've had both a necessity to solve, as well as an environment to test, methods to help get

people who are specifically having trouble in this area to be able to figure out a way past that limiter.

This can extrapolate so far beyond game development, even though it's obviously where I'm coming from as a trainer. This can absolutely be something which, if you are, let's say, wanting to learn how to do art, and you got some art resources to learn from, but you're not using them, that's not really an art problem. That's a problem of getting yourself to use materials you have. If you want to be a writer, if you want to start a podcast, if you want to do videos, and you have the equipment, but you're not doing it, those aren't - once again - podcast or writing or video problems. Those are problems of getting yourself to do the things that are within reach.

We're we're able to distill a lot of these techniques, generalize them a fair bit. Even though occasionally you'll still hear me seep back into my game developer examples, because that's the people I'm used to helping with these things, what I've realized is that this is really a great, much more common issue to target for helping to unblock more people in the world out there, even if you don't care at all about game development.

Speaking of which, I'm never going to get technical. I'm not gonna talk about code, or any that kind of stuff. What I might say, is the word "sprite" which is essentially a game programming word for animation. That's all I'm really talking about. When you hear me say the word "sprite," just think animation.

You might also hear me mention, from time to time, Trello, or Trello cards. That's T-r-e-l-l-o. There's a free plan. It's not necessarily game development specific. Some people use it for planning out their schedules. Some people use it for keeping their notes organized. It's quite often a part of our process, but that's what I'm referring to when you hear me say Trello card. It's basically just a personal note system, kind of like Evernote, OneNote, lots of alternatives out there. Workflowy is another one I've been using on my personal time, but, just to keep things straightforward, I often refer to it as a Trello card.

The very last bit of jargon you'll occasionally hear me use throughout is referring to "indies" or "indie game developers." Indie is just short for independent, as originally we used this term to mean independent of a publisher. Just like independent films, this now also has kind of an artistic vibe in a lot of cases. It's just a very small game development team. Sometimes it's even a solo, sometimes it's a small team of a few. It's a little more garage band, and less orchestra. Some games are made by giant companies with hundreds of people, we call those AAA ("Triple

A"). A lot of people I work with are indies, and so occasionally when I refer to indie developers, that's what that's referring to.

A lot of where this technique is most important is when you're new to something, when you're doing something for which you have no audience yet, for which you have no proper background to give you the confidence of doing it. When I wrote a 500-page textbook by myself, or when I released two video courses I made and self-published, I had no background in doing either one of those things. The same sort of things I'm talking about, and mindsets I'm talking about here, can help you get to doing the sort of things you mean to do.

That includes, for so many people out there anymore in the modern economy, there's lots of folks who are either solopreneurs, or remote, or freelance contractors. In any of those kinds of cases, even if you might technically have a manager, you quite often have to self-manage.

So whether this is for part of a career skill, whether it's because it's part of a hobby that you want to pursue but have been having difficulty getting yourself to do on the side, I want to help equip you with the kind of abilities and the kind of outcomes and successes, that I've been able to enjoy, as well as that I've been able to pass on to my members. I want to make that available to you, as well. That is what this program exists to do.

But something else you're going to be hearing throughout is that these techniques are absolutely not designed to overwork you, or to lead you to over exert yourself. It really is about being able to connect what you want to do, to doing it. In many cases you are going to hear me encouraging that the same skill set isn't just used to push yourself a little bit further when you're tired, or to try to work more hours, but absolutely can and should be used to keep yourself exercising consistently.

You could use the exact same technique to get yourself to start meditating, if that's something I've been meaning to do, but somehow not getting around to. It's something you can be using to take care of what needs to be done, in less time, or to make more efficient use of what limited time and energy you have left over, in order to leave more available time and energy for the things that are most important to you. It can leave more time for things that have nothing to do with productivity, or business, or work, but instead are about family, are about rest, are about just quality time being alive.

Game development was ultimately a really useful space for this sort of technique to derive from, because virtually everybody I've ever worked with, in the many years I've been helping game developers, technically has had the equipment, because all they need is a home computer. They have access to all the answers they could possibly want to find on the internet, because, turns out, the kind of people who make games are quite active in online communities. The kind of people making games are generally very technically proficient people, so there's a lot of video tutorials, lots of high quality documentation and examples out there on the web on how to do it.

So, the reason why it's me teaching this material, is because I'm someone who for years has cared about helping get people to do the things that they wanted to do, for themselves, that they've been meaning to do, but running into barriers doing. I understand that that's something that affects not just game developers, but a lot of people in the world today, and I am here to help.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity and the chance to help you with this.

Chapter 4: Uncomfortable Truths

We're going to start off with just a few hard truths, up front.

One of the first things: we prioritize things we are assigned. We have to learn to assign ourselves things. We need a way to do that, to give tasks you give to yourself the same kind of seriousness as work that is assigned to you from the outside - from not only a manager in a workplace, but potentially by a family member, or anyone else in your life, or world, you have obligations to.

Another hard truth we'll deal with is that merely wanting, intending, or meaning to do something, even knowing how to do it, does not automatically translate to doing it. Something is missing. That something is what we'll be talking about in the material of follows.

Third hard truth, is what you've been doing up until now has not been working well enough. I'm not saying it doesn't work at all. What I'm saying is that it's time to try something different. I assume that that's why you are following this material, to at least try it out, to see if it fits, to see how it can complement.

Obviously, feel free to adapt! Feel free to make this your own. You don't have to take any of it as gospel. Feel free to intermix it with things you've learned. I'd love to hear your feedback, and ways you've updated or tweaked it to make it yours. But, what you've been doing up until now has not been working well enough, and it's time to try something a little bit different.

For this to work, here's our fourth hard truth, you have to want to be in control, to really care about the good feeling of being in command of your limited task energy. Everyone wishes we had more energy and time. We all have finite energy and time to work with. We're going to really focus here on how to be in better control of it, and the good feeling that comes from being in control of it.

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Next hard truth to mention is that, like exercise, the longer you've been ignoring this, the longer you've been having a challenge with it, the harder it's going to be to fix. The more someone

needs to do push-ups or run, the harder it is to do push-ups or run. Obviously, if you've fallen off the wagon, you can get back on the wagon. Depending on how far you've fallen from the wagon, it might be slightly harder to do so. You still can. We can help get you past that. We can offer you some steps. We can offer you some tactics to make it a little bit easier.

It's still going to take work.

Now, the upside to this, is one of the best rewards you can get for getting better at it, one of the greatest things to come out of making progress on these problems, is a really snowballing positive feedback loop. The better you get at it, the easier it gets to maintain, until it becomes so easy to maintain as good habits, instead of having to constantly fight against bad habits.

The last truth, before we get to the real material, is that this audio is going to cover techniques that involve a physical component: you're going to need a small whiteboard, like about the size of a page. I should stress that you don't need this immediately. You don't need to drop everything you're doing to drive out and get one. You don't need to go digging through stuff you already have to find it. I just wanted to give you an early heads up. It won't even be until, maybe, the end of chapter 7, that we're going to really need it for this to work. I wanted to give you an expectation of that so this doesn't catch you off guard later. You don't need something full on your wall. Just a small, portable, notebook-sized whiteboard. Should cost anywhere from maybe \$5 USD, to maybe \$10 USD. If you don't create the artifacts, then it'd be a little bit like going through material on weightlifting, but never touching a weight. You've got to do the thing for this to make a difference.

I'll also say, if the whiteboard, for whatever reason, seems like it's not going to work for you, for many years I did a version of this with a pen and notepad. Just a pocket-sized notepad. Now, we're talking a 57 cent notepad, and a Bic pen. You can get a bag of 20 of them for a few bucks.

If a pen and notepad work better, that can be your fall back. It needs to be physical. It needs to be tangible. There's reasons why this doesn't work as well digitally. There's reasons why it does not work in our imagination. It needs to be outside of ourselves. The pride that tells us we don't need to produce the physical artifact, we don't need it, we can just hear about it, that limits us to not going beyond the results we've been getting so far. That's a huge part of why we've been stuck: we're so caught up in our heads.

However much you been able to do without it, you have been holding yourself back by how much more you can do if you have it at your disposal. You're going to need that physical artifact. You're going to need either a whiteboard and whiteboard marker or, as a fallback, notepad and pen can approximate it.

I will say, when it comes to the notepad version - I have entire bag full of notepads that for years I've been using a version of this with myself. I would try to work with some of my training clients with some sort of version like this to try it out. They'd say "Chris, am I just wasting paper? What if I'm wasting paper?" Eventually, it's why I found, for many people, the whiteboard is a better answer. It takes that concern away. It means, no, you're reusing it, and it's very reusable.

Here's the thing about wasting the paper though, from this 57 cent notepad: it is far better to potentially waste a piece of paper, or half of a page of a pocket-sized notepad, than to waste your day, than to waste hours of your life you can never get back. If the cost of being in direct control of your action, wherever you go, is going through a few more notepads per year, that fit in your pocket? I think that's worth it.

I don't mean to sound like I'm anti-environmental, but I think that's a good use of that amount of tree, if it means you are using your time to be in better control of your actions and your life.

If you see it as a waste of paper, at least see that it's preferable to wasting your time, or not being in as much control - if you find the pocket paper solution works better for you than doing it on a whiteboard. But: you're going to get vastly more impact, reach, superior results by making the physical thing.

And that's the last hard truth.

Chapter 5: Staying on Task

Here is the core technique, on how to assign yourself something, in a way that you can get yourself to do it.

It's going to sound embarrassing, because part of what happens, is when we sit down meaning to do something, we get kind of caught up in distractions. Maybe, sometimes, we even forget what we sat down to do. We would remember, if someone asked us, but there's kind of a hint of shame in that, since (A.) we needed a reminder, and (B.) we might be painfully aware of the fact we've strayed from it, or maybe don't have much to show despite having been, in theory, sitting down to do this.

This affects anybody from a school kid trying to do homework, to adults who are meaning to work on their writing, meaning to work on their podcast, meaning to work on their game, and yet the progress isn't happening, even if it's why they sat down at their machine.

What we're going to set up is a reminder of what you're trying to do that you don't have to be prompted for from the outside, which doesn't need someone else managing you.

Here's all it is: we get a whiteboard - small, one about the size of a notebook. Something easy enough you can bring it along in a backpack to a coffee shop, something you can easily place on your desk somewhere, in a way that's not in the way, something that doesn't take up a ton of room or cause clutter.

What we're going to use that whiteboard for is writing down a single task, a bite-sized task, what you'll be doing for one sitting.

We're aiming at a half an hour, to, maybe two or three hours, max.

We're not going to write the next task on it. We're not going to write out a full to-do list.

Think of it, almost, as a one-item to-do list.

It is the item you are doing right now.

Now, for as simple as it sounds, there are some tricks to getting maximum effectiveness out of doing this.

For example, the reason why I emphasize it should be something you're doing in one specific sitting - someone might hear, "Okay, you write what you're going to do on a whiteboard," they may write a month goal on the whiteboard, then set it on their desk. I'll tell you what happens in that case: you'll forget about it! You'll ignore it. It kinda falls into your blind spot. You no longer see that anymore, or think about it at all.

When it's one sitting? Every single time you are touching it and interacting with it. Every single time, you are erasing it, then writing it. It's getting you to think about, "What am I doing with this sitting? What is my intention, what am I trying to achieve?" as you're sitting down to do this.

This also means you're not setting it up the night before. Some people write the advice that you want to plan the next day the night before. There are advantages to doing that, for a to-do list. There are advantages to do that for strategic thinking. When it comes to the task you're trying to do, though, I'm not saying the night before you should write down what you're gonna do in the morning; I'm saying in the morning, write down what you're going to do.

It is also important to not put down two different things, because that means one of those things you're writing down, you won't be doing. You're only doing one thing at a time.

Part of how this works is that we are trying to train ourselves, so that as soon as you finish writing it on the whiteboard, you'll start doing it.

You probably often hear the hard part is starting? Getting yourself to start typing the story, to reopen that art asset. We're trying to turn this into a trigger for you. It's gonna take a little bit of training to do. The goal: as soon as you write down your task on the whiteboard, you're conditioning yourself to mean this is what I am assigning myself to do with this time. From the moment I finish writing it down, I'm starting on the task.

If I can even get myself to start a task, by my own mental command of what I wrote down on a whiteboard, is it clear what a difference that can make in our ability to direct our time, and our attention? Rather than when we sit down, meaning to do something, and then somehow the

time disappears, we wind up spending hours on screen time, inexplicably on social media, news aggregators like reddit, things we didn't mean to do.

When we write something down, we know, in agreement with ourselves, that we are practicing. We are training ourselves in this, through repetition. When we write it down, the moment the marker leaves the whiteboard, or the pen leaves a page (if you're doing the paper version) you start doing it.

As simple as this sounds, that can already release you from some of the most common distractions, sidetracking, ways we fool ourselves into thinking and feeling like we're working on something, when in reality, were procrastinating and putting it off.

We're going to write down exactly one thing on that board. It's the thing we're doing in one sitting. The moment we finish writing it down, we start doing it.

Then, you want to set it open-faced, on your desk, facing you, so it's right there. It can't be ignored.

This is why it's so important that it's physical, tangible, not something digital on your screen, why we're not just email ourselves, or typing into notepad then minimizing it. What's great is this essentially keeps yanking our attention back. You can't hide from it. It's right there.

Every time attention starts to drift, you have this as a filter to look back to, and ask yourself, "Is this what I'm supposed to be doing?"

As silly as that sounds, as much as it seems it shouldn't matter, I find - and people I've worked with who tried this found - it helps. It creates a filter. It answers our question, when we forgot what we were trying to do. When we start to get off course, this helps correct it, as near as we can to immediately.

Another finding from general self-control research that supports this is there's very much an effect from what is in an arm's reach. What is within our nearby attention exerts an influence on the decisions we wind up making.

Maybe you've had this mistake, where you put cookies on your desk, so you wind up eating all the cookies, far too fast. It's because they're right there!

Well, you're taking your task, and you're giving it the immediacy of being on your desk. It's within arm's reach. It's that much more convenient.

What's also great about having it right there, is that sometimes this is a step towards a longer-term goal. This is part of a bigger picture, piece of a longer queue in plans you have for yourself. This takes that task and places it into the immediate. That immediacy is another important part to keeping ourselves on task.

[00:30:00 in one-file audio]

Now, as another couple notes about what we're writing on the whiteboard - because, again, there are ways to do this that work better, and there are ways to do it that are less effective. (That's why a lot of experimentation, trial and error, and exploration went into this!)

When you write it down, you want to not just write down a noun. Make sure you're writing down what's the action. If I'm making an art asset, I don't write, "player sprite." I write, "I drew the player sprite."

Also, notice that I put it in past tense. I didn't say, "I'm going to draw," I say "I drew," that player sprite.

This has an interesting effect on us. Most of us are honest people. Most of us are uncomfortable with lying. Most of us find it a challenge to write down something on a page that's even temporarily not 100% true.

It's a fiction. We know it's a fiction. That tension, the little bit of discomfort, picture it like a cliffhanger in a story. There's need for resolution that has not been satisfied. When you put it in past-tense, "I fixed that bug," it's a tiny lie that we are attempting to make true before we get back up.

This is, again, why it's nice to frame it in the scope of a sitting. We don't want an untruth hanging over us for a week. We don't want an untruth hanging over us for a month. There's too much

fake it til you make it going on there, for most of our comfort, and we'd just start to disassociate from it.

If it is a one-sitting fix, a half-hour to a, maybe, few hour situation, you can write down, in past tense, what is going to be true by the time you get up - then you don't get up until it's true.

We're going to go back to some additional notes on getting maximum effectiveness from what we put on the board, but I want to clarify why this is so simple, and so straightforward. I know, at first, it can feel like, are you serious? What on Earth is achieved by writing down a sentence on a whiteboard, or on a notepad?

Part of why it has to be so simple, and straightforward, is because this way, you can't fail to use it right. It's general enough to apply to a flexible variety of different tasks, and different kinds of steps in those tasks. It doesn't take much. It's not a huge expense. It's not super laborious. When I was exploring techniques to cover in this material, I tried all kinds of things. I tried full grid spreadsheets, where you're inputting values and weights for doing calculations. I did things that involved videotaping yourself to play back while you're working, so it feels you're your own working companion.

I've done lots of different bizarre experiments to make it work, but here's the thing: when I studied material on self-control, there's an excellent book called *Irrationality*, by Alfred Mele. He wrote that the reasons people fail at self-control is because either they did not attempt to exercise any method of self-control, they were unsuccessful in their method of self-control, they gave up on applying the self control, or they didn't recognize the need to use a method at all.

Well, let's strike off that last reason immediately. Obviously if you didn't think we needed any method at all, you wouldn't be here. You're here, so you know there's some time, place, and situation that warrants a use of some kind of self-control mechanism.

To these other ones, when someone doesn't attempt it, or if they're unsuccessful in attempting it, the way to get past those, is to make it so simple that we can't look at the effort involved, and say, "I would need a whole system just to motivate myself to fill out that spreadsheet of values." Or, "I would need a whole bunch of effort, dedication, and momentum to get myself to film myself, even if that technique worked."

We need something so plain that you cannot look at it and say it takes too much effort.

You cannot look at, and say, "I don't have time to write on a whiteboard," because you do.

You cannot look at it and say, "I can't afford a notepad or a whiteboard," because you can.

It's also structured in such a way that it's not forcing you into action. You're not setting yourself up with penalties. You're not publicly shaming yourself. You're not having someone else micromanage you. It's, instead, reinforcing a firmer sense of active choice in your role of being in control of it.

Think about it this way: it's like if you were a parent trying to get your child to come along - and let's be real here, sometimes managing our own attention among all the distractions around us can feel like we are both the adult and our own internal child. What's the difference between when a parent and child interact in a way that the child comes along willingly, versus when the child feels forced to do something?

You can ask this question about a coach and an athlete, about a teacher and a student, or of a manager and employee.

The enormous gap between if someone feels like they are willingly doing it, versus being forced, is if someone's willingly doing it because they understand the benefits, they're on board, and they're cooperating - that can lead to future self-regulation. That can lead to someone being on board without fighting against it, rebelling against it, or lashing out.

When you force yourself, if you set yourself up in a way you feel micromanaged, shame, driven, forced to do something? That's exhausting. It's a negative association. Most of us dislike that feeling, so we'll reject it. So it's important here that there is no penalty, no punishment, no harm to come from if we fail at this. It's about building up trust with ourselves.

In that moment, when we decide to assign ourselves something, the reason we are assigning to ourselves is because we know there's going to be an internal struggle to get ourselves to do it. We are competing in the moment with the ease and momentum of habit. That is a powerful thing to fight.

There is an appeal - deep, rich, natural, instinctive appeal - to do what feels most comfortable and natural. That means not doing what we wrote on the whiteboard. All this amounts to a weakness of will, lowered focus and reduced concentration. So, we need the simplest thing we can do, and this is it: writing down a one-item to-do list, then putting it right in front of your face.

A bigger method fails those criteria. We'll put it off. We won't fit in. We'll feel exhausted by the one or two times we try it. Even if it worked, we'll find it took too much effort.

It's like the old saying, the best camera is the one you have with you. The best motivation and self-control method is the one easy enough to actually do it.

Doesn't matter if it seems silly or simple. If it works, and more importantly if it's easy enough to get yourself to do it, then it's far better than anything more sophisticated which you won't actually do.

If anything, you might find, out of the many different ways to leverage these techniques, in addition to using it to get yourself to follow through on assigning yourself a task, you may find other, more advanced structures, patterns, processes, methods for self control documented in books or audio courses which, by writing on the whiteboard, you can get through those. Or, make it your task to try those. You might prove to yourself you can get those systems to work for you. You can still use this as your stepping stool up to to the level of motivation, energy, or difficulty necessary to even try those more complex systems.

Too many people intend to do it, yet if they could get themselves to do the Pomodoro method, then they wouldn't need it.

The difficulty here - and let's be clear, there is still difficulty - is not in its complexity. It is in overcoming our internal inhibition to do something which can feel silly or unnecessary, because that means admitting to ourselves we were having trouble doing it on our own. It makes us physically confront our own struggle to overwhelm our course of physical action in the world around us by our thoughts alone.

It feels like we shouldn't need help to focus. I assure you, it is neither silly, nor unnecessary.

The modern world is bombing your attention, every minute of the day, with shiny distractions, and an infinite number of potential rabbits to chase. You have the opportunity to communicate with anyone you have ever interacted with, and the infinite people you never have yet. Maybe this wasn't necessary 50 years ago. It is necessary today, for many people. There's nothing wrong with that. We all need help to focus in this modern landscape.

I developed these methods first and foremost because I wanted to improve my efficiency, as well. Some of the research cited by that Irrationality book, by Mele, is research by a scientist named Ainslie - A I N S L I E - reflected that the best exercise of self-control methods tends to happen when we believe our feelings about something are going to change.

In the moment, we don't feel motivated to do it. In the near future, we don't think we're going to feel motivated to do it. Even during the situation itself, we won't feel motivated. Yet, we sincerely and deeply believe that in the future after it, we will want to have done a certain thing in our past.

This is a convoluted way to say: we're going to want to have done something, even if right now, we don't want to do it.

That is the sort of thing that this whiteboard, or your notepad, becomes most important for.

It is for things you're going to want to have done, even if right now - truth of truths - you don't want to do them. You don't feel like doing it. It doesn't seem worthwhile, or important yet.

There's a great example that Mele draws upon, in relation to that research. He used the example of when Odysseus ties himself to the ship, to stop himself from responding to the siren songs. He knows he's going to want to. He knows, in the moment, even the moment itself, that's what he's going to be drawn to do. That's precisely why he has to employ a self control technique, because he knows in the future looking back, he's not going to want to have done it.

[00:40:00 in one-file audio]

Now, I don't actually recommend the whiteboard case of attempting a negative. You'll notice so far, our focus has been on writing a positive. What is the action that you're doing? It's maybe not quite as usable to say, "I don't want to do this by X time." But, it is possible to replace one

activity with another. As an example for this, random attentional feeds - whether it's social media, whether it's something like Reddit - these are things that pervade our time, our devices, our attention. While we're at a computer they're incredibly tempting. They're always there, with new stuff coming out. They are literally designed to addict us, to draw us to keep checking our phones, rechecking tabs. Those aren't just time drains, they shred our attention. They intermix together serious, stressful, productive, useless personal fragments that all lead nowhere, in no order, with no connection. That can do some damage.

Rather than thinking about it as, "I'm going to not do those things, because those things aren't helping me," it's a bit more like how I'm vegan, so I don't eat meat, dairy, eggs, etc. and when someone makes that choice in their diet, you don't just stop eating meat, eggs, and dairy, you replace things. It's not about less, it's about different.

In the same way, when we want to get rid of something like these attentional feeds, the modern-day siren we need to tie ourselves to the ship's mast to avoid, what's going to work much better is rather than saying I'm not going to do those things, figure out what you want to do, instead.

What's something you're actually going to want to have done, you'll feel better about having done? Use the whiteboard to move yourself in the direction of doing it. Break it down into single sitting, actionable tasks that are going to be cumulative, in terms of your knowledge, learning, portfolio, experience, or identity.

Part of the effect it has, just being written right in front of us, it's a bit like if you remember, if you go back to your days of test taking - some of you may still be in that situation, a lot of folks here are probably a different phase of life by now - and it was the night before a big final, maybe you've got a physics exam in the morning. Your friends say "Hey, want to come play some games? Then we're going to grab dinner, want to come out?" There might be other times and situations when you say yes to either, nothing wrong with either one. But when the exam was the next day, and the deadline was impending, you said, "Sorry, I've got to focus on this right now."

What this is about is setting you up, to give yourself permission to say to other distractions and temptations around you, "Sorry, this is the thing that I've got to be doing right now. This is my

assignment. My deadline is coming up in about an hour. I can reach out to get back in touch. I've got to finish this right now, it's important."

It's learning to train ourselves in giving that same level of importance to what we assign ourselves in one sitting, as what we would do if it was the exam the next day, the immovable deadline of the outside world, the course schedule this semester, or the boss's requirements. It's learning to give ourselves that same sense that I've given myself this to do, and practicing is our way to get better at doing it.

Suddenly, when your attention is drawn to babysit the post you did in the morning on Twitter, or on YouTube, to see has somebody liked it, are there any comments or replies, are there any misunderstandings I should clarify, should I rethink and delete it? Instead, you start to look at it as, I can't, I've got a deadline. I have a thing I'm focusing on. I need to finish this, so I can get back to my life. I need to make this short term lie I wrote true, so I can get away from it. That's my priority.

Hopefully, this can also even feed back into, if I don't have time to babysit my post and keep an eye on it, to constantly reply to replies to it, that might train us out of making it in the first place early in the day, because it's going to shred our time and shred our attention. It sucks away time we cannot get back.

We've got ideas zooming all over the place, all the time. So many things we Are thinking about, so many opportunities, options, Inspirations, so much stuff happening in our brains. A lot of that doesn't happen to line up to the thing WHICH we mean to be doing at the time. If we're not careful, we may latch onto the wrong one of those, heading the wrong direction, and wind up down a rabbit trail.

Instead, think of what we write on this whiteboard as being like a radio tuner.

Every song that's on the radio is passing through it from all different directions simultaneously. It's always in the air. It's electromagnetic radiation. What a radio tuner is doing is it picking a very narrow band of all the possible things going in different directions - to get music, instead of noise.

What we put on this whiteboard is our way of telling ourselves that out of all the fleeting, flying, momentary creation and destruction of thoughts that we're having, this gives us an easy antenna to say, I'm actually dialed in to ones related to this thing I put on the board. Those are the ones I'm listening for right now. Those are the ones I'm turning into music.

The other noise? This gives us permission to let that pass through without having to listen to it. It can help us rise above that static, that otherwise is so common to feel taking over our lives in a modern context.

It means that whenever we're tempted with a thought of an article we see in a feed, of something that comes up in text, it lets us ask, "Does this help me with what's on the board right now?" Because if not, then why do it?

The focusing power of when we've been assigned to do something is enormous. It lets that little stuff pass.

Speaking of the radio tuner example, for ideas that are irrelevant and tempt us to go astray - I want to stress another use of the notepad. Even though I now use the whiteboard technique primarily, as my main task focus, I still carry a notepad and encourage this use for it. As I'll mention in a second, this still works even if keeping a notepad for your main, current to do.

But this use of notepads, counter-intuitively, is to write down things to forget them, to get them off your brain.

When I refer to fact I've got literally a sack full of spent notepads, some of that is filled up not with things I was trying to remember, and not with things I was doing at the time. When I used to use only a notepad, no whiteboard yet, coming from the front, or top, I would be doing my tasks, past tense, in this time limit. I did this thing, writing something down that's not true yet, not getting up until it's made true, then crossing it off.

If you work from the other side - literally flip the notepad over, write on the backs of pages starting from the back -instead, write on those any fleeting thought you need to trashcan, which you are ready to drag to the recycling bin.

This is weird to people, because we think about writing something down so we remember it. We think about writing things down because I'm taking notes, this is important, because I want to get to it.

Here's what I've discovered: when you get it out of yourself, your brain stops repeating it. Your brain can take it off a loop. The brain can stop fooling itself into thinking "This is so important! I better do something with this." As soon as you've written it down, you've scratch that itch a little bit. You've let your brain free, by saying, if this is important later, I can find it, because I wrote it down. That allows you to dig a layer deeper, to get past it.

At a team management level, one of the things that we have happen in our club, and I've done in my private training clients for thousands of hours, is when someone has an idea that is either irrelevant to the current project, or way out of scope, we squirrel those ideas away to a Trello card, or some other note somewhere else. We say it's something we might do for a sequel, a follow-up, or a future project. There is some remote chance, it may wind up in a sequel or future project, but more often, the very immediate value is getting it off our thoughts for now, to free our attention to be on the current task we're trying to do.

If you've got a whiteboard, it's something you can use a notepad for. If you've only got a notepad, this is something you do in the back. Write down the things that come to you, to get them out, to unblock you from it. It's another way, if you have a hard time letting these stray thoughts pass you like the radio tuner, use it as a trash can.

Write it down, to move past it.

Here's an example of what I mean by a throwaway thought. One of the people who was testing out this material shared this story with me, saying he was still working his way through the audio. He said he's been working on a big project for work, that has kept his head busy. Last night he got a ton of work done, but there were still two items outstanding which were bothering him. When he tried to go to sleep, his head kept going over them, repeatedly. Thinking back to my audio, he pulled out his phone and opened OneNote. He created a to-do list, and added those two items to it. He put down his phone, and fell asleep. Nothing was different. He wasn't ever going to forget those items. They still needed to be done. But he tricked his brain into thinking he could let it go.

You see what I mean, how this work was going to happen, anyway? This isn't about, I need to attach this to a calendar event - because it was already going to happen the next day. It wasn't possible it would slip through the cracks. But, it was distracting his attention, in this case not even from another focus, but from sleeping! So, he offloaded it to something external.

Speaking of which, I want to point out when you're doing this offloading thing, it doesn't apply to the same set of rules and conventions around having a physical thing there, like for the core task we're focused on. When it comes to discarding tasks, it can be in other ways. It can be an app on your phone. It can be in a Trello card, that you plan to occasionally archive and discard entire boards of. It can work however you want to go about it.

When you do use notepad as a trash can for your ideas you're not keeping: don't write it past tense, and don't give it a time limit. We don't want to mix our conventions. That's part of establishing a certain set of practices around when I write it down, and what that means to me, what I'm training and conditioning myself for it to mean when I write it in this fashion.

This also means you can still write it in the same notepad. Again, it helps if you do it from the back side, or one on whiteboard and one on notepad, to differentiate in non-trivial ways what it means to have a fleeting thought you're discarding, versus an active thought that you have made a conscious decision that this is what you are, right now, getting yourself to do. You want to keep those separate.

[00:50:00 in one-file audio]

Keeping those separate is actually one of the key distinctions about using the notepad or the whiteboard to separate our tasks from what's inside us. It creates a division, a wall. It creates a gap between simply a thought you have, and an assignment you mean to work on.

For analogy, I've had a great fortune in my career as a game developer to work with some world famous game developers. While not quite in the same industry, kind of like some of the challenges around George Lucas, if someone who is established and accomplished, when they say something everyone around them thinks, "That's the stone tablet from God, we have to act on it! How can we make something happen from what they said?" There is no longer a gap between, wait, were we actually supposed to run with that? Was that an instruction we were supposed to have followed, or was that just a fleeting idea someone thought out loud?

It lacks the clarity of distinction - are we supposed to redirect our energy based on this, or is it just an idea? It becomes too easy to mistake a thought we have with an assignment we give ourselves, when there is no separation.

When we put it on a whiteboard, when we put it on a notepad, we've essentially air-gapped that we don't accidentally reassign ourselves. We can't accidentally derail ourselves.

We may consciously cross it out, or erase it, and put something in its place. If we do, it's because it passed a threshold that, to us, says, I have considered it, and I deliberately intend to change the course of my actions from what I had previously told myself to do. In that case, it's fine! But that's so much different than when it's all up in our heads, when it's all in the same mush. When it's all in the same fatty, meaty brain tissue - I guess more fatty tissue than meaty tissue - when it's all up in there, it's all mixed together.

It's like the old comedian's joke, about a smoking section in a restaurant, or a peeing section in a pool: there's no separation. If your brain is the only container of what you're supposed to be doing, it's too easy to keep nebulously redefining it, to keep changing it, keep redirecting it, until it has moved in so many different directions that it has gone nowhere at all, and you're back to where you started by the end of the night, or the end of

the day. These days of no improvement, add up to weeks of no improvement, to months of no improvement, to years passing with us asking, "how come I'm still where I started?"

By making a point to train ourselves to do the things we put on the whiteboard, to start the things you put on the whiteboard, to start doing things by putting them on the whiteboard, it makes it not just easier to do what's on the whiteboard, but *also easier for us to stay off of tasks we don't put down*. We learn, and train ourselves, that if this was something I meant to do, I would put that on the board.

Let me reiterate: when we put it on the board, we don't write it until we're just about to start. We don't set it up the night before. We don't write it as a reminder of what we intend to do. If you want to do those things, those can be fine, put those somewhere else. Put that on a Trello card, put that into Google Calendar, put that on some other whiteboard. Use some other to-do list system.

I'm talking about when you are about to do it, that is when we need to condition ourselves that I put it on this board because this is my intention. This is my running start to jump right into doing the task, right then and there. We want to establish and build in a strong link for ourselves between writing it down and immediately setting about doing it.

If there is an intermediary step, like making coffee before we dig in on the work, then on our main board, on our only board, we've written down what we're doing. If we have a distraction that needs to take over our attention - I've gotta go eat lunch, something came up, I need to deal with this other thing - that's fine. In fact, I'm going to encourage this: rather than let yourself silently ignore the board, put yourself a line across the middle, divide off the bottom, then, hanging underneath the main task, write down the one distraction you're doing. Write down the one side step, the temporary, "I made coffee by 10 a.m." Granted, just like on top, let's write this in past tense.

When we put it down there, it serves several purposes. This actually keeps us on task on the off-task thing.

This reminds me of a classic episode of *Malcolm in the Middle*. This must have been nearly 20 years ago. The dad Hal goes to turn on a light switch, and the bulb won't turn on. He checks, and discovers the bulb is out. Okay, he goes to get a bulb from the closet, but finds the shelf the bulbs are on is loose. So, he picks up a screwdriver from a drawer, but the drawer the screwdriver is in is squeaking. Now, he goes to get some WD-40 from the garage. Shakes that can, realizes the WD-40 is out. He hops in the car to drive to go pick up more WD-40, then the car won't start! His wife peeks in the garage, catches him underneath his car working on it, and tells him, "Hey, you know that kitchen light needs to be replaced?" He hollered back, "What does it look like I'm doing!?"

What I like so much about this, is the bulb he needed for the kitchen was there. He didn't need to go to the store to get the bulb. The bulb was there, on the loose shelf. He let himself get sidetracked, from getting sidetracked, from getting sidetracked, and lost sight of the original mission.

This happens in Hal's case from being productive, and trying to do things that are constructive. All those things might need to happen. This happens to us all the time when we're programming games, where we go in there to make one change, and we realize, oh, I could refactor this, I should refactor that, I can redo this, I can replace that placeholder art. We get several steps removed from the thing we actually meant to do.

If this happens we're trying to be constructive and productive, you can only imagine the extent to which, when we are allowing ourselves to be distracted - which, in moderation, is an important, healthy, just fine part of our day-to-day existence - if we let ourselves go from distraction to distraction to distraction, we lose focus on what we even sidetracked for. We don't actually even answer the email like we intended to do. We don't actually even make ourselves the coffee, which is what we gave ourselves a break meaning to do.

We lose track, lose the thread, and it's hard to get back on. If we give ourselves a maximum of one distraction at a time, until we wrap up that distraction, this helps us control, contain, and stay more aware of where our time is going, what we're doing with our energy.

It's like if you're in a classroom as a kid, and gave yourself a bathroom pass. that means to go to the bathroom, to come back, and then you're back on task. It allows you to avoid detours, of detours, of detours, since that is where we lose our thread. That's where we have a hard time coming back.

This is also important because it means that we are acknowledging that, yeah, this is fine. I have given myself permission. In the scheme of things, this is worthwhile. I'm feeling exhausted, I need to take a short walk around the block - write it on the bottom of the board. Don't hide from it.

Those are healthy ways to have a relationship to ourselves. In the same way as, to go back to our example of a kid on a bathroom pass, there are students who absolutely abuse that, to just get out of class and go hang out in the hallways. The teachers learned that through repetition, and then can discourage that. They can say "no, hold on - maybe there's something medical going on, maybe you need a nurse appointment, but if you're actually going to the bathroom this often... I'm suspicious."

Surfacing it enough to write it and look at it, to articulate it to ourselves, makes us aware so we can then have that level of control over ourselves. If I keep writing down distractions, it's making me more aware that that's really where I'm putting my time. That's really what I'm doing, and not the thing on top. I'm obviously distracting myself from it. It's making me more aware, and that makes it easier to operate strategically, not just tactically, on why I'm not doing the task.

Another simple tip, for why it helps so much to only ever write one task on the board, except maybe one distraction to ask underneath it: this also avoids us stacking times. Part what happens when we try to make a whole list, and we try to put times on everything on the list, is inevitably, the whole thing cascades. That whole thing slides. One or two tasks early on, or middle of the schedule, go wrong, then the whole thing tips over. By limiting the depth to one task, or one side track at a time, it minimizes the extent those times can pile up on us.

This is important to us feeling we are doing okay. We are making progress. We are focusing on a thing, without having to worry about the overall stress of the day.

Another reason why we don't want to have all those tasks in front of us the same time, is because we get ahead of ourselves. It becomes very easy, even if we put them in a linear order, and intend to do one then the other, when they are all in front of us we're thinking about all of them at once.

Even if we're not, in parallel, giving them our attention in terms of our actions, they are absolutely still eating into our attention at the moment. We only want to see the one thing at a time we're doing. Whatever queuing system we are going to use, whatever to-do list you want - could be a Trello, could be a whiteboard, any traditional method of to-do list or calendar use can help. That needs to be out of sight, for the same reason why we want the board or the page of the notepad consistently right there, physically, visibly facing you, there present in sight, but one thing at a time on the board is an important part of doing it.

One of my club members who used this material, he keeps several layers of his to-dos. He has a to-do for this week. He has a to-do somewhere else that's on a month-to-month basis, or a few months at a time per chunk. Another one is his year goal. He distills those down incrementally. The daily one, which he translates into this task on his whiteboard, that's the most precise. As he translates each down into the nearer term, it gets more precision. His use of this system is pretty advanced. He's integrating it into a system he was already using for himself, to better tighten up his loop.

Another member used it on something I think is a good illustration for how useful this is even if, let's say you're not like that other guy, maybe don't have quarterly goals, year goals and month goals, and all that sorted out for yourself. This other guy just said the time he

tried this, he decided to try it with "get new printer working by 10:30 a.m." Very different scale and complexity in this other person's situation and arrangement.

[01:00:00 in one-file audio]

He said he went online to download the software, and hit a bit of trouble. He waited for the download, checked his mail, checked Facebook, posted comments to people, then put his phone back. Feeling good about clearing all those notifications, he thought, "What should I do next? Maybe I'll get something to eat." But, as he put his phone back and got up, he saw the whiteboard on his desk then said to himself, "Oh, yeah. I haven't done that yet, have I?" The printer got installed by 10:30, on the dot.

Because he had assigned it to himself, he couldn't lose the thread.

He decided to be done by 10:30, so even if there were some distractions and other stuff that came up, and he got a little sidetracked, by the time 10:30 came and went, the new printer was working.

I'll say that, even though I've been doing this for a long time, and I pride myself on my efficiency and clarity with how I do it, this still happens to me. I will give myself a task, have a couple hours when I think I'm going to do it, I may occasionally do a little temporary short-term side tracking to check email real fast, or my text messages. I'm measuring myself at my pace to say, you know what, it's cool, I'm still going to have this done by 4 p.m.

I've decided how aggressively or not aggressively I'm going about this task, about its level of priority or importance to me. I've decided that I'm okay with the version of this that I'm going to have by 4 p.m. That actually accounts for being a human, working at a reasonable pace, stepping over using the bathroom when I need to, whatever. That's already factored into this idea of the version that's going to happen by 4.

I don't want you to get the wrong idea and picture that the goal here is for your eyes to turn red, for you to turn into a Terminator. You're still a person. It's okay, and we're accounting for this idea when we set the time goals. I can do things, and still by the time 4 comes and goes, know that I'm ready to switch over to some other task for how I'll direct my attention.

There are some of our keys for staying on task. Ultimately, our focus is still on how to do that incremental, moment to moment, the thing we are doing today, right now. In this next section, we're going into what are some strategies for maintaining progress in a way that avoids guilt getting in our way.

Chapter 6: Guilt-Free Progress

What you wrote down - let's say it didn't come out perfectly. Maybe it took longer than you expected. You ran later than the time you gave yourself. Maybe you didn't finish. What you have to ask yourself, is did you earnestly make more forward progress on it than you would have if you hadn't set the target at all?

That is the real objective: to move forward. To move forward in a way you wouldn't have if you hadn't done this.

As they say when someone is new to the gym: they are lapping the people who are on the couch, no matter how slow they are going.

It might sound like at times, and might feel like at times - I'm from Missouri, and occasionally, we'd be trying to get a car unstuck from the snow. (Maybe, where you're from, it's getting a car unstuck from wet mud.) It may involve a bit of spinning in place. It may involve a bit of rocking back and forth. That kind of motion is sometimes what it takes to get a grip, and get unstuck. That's not only not nothing, in some situations, that's the only way to move at all. It's the only way to go forward if you're in a tricky standstill - which, I know a lot of you are here because you feel there are points where you've hit a tricky standstill.

Respect yourself for having put in the earnest effort on the task you meant to give yourself.

Now, furthermore, and this could be a whole other book, a whole other subject. This is a big deal. We have to understand this, and if you come away with one thing about how to not mess up your mental relationship between you and the whiteboard, or you in the notepad, this is it.

Your success in this case - how you evaluate if it's working or not - has to be defined 100% by whether you did the action you intended to get yourself to do.

This is why when we're thinking about the tasks, what you write on the board has to be what is in your control.

This isn't one of these magical self-help things where you write, "I want a Ferrari," and then you get a Ferrari. What you're writing down is what you're doing. Are you applying for the job? You don't say, "I got the job by noon," because that's not in your control. That part is not up to you. You're writing down your action, so you can measure your success by if you take the action you intend to take.

This is a great deal harder than it sounds. What if you give yourself orders, and then discover afterwards that, based on new information you didn't know at the time - heck, maybe you had at the time, you just forgot because you've been busy - what if it turns out that after you do it, the time should not have been spent the way it was? That's still a win. You still have to frame that as you followed the orders.

When you are writing something on the board, you can be the general. You can be commander. You can think strategically. When you are following what's on the board? Then your job is to be a foot soldier. It's to follow orders, even if it turns out, maybe that was a bad call about what to do.

What if you do something, and the result doesn't come out as well as you hoped it would? You pictured the character sprite would be amazing, and in hindsight, you're a little embarrassed of it, maybe even feel like you now need to assign yourself to redo it. It's still a win. You produced the character sprite, at all, when you put it down. That's a win. Now, your next assignment might be, the next day, "I'm going to redo that character sprite," or rather, past tense, "I redid that character sprite by 8 p.m."

But, if you allow outside factors or future information with hindsight to leave you regretting how you followed your orders, that is going to train you into a really disastrous, chaotic situation. It can corner you into feeling helpless. That can lead to feeling like the world is chaotic.

I'm going to digress you for a moment with an important, but short, tale about farmland you inherited.

Surprise! You had an uncle in the midwest, you didn't even realize or didn't remember, you last saw when you were 2 years old. This uncle passed away, and left you control over a sizable amount of high-quality farmland in the midwest. Now, you don't know a lot about farming, and turns out, I don't either, so we're going to simplify this for the sake of illustration. Understanding that there's a lot of money to be made, you invest in hiring a few experts.

One adviser tells you that if this next season turns out to be a dry season, then you should plant corn. The adviser also tells you if it turns out to be a wet season, you're going to be better off planting wheat.

Dry: corn.

Wet: wheat.

We still, in that case, have to predict the weather. Weather, it turns out, is an incredibly hard thing to predict reliably, even with the best equipment and experts in the world. Also, because of economies of scale, equipment and chemical needs, let's say it's not viable to ratio the land. You can't balance your odds. No being clever. It's going to be all corn, or all wheat.

Now, another adviser tells you there is a 70% chance this next season is going to be a wet season. Better odds than a coin-flip, but still far from certain. You can't be, it's weather. Because there's a 70% chance that it's going to be a wet season, that means there's a 70% chance that wheat is going to be the better choice.

You plant wheat, because there is a 70% chance that's the right thing to plant. It is the clear choice at the time.

To use our whiteboard, we wrote, "I planted wheat by noon," you planted the wheat, the year happened, you look back, and oh my goodness, against the odds, it was a dry season.

Remember, dry means we should have done corn? But, we thought, odds are pretty good, 70%, is going to be wet... so, we planted wheat.

Not only what will we do, but how do we feel?

Should you have planted corn instead? Even though, at the time, you knew the odds are good it was going to be wet, and so you should plant wheat?

Of course not.

Should you have planted corn? No.

Should you regret having planted wheat? Also no.

What if you had entrusted the land to, let's say, another layer of advisers. You'd hired someone else to farm for you by proxy, to make that call. If someone had, against the best expert judgement and odds they found, gone against that information and said, "Know what? I'm gonna bet 30% chance on the wrong answer." Even if that turned out right, shouldn't you still be mad at them? Shouldn't you still be frustrated they took such a careless risk with your assets?

You've got to project the same to yourself. The right choice was the right choice, regardless of how the dice rolled. Next time all the numbers, experts, and best information you have access to tells you the same thing, what should you do? Should you increase your odds of planting corn? You should absolutely plant wheat again. Just because the odds didn't work in your favor doesn't even necessarily mean you did anything wrong. It doesn't mean you should necessarily retrain yourself.

If you let outside factors and chance, things like sheer probability, market timing, how critics do or don't take a certain thing you do - if you let those shape your sense of whether or not you should regret having done the things you intended to do, it leads us to perceiving the world around us as something in which information doesn't matter, in which the odds are pure chaos.

In order to perceive the world as manageable, it's necessary to dissociate the outcome from, "did I do the thing, that at the time, from the information I had, was the right thing to do?" I say all this, because what's going to happen is if you put something on the board, and then you do it, and you regret having followed your own orders? It's like if you had a boss that gave you orders, and every time you follow the orders of your boss things didn't go well, you'll start to doubt the competency of your boss. You'll start to say, I shouldn't do what they tell me.

You are your own boss. You can't get away from that. For the rest of your life, you're giving yourself assignments.

If anything, maybe you give yourself, as a foot soldier, some feedback to your strategic commander. Next time you write something down you say, "Hey, just as a heads up. That didn't go great. Maybe we should rethink if we have the best information. Maybe we should revisit some assumptions." But you still have to feel good that you did the thing that was the best decision at the time, from the information you had.

[01:10:00 in one-file audio]

I have to stress that this thing about making smart choices, versus choices that happen to go well, is not hypothetical. It is not theoretical. It is not something like a mind game we play while the same stuff happens. It's real.

One of our club's original long distance members, guy running a company called Stonebaked Games, some of the work he does is with recruiting for a pretty successful soccer league out in the UK. The way that work is done? He's an analytical person. He writes programs that deal with reams of data about different positions on the play field that soccer players take shots from, where they pass, how often they pass, all kinds of factors and variables. There's tons of tracking of positions, down to many times per second, that can be analyzed.

The players they recruit aren't necessarily the ones who, in the low scoring game of soccer, happen to have got some balls into the net. The players they recruit are the ones who, consistently, by whatever metrics they can come up with, are the ones who played smartest - shooting from positions where there's a higher likelihood of the shot going in, passing when it was the right decision, regardless of whether or not that particular pass worked the way they hoped.

If you think about what kind of boss you'd like to work with, what kind of co-worker you'd like to work with, what kind of person you'd like to employ to be on your team, what kind of company you'd like to fund, any relationship to work getting done - do you want the one who got lucky making dumb choices, or do you want the one who, maybe hasn't been as lucky yet, but is absolutely making the right decisions, the right ways, on the right criteria?

If you want to be the kind of person who is going to wind up working with good people, working for good people, having good people work for you, then you have to become the person who makes decisions right, rather than overemphasizing getting lost in whether making the right decision happened to pay off any particular time.

This is also a difference between becoming a reliable source of good projects, good decisions, good choices in your future - a fountain of good thinking - as opposed to someone who is relying

on having once gotten lucky having something gone well, but without any kind of repeatability, any kind of sense for how or why, hoping lightning strikes again.

Maybe that's all well and good, if you have access to experts, and clear information. Quite often, when you're starting something new, one of the challenges in being new to it is we're not sure which way is going to be advisable. We don't have enough data, or enough clear data, to be able to weigh whether we should do option A or option B, and, in real situations, options C, D, E, F, G, and so on.

For this, there's actually another example, which coincidentally is also vaguely farm-related.

I refer to it as Buridan's Donkey. Classically, we use a different word for donkey. I like to keep my materials family friendly. But, Buridan's Donkey is a simple parable from the world of philosophy, in which we have a donkey, and the version we're going to use today has two bales of hay right in front of the donkey. (Buridan, by the way, is a French philosopher.)

So these two bales of hay are equally appetizing. Neither is evidently rancid, or covered in bugs. They're both about the same size. Both look equally delicious. This donkey is equidistant to each.

Neither one is more convenient. In the classic tale, this donkey is unable to decide which one to eat from. The donkey looks left, saying, that looks pretty delicious, and pretty convenient. The donkey looks right, saying, that one looks pretty delicious, and pretty convenient, as well. It cannot for the life of that donkey - quite literally, for the life of that donkey - identify a reason to pick one over the other, and therefore, *dies of starvation with twice as much food as it needs*.

All because he's stuck at indecision.

But, here is a situation in which either answer is a superior answer to neither answer.

The right answer is either. The wrong answer is neither.

We might even be able to determine, if he started eating one bale of hay or the other, we could discover, this one is not as good as I thought it looked. This one is a little rancid and rotten on the inside. Okay, well, because the donkey started on one it decided on, it learned that new fact, and can turn around walk over to the other!

All the time in making decisions, as a project lead, in making decisions about how to best proceed, which video course to start, which book or approach to use: the correct answer is any, and the wrong answer is none.

If we're not careful, if we refuse to move forward until we have perfect information, until we have found the experts who can answer for us, clearly, "definitely go this way, odds say with definite favoritism it's going to be a dry (or wet) season," when in reality it's often much more gray area - either one is a better choice than neither one.

You don't want to end up like Buridan's donkey, starving with twice as much as what you need.

Another way to approach this, if you want a game industry answer? John Carmack's classic answer, when he couldn't figure out whether to do something with option A or option B: John Carmack's approach - and granted he was in a commercial studio so sometimes this option may not be afforded to everybody out there - he'd say do them both, then decide from that which one to move forward on. Often, depending on what you're trying to do, and how you're going about it, it may take you less time, and less hesitation, to power through, trying each, than it would to sit and calculate, research, interview, and come to a decision before getting involved in either which one to start on. It's hard to tell sometimes, until it's running on a machine and playable in front of us, which is working better.

I say pick either. That's the Buridan's donkey answer. John Carmack's approach, he says do them both. In either case, the important thing is to not get stuck on, because I can't say for certain, if we go back to our farming example, whether it's going to be a wet or dry season, therefore I should plant no crops!

As ridiculous as that answer sounds, it is shockingly a common dead end for people's game development experiences. When they reach a point where they can't come up with a clear reason to go one way or the other, they pick no game engine, no platform, no video course. Like I said, even in the case where one bale of hay turns out to not be as good, one way to find that is to start eating it. Now, we have information we didn't have before. Now we can make a more informed decision from information we know, and we can start eating the other one.

But, we couldn't figure it out until we started trying to do something with either of them.

Let's go back to our whiteboard, why it works, and why it's important, despite being so simple, and so easy. It works a bit like that person in the meeting, if you've ever been in a good meeting - a meeting that was focused and on task - there's almost always at least one person whose task in that meeting is keeping everyone focused and on track. It's someone saying, "hold on, that's not the item we're on." It's saying, "Let's table that until the end." Someone who is keeping discussion on track and on focus frees up the rest of the group to operate at better capacity.

When we don't use a whiteboard, or a notepad, to put outside of ourselves the task we're doing, this is the little more internal attention that's tied up, wasted, misspent on essentially serving the same role in our head, constantly asking, "Are we doing the right thing? Are we doing it?"

I will say, maybe you've got the brain power, attention, energy, motivation, and wherewithal to sometimes pull that off. But, like operating without a calendar: if you don't need one, you can do even more with one. If you can pull it off without it, you can do it better with it.

Think about when world records are set, when sales charts have tipping points. Those decisions are often a gap of inches in races, seconds in sports, a tiny percentage advantage in business snowballing massively over time. Every little bit counts. This is an easy one to offload from your brain onto externalization, which again, has all these other benefits like how it air gaps your conscious choice on, "Is this the task I mean to be doing, or not?" by what you put on the board.

In terms of what you're putting on the board, it does need to be a specific chunk. It has to be something you can tell whether or not you met it, exceeded it, or fell objectively short on. This is a general goal setting thing from S.M.A.R.T. goals, where they've got to be specific.

When my private clients are trying to figure out what they're going to do over the next week, the answer can never be, "I'll spend more time on art. I'll do more code." How much more? Specifically what? Will you produce three new sprites? Add certain features? Make it concrete. You should be able to tell from the goal not just did I do it or not, and check a box, but did I fall short, did I exceed it?

Occasionally, there's a case, where it's tricky when you're new to something - I know that's often the times where you're going to be employing this, because that's where you most need it - if you're new to something, it can be hard to estimate how long it's going to take. In that case, give yourself a concrete time-bound - still past tense - "I worked on this problem for two hours." It's

not ideal. It's not as good as figuring out what is the concrete measurable, but at least that in itself is a clear definable target.

You can be honest with yourself: did you work on it for two hours? Did you fall short of that? Did you overshoot it?

It's a little more concrete than, "I worked on the problem."

We're writing a small lie, then we're turning it into a truth.

As part of the small lie: we don't declare this like some sort of grand gesture to the world. Do not do that. Every time I have seen people go out of the way to Tweet their goal before they've done it, going into a meeting to announce to everyone how much work they're going to do even though they haven't done anything yet, it only gets worse. It puts them into a spiral. It piles up the anxiety, until they do nothing.

It backfires. Every. Single. Time. I've seen people do it.

This is not like most of the time, or some of the time, or certain personalities - every single time, and in my years doing what I do, I've seen a lot of people make that mistake. When they try to make a grand gesture or public statement, it backfires.

They not only don't do it, they often hang up their gloves and quit. They walk away from it. It gets to be too much.

[01:20:00 in one-file audio]

This is a private promise to yourself. Part of we're trying to train ourselves into is respecting you as your own audience. It's respecting that when you put it down, it matters that you're seeing it.

Speaking of which, in terms of this promise to yourself, if you overshoot your time target a little, if I say 9 o'clock, but I don't actually finished until 9:15, if I say 2:30, but I don't actually finish until 3:45. Here's the thing: it's fine.

It is totally fine.

Picture it like you've got a cool teacher who understands, and accepts some slightly late work for mostly partial credit. "Did you do the assignment" is actually far more important than whether or not you hit the arbitrary goal. The arbitrary time goal was there to help drive the action, or to help you prioritize.

For some people - and, too real, sometimes this is me, I confess - sometimes it actually even helps motivate us a little bit, as long as it's not too extreme, to look at that board, and see, "Ooo, I'm already late. I was supposed to have this done by 6:00. I am behind. It is already 6:45." This helps double down, increase the effect of, "Sorry, I can't go watch a show right now honey. I'll be there shortly. I really have a tie this up." I feel like I'm behind schedule.

Now, can't emphasize enough, the trick we're playing on ourselves is that that schedule is made up and arbitrary. We decided that schedule. At the same time, every schedule is made up, every schedule is decided, every schedule is arbitrary.

We have created for ourselves an environment in which we are trying to direct our attention and energy.

We've created a situation in which we give ourselves an assignment in a way that is concrete enough an excuse to defend in our priorities, "Sorry, I have to wrap this up first."

If being a little bit late with it means you did it? Mission accomplished. It still means it happened. It still meant it happened that week. It still meant you made progress on it, in a way you might not have if you hadn't assigned it to yourself, and started the moment your marker left the board, or the moment your pen left the page.

As soon as you complete what you wrote, you have to erase it. Do not leave it up there like some kind of trophy for what you did. If you're on a notepad, cross it out instead. What we're wanting to do is build this in as a completion, closing bookend for this marker, shutting the case. This is solved. It's physical action that begins to feel like a reward. It acknowledges outside of ourselves, even just for us alone, outside our brain it acknowledges, "I have changed the world around me, the world is different because I have done my thing. I finished my task." As little as that sounds like, it happens by doing what you assigned yourself and, immediately after, erasing it.

Think about we're reinforcing here: while it's on the board, that's what you're focusing on.

If you're not focusing on it, we want that board empty. We want the board erased.

I will say, there is a certain personality type I've discovered, or certain situations where, if you have blown so far past your deadline - you meant to be done by 2:15, and it is now 6 o'clock, you need to eat dinner and get back to other stuff. This task turned out to be a bigger rabbit hole and you intended. Be the cool manager to yourself. Accept, okay, you know what, I have to re-evaluate.

Erase and rewrite that task. Give yourself an updated time target. Frankly, probably pick a smaller chunk to bite off. Redefine the task and timeline. That's going to help touch back with it again to keep you engaged to it, so you don't completely disconnect, start to wear yourself out, exhaust, chase it down a potentially deep rabbit hole. Give yourself a moment to re-evaluate. If you're finding time you've blown too far past the time for it to be useful for you, unable to think "I'm a little late, I can still get this in," if you feel like it's becoming a counter-motivational factor that you are way over schedule for it, then erase it and update your task or time on it.

In the same way we've created a gap, for what is something I really intend to assign myself by whether or not I write it on the whiteboard, putting the time plays an equally important part.

I know it sounds almost throwaway, when I say these examples of, "I completed such and such by 5 p.m." or "I completed such and such by 8 p.m." This is incredibly important! Part of its hidden in there, it means we have to answer, as part of deciding not only what I'm doing, but also how long should I give myself to do this task?

Almost any task is squishy. What if I gave you 10 seconds to draw a house. Can you do it? You're going to draw a square with a triangle on top, and done. What if I gave you ten hours to draw a house? You might push the limits your current sketching ability. You're probably going to give me something more, though, than a square with a triangle on top. You might attempt shading. You might attempt perspective. You might attempt shadows.

What if I gave you ten years to draw a house? You might fit art classes in. You might find someone to give you feedback and iteration and critique. It might not be the first house drawing you produce. In fact, over 10 years, I'm hoping you produce a lot of them. It's going to come out an incredibly different way, maybe even a sellable drawing of a house.

Though sketching is an easy example of that, there are many tasks it applies to. The more experience you get in any field, the more you start to realize that at different levels of zoom, there are ways you can rush it and cut corners, there are ways you can reliably nail down everything, engineer the robustness heck out of it, really planning ahead. There's a time and place for anywhere on this spectrum.

When we put down how long we're giving ourselves, we're not trying to answer, "How long does this take?" Because how long it takes is often squishy. What we're really answering is, "am I going to give myself the version that I can do in two hours? Am I gonna get myself a version of this I can do in 30 minutes? Which version is worth it to me in the bigger picture?"

What makes this powerful, and why I keep saying worth it, is it gives us relative controls. It lets us prioritize, and say that some parts are completely unequal in their importance to others within this work I'm doing. Some parts of this have to be robust, some parts need to be flexible. Some parts can be hacked on top, because we're not even sure we're keeping it. We might rip some work right back out.

In everything we're doing, part of what we're answering is what version of it we're giving ourselves, including, even by the choice of what will I consider a single sitting of this task.

Picture a player sprite, because it's an easy graphical example. Do I mean every facing of that character? Do I mean every pose of animation? Or do I just mean a single, one-facing south pose, reference frame to discuss with the team? If there are changes we need to make to the outfit, we want to do that before I draw 32 different frames in different poses at different angles.

Depending on the complexity of the sprite, the graphics in this game, my speed and expertise as an artist, it may be something where the single sitting task might be, "You know what, this game is coming out in a week. We still don't have a player sprite, so I am gonna mash out something in one sitting. It won't be pretty, but I can make us a player sprite, with all the animation frames, and all the facings, in one sitting." It's going to be a wreck, but it's done. We can then focus our energy on the other pieces.

Or, if it's early in the project, and we're still in the exploratory phase, still defining who is our character? There are other people on the team who would love to chime in and have a say on that. In that case, like the ten-year house drawing, I can say my task for one sitting is to come up with five different sketches. Then, as a team, we can discuss and vote on, and get the lead's

input on, which one of these sprites, or which elements from each sprite, we want to pick apart and bring together for the next draft of the concept.

You're seeing how this can work, in terms of we can decide both in the time we give ourselves, and what we define as one sitting of complexity by how we're going about our tasks, how we're planning out strategically to translate into these tactics of simple tasks getting ourselves things to do?

Part of what happens with expertise is you get a vantage point for different ways to do things. A total beginner might take 10 minutes to do something that a true, lifelong, committed and disciplined experienced expert can pull off in 10 seconds.

As an example of this, I've been programming games for over 20 years. A lot of my YouTube traffic comes from my speed coding demonstrations, where I'll program in five and a half minutes, people will complain in the comments it took them five and a half months to write similar games.

Part of my expertise is as a trainer, out of the nearly 2,000 hours I have spent one-on-one working with people, through their coding problems and questions over screen share, every question people come at me with, regardless of their experience level, regardless of the game genre, regardless of the platform they're developing it in, I can fit an answer to one hour. Right as the hour's wrapping up, they have solved their issue, and they're unblocked. No matter what their experience level, their background, the platform etc. I've been doing this long enough that I know how to scale a version of the answer to unblock them in a one-hour conversation, for almost any situation.

Part of what happens as you gain expertise, is that you increase the things you can do in one sitting, or the options you have for one sitting. It becomes a matter of right-sizing, identifying what is the task you should bring on. We'll hit this more when we get to the checklist of what to do if your tasks aren't working out, but sometimes, we're overshooting things. Sometimes we were trying to do something in one sitting that, maybe, could be done in a sitting by someone, but we're lacking some pre-reqs. We don't have enough relevant experience yet.

I want to not get lost in all this conversation: the writing it down is important. Keeping it in view is also a critical part of this.

This is part of why it has to be portable, and why you don't want a big, whole-wall whiteboard.

You want to be able to carry it with you in a backpack, in a messenger bag, or, if you're traveling and you feel weird with bigger bags, if you want to use a notepad method, again for many years my life I used a version of this in my notepad. When you're doing it, you want it in line of sight. You want the notepad on the table in front of you. You want the whiteboard on the table in front of you. If you leave it in the other room, if you leave it in your apartment? Not doing any good. Don't leave your dorm then go to class.

[01:30:00 in one-file audio]

This invites a question, "Chris, what if I feel embarrassed, if a coworker, or a classmate, or a family member, or somebody sees what I'm doing, and thinks I look a bit ridiculous? They might say, why do you have written on a whiteboard a sentence about what you... did?"

There are several things going on.

We think they're real concerned about what we're writing on a whiteboard. Nobody cares! It's a whiteboard. This is literally office supplies. It's something people associate with productivity. It's like we have a notebook out, or a notepad out, or when you have a calculator on the table. People see that next to a computer and don't think twice about it. We process it as background detail.

There's a classic line that's been quoted to Eleanor Roosevelt, David Foster Wallace, and when I looked it up, apparently goes back to Joke Smith from many years ago back in the 30's, but a line that says, "You probably wouldn't worry about what people think of you if you just knew how seldom they do."

Nobody's really trying to read your whiteboard and sweating it. But here's the thing: even if they do, even if somebody asks you, if what that creates is an opportunity for you to explain to them, "I'm just trying a thing. I'm trying to be a little more productive." That dialogue is a really powerful conversation. It says you're working on it. It says it's important to you. It says you aren't beyond looking a little bit silly, or weird, or awkward.

There's an excellent line from Tim Ferriss in his book, *Four-Hour Work Week* - by the way, there's some things about his core thesis, or things about Tim Ferriss as a person I'm not maybe advocating for or a huge fan of - but he's got this amazing quote, in which he says, "A person's

success in life can usually be measured by the number of uncomfortable conversations he or she is willing to have."

That is part of what this is: an uncomfortable conversation by saying, "Yeah. I'm trying to be more productive. I'm trying to get through this course. Seeing if it works for me." Those kinds of uncomfortable conversations are exactly the same sort of things that make you into a better presenter, better speaker, can allow you to change your life. What it says is, I am comfortable breaking the mold of what people around me think. It says, I am not afraid to explain and stand by my decisions.

You're trying to see if this helps you stay on task. Hopefully, you'll get such good results, you'll be able to tell them it worked for me, check it out, try it out, and maybe it can work for you too.

When you explain to someone you see regularly - a coworker, classmate, family member - that you are trying to change your life, that's helps adjust our personal redefinition of ourselves, in a positive way. They'll be rooting for you if they care!

If they're not rooting for you, then you can't care about them, anyway. They're not on your side.

As part of setting this up, thinking about it as kind of a filter on our tasks, though computers are very good at multitasking, people are not so much.

Everyone feels like they are, nobody really is, and if they are, they are either faking it, or not as good as they would be, if they weren't. So, when we put something on the whiteboard, or on the notepad, one of the setup steps we need to do, one of the first things we do as part of starting the task, that moment your marker or pen leaves the page, is to immediately start closing other tabs. Bookmark them, if you have to.

You know, there's a way, by the way, to bookmark all open tabs at once? Just go to Bookmark All. It creates a folder of all your old tabs. Didn't lose anything. Then, close them. Close the other programs you're not using. If you're not currently making music, close the music program. Not currently making art? Close Photoshop. You're not currently modifying files on a server, close your server access.

Let your computer be doing only the things that are relevant to the task you're doing. This reduces your distractions.

An easy trick to this that I actually do, that helps me narrow my attention and focus: I have four different browsers installed. I do. I have Chrome, Firefox, Safari, and Opera. I don't care about the difference between these browsers, at all. I use them each for different things.

When I am doing personal, hang out chill stuff on my computer, with friends or whatever, Chrome. When I'm doing work, work accounts, work Twitter accounts, and work-related tasks, I'm in Firefox. When I'm doing YouTube-related stuff, I'm in Safari. When I'm doing IGDA Los Angeles non-profit board stuff, I'm in Opera.

What it means is that's the browser that, when I open it, has certain logins saved, certain accounts already logged in, things that will or won't autocomplete. It gives a different environment.

When I go to it, the other stuff is even further off my radar. It's no longer a few taps or clicks away.

I've known some people go to the extreme - and I've tried this, but it may be a little too extreme for me - some people create a whole separate user account on the computer for when they're in work mode or not in work mode. Things like this are great to sweep away everything but the thing you're trying to do. I want to encourage trying things like that.

As another small-time tip, something I find helps: if I keep checking the time, then I'm distracting myself, keeping one eye on the clock. In the same way as I offloaded to the whiteboard or an on-the-table notepad the task I'm doing right now, I also want to offload to something other than my brain to keep track of time. I don't mean this in a way that I'd have to keep checking it, because that would be costing me cycles, shredding my attention.

What I do is I set phone alarms. If I'm doing it till 6, I set an alarm for 6. If I'm doing it until 4:30, I set my alarm for 4:30. Until 8? I set it for 8.

I'll say, at least one of my club members who tested out this material ahead of time, he said that he found it kind of annoying to fumble with his phone. But, once he realized that a smartphone is actually pretty good at using voice to create alarms? Easy and worth it. You might find that works for you.

Another little trick for those alarms, because part of the goal is to forget the time, to lose track of the time, but you know I've also mentioned it's valuable to be using it to scope to fit into the time frame we allocate for a stage or step of the process. The other trick I use as a code to myself is any alarm that is set 6 minutes or 20 minutes before any half-hour increment of the day - if I'm wrapping something up by 7:30, then I'm setting alarms for 7:24 and 7:10. If I'm wrapping something up by 8, I'm setting alarms for 7:54 and for 7:40.

What I like about those, as this easy system, is even though there are labels on the phone, and you could set alarms labels but I never actually bother to do that on my phone. When I set alarms 6 minutes before and 20 minutes before I find those are natural signals to myself to start winding things down, to start pivoting towards final revisions, final edits, getting things ready to be wrapped up, because otherwise what happens is because my goal was to lose track of time, to not be thinking about the time, it sneaks up on me, catches me off guard. Suddenly, I'm stumbling over my intended time limit, which, sometimes you can't do, if it's a situation where I've got an appointment right after, have to leave the house right after, or some things going on that I need to fit in after, while it's still tonight. It's a way that helps make sure I'm sticking the landing, those 20-minute and 6-minute signals to myself. Whenever I see an alarm that is 6 minutes or 20 minutes before any half hour ago increment in the day, that's my sign I need to be wrapping up what I've got, and pacing myself to the time remaining in that sitting.

I still remember, since my undergraduate years, people in my life being a little skeptical how many alarms I set, and what my deal was. You learn to do it on vibrate, or some way it doesn't disturb people, so they don't notice. But, even though I wear a watch, my watch is stopped. It's not broken, and the battery isn't dead. I had the battery taken out. It's a simple reminder to myself to not be watching the time, to not be looking at the time, that it is not an efficient use of my human brain. If you find me and see my watch, the hands don't move.

When I have a timer to keep track of the time, I'm entrusting a machine to do that. Machines are better at doing that than our attention is half divided on watching the clock.

As a variation to try, by the way, and this is one which sometimes I do, sometimes I don't, your mileage may vary, or may depend on the kind of task. Something I find useful sometimes is to write down, as part of the task, why I'm doing it. What is the reward I'm going to get from it? And when I do, I try to make that reward intrinsic, not extrinsic. Not saying for money, not saying to get someone else off my back, but instead, I'm doing this because it will reduce my stress. I'm doing this because I'll rest better. I'm doing this because I'll be proud. I'm doing this because it'll give me confidence and evidence to combat my insecurities. Writing these things down can help turn it from a dry, routine task to an instruction easier to follow.

If we go back to the earlier example of if we are a teacher trying to get a child, or a parent trying to get a child to be compliant, in a way that they willingly come along, that they're not fighting us every step of the way - sometimes it helps to give them the reason. There are kids who, hard to even blame them, if we tell them not to run with scissors, they run with scissors just because we didn't tell them why not. If you explain, you might hurt yourself or someone else, they don't want that, and now, that same kid won't run with scissors.

It's okay to give yourself a reason.

You don't necessarily need to. You can try it both ways. I find, occasionally it helps, occasionally it just gets in the way. It's a variation to try out.

Alongside that idea of putting down our reason for it, you can also put down how you're going to go about it. Let's say I have to have a conversation with the leasing office, landlord, a boss, someone I'm intimidated by. I have to write an email a certain way. I can indicate to myself, on the board, that I went about it "calmly," or "enthusiastically," that "I stayed with it, even if it got tough," and, again, all past-tense, so when I write it down it's temporarily an untruth that I'm going to make true in the near future, one sitting later, a few hours at most.

This helps us think through how I want to approach it, which makes it more concrete, more solid, gives us more of a plan going into it. It keeps in our mind what we meant to do, how we want to go about it, and what's important to us and why. It's one more factor that, if I figure out how I want to approach it, or when I tell myself how I stuck to it when it got tough, these things can help us push through. Just because we've made this agreement to ourselves in this fashion, we've trained ourselves to respect and take it seriously.

[01:40:00 in one-file audio]

In case it's getting lost in there, I want to clarify that when we talk about how I go about it, it's not just about how we feel on the inside, while the exact same thing happens in our actions or outside us, or in relation to others. Often, the outcome can be better because we decided to come about it in a certain way, with an angle of positivity, with a smile on our face. When we make up our mind to approach a task from a more positive angle, with a little more chipper attitude, besides feeling better while we do it, we can be that much more resilient, more thorough, more likely to find a solution, even if it means overcoming some hurdles. When we go into social interactions with others, team communications, project lead communications, and we make up our mind to approach that from a certain demeanor, that can help maintain the quality of team interactions, that can help lead new people to enjoy and take part in the project, which can lead to an overall better project for everyone involved.

As someone who tends to be very verbose, and write a lot in my emails, if I say I respond to the emails by 4 p.m., but then added, "I did not get caught up in overthinking the wording," then I've

given myself permission to shoot off messages, to not get lost in the details. To know that if they have questions, they'll email me after. To not have to be extra thorough, not to worry as if every single thing is submitting a paper to be graded - all just because I wrote that I didn't get caught up on overthinking the wording.

You can think of this as writing a short term lie and then making it come true. But really, what it's doing is it's coordinating and fixating attention on the action we're about to take, putting us in the head space as if it's already done. Then, all we've got to do is bridge that gap.

Let's say I'm going to take a day to rest. I've had a really hard time lately. I've run a lot of events, a bunch of extra stuff, maybe overtime hours on work. A lot of things going on. If we're going to get rest and break, (A.) we don't necessarily have to put it on the board, but (B.), if we do, this is another case where we can leverage writing how we want to go about it, or why we're doing it, if it helps. You write it down, give a time on it. "I read the NeverEnding Story up until 4:30 p.m., without guilt or stress."

That might sound like I don't need to say without guilt or stress, but as someone who often can be so driven by productivity, it helps me to remind myself that my whole reason for doing it is to relax, is to recover. It doesn't help if I do the action, but do it while feeling balled up with nerves. I can give myself permission for here's how I'm going about it, here's how I "went" about it, and then making that true.

I chose that example, as well, because an important part of guilt-free progress is being fair to yourself, and realizing that you can leverage something like this in how you guide your attention to give yourself breaks, or to enforce and defend specifically a little bit of time off, or time doing things you enjoy. It's not just about working yourself harder, or going through situations where you have reduced attention.

Now, that said, that's actually one of the first situations some of y'all who watch my daily YouTube videos, or used to, might have noticed. There was a point where I was feeling sick. I was under the weather. I had been doing daily YouTube videos. I still needed to do one. I was doing that every single day, and because I was under the weather, I couldn't concentrate. It was just not a good day. This is actually the tipping point that turned me to the whiteboard, as opposed to my pocket notepad, as adapted from it.

In that situation, what happened was I realized when I wrote it down, I could get myself to do things. Even when I was really at my limit. It helped equip me to do that. This actually mirrors a story, for a different reason, from one of our other club members who tested out this material. Again, huge star disclaimer here, which I'll clarify again after the point because I don't want to give the wrong idea, but here's an example where someone was able to use a whiteboard technique to push themselves in a situation where otherwise, he was already kind of past his limit.

He said there was an interesting and timely event - timely because this is while he had been reviewing an earlier draft this material - he said he had a mini-crunch yesterday. Some things lined up perfectly at work, resulting in a 30-hour shift. In the middle of this, his productivity had dropped to zero. Using the single-item written to-do list allowed him to focus, and quickly regain the focus, whenever he kept drifting. It was allowing him to keep working through those sad hours, with reduced anxiety. He also clarified, this not the norm at work, saying we generally work eight hours a day at the shop - which I'm happy to hear!

To connect this back to the point before, and how it helps us avoid that guilt, if or when these situations arise - and if you are a writer, if you're an artist, if you're... heck - in most fields, deadlines happen, surprises happen, clients, contractors, etc. fall through, get mixed-up, things happen - where occasionally we might have to work a little harder - what I want to suggest is that we make a deal with ourselves, that if we use the technique push ourselves too hard from time to time in that way, then we also agree to use the technique to give ourselves that time off, to give ourselves that relaxation, to tell ourselves, "sorry, temptation to work more right now. I have to keep playing games until 7 p.m."

And while, by no means should pragmatic utilitarian output be the only measure, even from a practical standpoint: if you're a terrible manager to yourself, and abusive to yourself, in terms of how much you always try to overwork yourself? And you don't give yourself those kind of outlets? It's going to degrade the work. If you don't ever give back to yourself, then you'll have less of yourself to give.

If the only things that we use the board for are to, frankly, abuse ourselves like a terrible manager, sure enough, you're going to start to ignore that board. You're going to stop touching it.

It needs to be something that, when you're guiding your attention, you are mature enough and have self-reflection on yourself to realize that your attention is as importantly guided towards things you want to do for relaxation, for recovery, in fairness to yourself - even if you occasionally might use it to overclock a bit.

As an example of this, if we zoom out, the game industry as a whole, categorically, is known for having a problem with crunch and overwork. This does not make it okay, but there are studios that are, at least, better about after the fact, in that if or when they have a few weeks of crunch leading up to some sort of big deadline for a major industry event, they then give people time off afterward. It's to help offset that it took more time from them leading up to it. On a more micro level, even though, since I work for myself, my hours are often fairly flexible, if I find myself working late into the evening one or two days a week, then I compensate for that by freeing up a few hours midday later in the week. I don't just allow myself to consistently overdrive, thinking that's sustainable.

If you do that to yourself, you're going to start to build up guilt from it when you look at the fact that you're not being fair to yourself. Done right, rather than worrying about breaking even on not feeling guilty over progress we aren't making, and about how we use the system with ourselves, we can and should be able to get ourselves to feel good about it by using it to do the things that help us feel better for having done them.

It's not just work, or recovery from work. It might even be something like scheduling a doctor appointment, taking care of the kind of things that your mom or dad used to encourage you to do.

Are you one of the many people who, for whatever reason, found that earlier in life, you had better sleep habits, and since then those sleep habits have fallen apart? Nobody else is, anymore, telling you, "It's past your bedtime." Don't let pride get in the way of exploring the possibility of putting on the whiteboard, "I got ready for bed by 9:30 p.m." if it helps - if it helps you break or change a bad pattern, and do things that you'll be glad you did.

It's not just an office productivity tool. It's a technique to get our actions to align to what we consciously want for ourselves.

Done right, it reduces our guilt, instead of adding to it.

Chapter 7: Jump Start the Starter Technique

Here's a big trick to getting into this new behavior. This is very counterintuitive, but also, important.

When you first start doing it, it's useful to do the motions before you stretch to apply it to something you really need it for. This just gets you spun up. This gets you through the steps to get familiar with the process.

Going through the motions matters, in part, because - I want you to think carefully about this - if the only things you write on the whiteboard are things you know you were struggling to do, you know the odds were against you, such that it will be an uphill battle to get yourself to do them? You'd be dooming yourself to see it as something unrealistic, if all you are putting down are things that you've already shown yourself before are unlikely to happen.

You need to condition yourself into the habit, so it's part of the process. I put down this, I follow the instruction. How hard could that be? I've got the recipe, I just have to do the steps.

You want to begin by, basically, applying it to something you were going to do anyway. Obviously, the goal is to move towards things where you do need it, but we have to get there incrementally.

We have to start by writing it down. Were you going to brush your teeth, anyway? Sounds dumb, I know. Write down, "I brushed my teeth," past tense, "by 10:30 p.m." We gave it a time bound, one quote-unquote sitting (even if we're standing at the sink). As soon as you finish writing, start brushing your teeth. As soon as you finish brushing, erase it.

Same thing, for when you're next making breakfast.

This can feel or sound a little silly at first. What's not silly is being in better control of your actions. What's not silly is being able to achieve the kind of results you can get from having better clarity over your ability to translate from thought, to an assignment to yourself, that you follow through on, so that same day you have performed the action.

[01:50:00 in one-file audio]

It is hard to overstate the level of power it gives you in your life, when it no longer becomes a question of, "Can I get myself to do something?" but elevates us to a strategic level, "I can get myself to do basically anything I mean to, so strategically, what should I give myself to do next?"

Somewhere between writing down what you were going to do anyway, and writing down something to do that is hard - whether hard because it's something you were intimidated by, involves struggling against your identity or rethinking what you know, looking up answers to questions you did not know how to solve - somewhere in that middle ground, you can assign yourself something just because you wouldn't have done it anyway.

The thing doesn't have to be hard.

The thing could be, "I got up and turned off the lights, then turned them back on, by 5:45."

The thing could be, "I walked into the other room, and back, by 7:30."

The point of these is they are totally doable, but you would not have done it, had you not written it down.

This starts to establish a rhythm, that when I write something down, I get myself to do something I'm capable of, but wouldn't have done otherwise. Does the thought of doing this feel uncomfortable, since your momentum doesn't lead you to want to do this sort of thing, and you don't see a clear reason to do it? Many of the tasks you consciously recognize you want yourself to do may not align with what you were on track to have done anyway.

It is because there's this gap, a difference between what we want ourselves to be doing, and what we were going to do, that this whole setup is necessary, and therefore, worth practicing.

It's practice at letting our thoughts, intentions, and words dictate our physical actions in the world.

So, I write down, "I went for a short walk and returned by 7 p.m." I finish writing. I walk down the block. I walk back. I erase it. Specifically, I chose this because it was a thing I wasn't going to do otherwise.

It can be little stuff, minor things. It shouldn't be grand. I'm not saying you need to stretch your boundaries of what you're comfortable with, nothing like that.

As senseless as those tiny examples sound, let me give an example of a way I still use it, that is similar to that, but using it in a specific way. Let's say I know it's been a rough day. When I sit down on the couch, and I know that I basically, "just need a moment" - which is fine, no shame in that, and no guilt in it - at the same time, my intention, plan, conscious want for myself is to get back up from there. This is not the rest of my night. This is a moment for catching my breath and recovering. When I sit down, I make sure I go to my office, grab my small whiteboard and marker. I bring it with me to sit down, because that's my foothold to get myself back up.

Otherwise, I'm going to sit there, telling myself a few more minutes, a few more minutes, and I'll lose track of time. If I sit down, even if I don't sit down then write, "I'm going to take a break for X amount of time" (maybe I feel more comfortable idling) having the board nearby, here's a trick that makes it simpler: rather than getting myself off the couch to do something hard by writing on the board a work task, when I need to get myself off the couch, what I'll write is something easier to do:

I rinsed my face by 7:30.

I got crackers out of the pantry by 7.

These are incredibly basic, easy, simple, non-intimidating, low-pressure tactics. But, I did the thing! I put it in past tense. I gave it an end time. As soon as my marker left the board, I got up, and did that thing. I come back, then I erase it.

But I got myself off the couch! I stood up. It's so much easier to work with that momentum, getting up and moving around, getting myself off the couch. I've snapped myself out of it, and can walk back to my laptop in my office, hunkering down with my whiteboard again. I've used it like a stepping stone towards figuring out, from one of my task boards, what work item to put on my board next.

I didn't get myself off the couch with a high bar. I gave myself the lowest possible bar that I knew would get me moving forward, and moving at all, even if that task wasn't important.

Is it clear now, why something as simple as getting up to the light switch, or walking to the other room and back, can actually have more hidden utility than it appears?

The same technique can work on a bigger scale than just getting ourselves off the couch. It can be easiest if we, I like to say, aim closer. When people are trying to shoot down range, a tactic they use for a target that's far away is to aim at a spot much closer. It helps.

Let's say I need to work on my research paper. Rather than trying to go straight for that, which is a high wall of motivation or energy to start, I might use the whiteboard to get myself to go to the library. Heck, could use it even to go to where my desk is. Once I'm in the situation, in that spot, it becomes easier to do something.

It's simple.

Let's say I'm already at my computer, and I'd like to do game art. Rather than going straight for, "I'm going to create a character asset," or, "I'm going to implement existing art in the pipeline," instead I might aim closer. What is the next step that, if I do it, is going to put me in the right situation? I might put on the whiteboard, "I opened Photoshop by 8 p.m.," or, "I opened Visual Studio by 9:30."

Having the right program open is the digital version of going to the library for a research paper.

In this way, we can do the same thing as we might to get off the couch. It can work on a bigger scale, putting ourselves in a situation, to work our way out of that inertia from sitting still, not doing anything, or at least not in a direction we want to go.

The aim closer technique also lets us use the whiteboard system even for things where you're not going to have the board in front of you the whole time. A simple example of this is working out in the gym. Do I expect you're going to carry the whiteboard while you're lifting weights? Obviously not. But, here's how you can still use the aim closer technique to jumpstart getting yourself to the gym: "I put on my workout clothes and my workout shoes by 7:30 p.m."

Once I'm in my workout clothes and workout sneakers, I'm unlikely to sit around the apartment. If I fear that could happen, a next step might be, "I got in the car by 7:45 p.m." I'm now sitting in the car, in my workout clothes and workout shoes. Do you think I'm not gonna get myself to the gym?

The more we can move ourselves in the direction, with a bit of the aim closer or other jumpstart techniques, the easier it is for us to get ourselves to the point where, you know what, I may as well do it, because I'm here, and I'm ready to go.

Maybe you don't want the whiteboard in your kitchen while you're cooking, but you want to be cooking more. If I can use the board to get cooking books out on the counter, to gather up recipes, get ingredients by updating my grocery list, I can use it to create a situation in which, at that point, the effort needed is much lower at the time because I readied the situation. I have everything I need.

The most generic way to think about this aim closer technique is if there's something you don't feel comfortable writing on the whiteboard, because you don't feel like you could promise to yourself it's something you can take action on in the next sitting, can you identify a different action to address that point?

For example, I'd like to cook a certain meal. If I can't write that down without having all the ingredients, instead, I should aim my action at getting those ingredients. Maybe I'm not in the middle of the store, in which case, it might instead be adding the ingredients to my grocery list. Perhaps I don't remember what ingredients I would need to prepare the recipe. Okay, then I put that on the whiteboard - I've narrowed down that I need to find the site that has the recipe.

This puts me on the path. It's like reverse planning.

This can happen on an extraordinarily different scale. What if we set some sort of much larger goal? I would like to organize a professional conference. Maybe I don't feel comfortable writing

that yet. Think about why. There's a lot of connections I will need to pull it off that I don't yet have. All right, then we might aim toward writing down a way to make those connections. I may need to get myself to relevant conferences in industry, to introduce myself to those people. Maybe I don't know what such conferences are. I don't know the cost, or the times of the year. Again, we kind of worked our way back to the action we can take in this same sitting, which is to do the research online to find the relevant conferences, or build myself a sheet of information to make that decision regarding about where is worth going. Where can I get the most bang-for-my-buck? Where can I afford to do it in budget?

Speaking of in-budget, this may be a case where there's things which are either expensive, or out of reach in the foreseeable future, at least for the near term. We can, in the same way of aiming closer, work our way backwards. Why can't I write it down yet? It leads to finding questions, like if I would need to raise money to do it, and I don't yet have the position I'd need to do that, what are some things I can do to increase the odds of that being an option for me? That might be pursuit of certifications, qualifications, or related networking connections.

[02:00:00 in one-file audio]

Or, I could focus on making a better demonstration of my work, other ways of building up a proof of concept, that could make it easier. This moves us towards a situation in which we could write that [with regard to fundraising] in reasonable confidence.

Find the thing you are prepared to attack directly, rather than what's seemingly out of reach, to be able to move towards there now.

I realize raising money for a business, or starting a professional conference, maybe those are a little too big. Let's go back to something a little more everyday "human" scale: reconnect with someone you haven't spoken to in a long time.

Let's make that our possible example.

Find someone, maybe you went to school with them, or were in your hometown together, maybe you're related but not the kind of family that stays in touch all the time. Give yourself a task to reach out to them.

Let's go back to this point: what you put on the board is the action you take, not the outcome anyone else does. You are not in control of if they reply. You are not in control of if you have a whole conversation with them. For all you know, they won't respond. For all you know, you can't reach or find them.

We're going to put down, "I reached out to such and such by 7 p.m." Maybe you couldn't even figure out how to contact them, because they deleted their Facebook account, and their old

email address seems invalid. Well, we gave it a shot, and made some action happen in the world around us by writing on the board, which you wouldn't have done otherwise.

This can help us build momentum, forming a bridge from doing things we were going to do, into doing something we would not have done anyway. It's establishing trust with ourselves, that when the marker comes up, I'll start doing what I wrote down. When I finish doing what I wrote down, that action part I am in control of, I erase it.

Here's another thought on what we do and don't put on the board: if there's something you're trying to get yourself to do, or you think you've been trying to get yourself to do, maybe telling yourself you're trying to do it, but you can't even muster the level of active decision making and starter action to write it to yourself when you're alone? At that point, it may be better to admit you don't actually want to do it.

Or, maybe you're not convinced it's going to be worth your while to do.

Either of those may be true. Either of those may be okay. That's not as condemning as it might sound! This is not judgmental.

For years, I owned a mandolin. I learned a few chords, felt overwhelmed, never got further with it. At some point, I had to quit stressing myself saying I am someday going to learn to play the mandolin. I came to terms with it being just a decoration in my office. Then I sold it.

I had to let it go. I didn't keep beating myself up, wondering why I wasn't a mandolin player. It's okay.

This is, again, one of the nice parts - in that if I don't feel comfortable writing it on a whiteboard, to myself, when I'm alone, maybe I don't mean to do it. That's okay. Maybe it's healthy for me to make the realization that I have to find something I do care about, because how much do you have to care about something to write it down on something next to you, or in a notepad from your pocket?

If you aren't convinced it's worthwhile to do, that's another factor. We're afraid it's not going to pay off.

Part of the difficult reality when we're new to anything that's a lifelong enrichment skill - new to a sport, playing an instrument, painting - it will take a very long time, and a lot of experience, to financially (if ever) pay off. Most of us will never get paid to play basketball. Most of us will never get paid to play music, make art, or, to make video games. It can still be worthwhile. It can still be valid.

If we don't focus on what we're going to get out of it in the near term, we won't stick with it long enough to even have a shot at getting out of it things that can only be gotten out of it in the long term.

It may become a matter of reframing. What do I actually get out of doing this in the near term? There are still reasons why it's worthwhile to play a sport, play an instrument, produce art, make games. It might be about finding it creatively fulfilling, or learning new skills, but the focus is on these things we get out of it. This can justify it to ourselves, to overcome the reason why we're really putting it off is because we were so fixated on what we weren't realistically going to get from it in the near term that we were overlooking what we will get out of it in the short term.

Think about why most people who are in martial arts are learning martial arts. Are they doing it to become stunt actors? Are they doing it to win street brawls? For most people, they're doing it for discipline, focus, physical health. Those are things that are guaranteed.

It's increasing self-confidence, no matter what else happens, in a way that it's a worthwhile activity in itself. There might be some benefit, that if you look at it with the right lens, it's worth giving the effort and opportunity, to assign it to yourself by writing it down. Why you do a lot of those things can be drawn, by analogy, to why people do high school and collegiate extracurricular activities, why someone would play a club sport, even if they don't see themselves going pro - maybe someday they will, for many they won't, but it's still worthwhile.

There's actually a valuable point that I learned when I was younger and applying for schools. I applied to Harvard. (Though, I didn't get into Harvard!) When we visited the campus and did a tour, our tour guides mentioned Harvard has a ton of athletics. People think of it as a very academic institution, but it has a lot of sports teams. One of the parents asked, "how does the sports activity affect your grades?" After all, grades are on their minds, or they wouldn't be shopping around to consider going to Harvard. What those student-athletes said was their grades got better in season.

Their grades go up when they have more to do.

Grades got better when they were, in their case, rowing for crew.

Of course, this is counterintuitive. We ought to be slowing down to make sense of what's going on. How they explained it has resonated with every step of my life since.

Picture the athlete when they're in season: they have to keep a schedule, with discipline, and a better bedtime. They have to be conscientious about how the two hours or one hour left get used. Out of season? They have less to work their schedule around. Time becomes an undifferentiated blob. They may stay out later. They're not driven to make one or two hours here and there between things fully count.

Another way of looking at it, too, is that it's not just like they're adding more to their schedule. What they're adding to their schedule fills them up - it recharges their batteries, because they love doing it. They find it satisfying, and fulfilling. It's a healthy, good outlet for them. It's something they want to do, unlike maybe some other things they are pushing themselves through because they think it's in the long-term interests for their futures.

Sometimes we are concerned about, "do I have time to do this?" though you might have more usable time if you do it!

Counter-intuitively, when you add the right thing to your schedule, it can help you get other things done, better, more efficiently.

For spatial analog, one of the things that we learn as professional level designers for games is that if you take an empty room and you put some furniture in it, and interactable objects, it makes the room "bigger." Your brain chunks the space into I can sit there, I can use that healing machine in the corner, I can open up that crate. That same pattern holds true.

If the level design and game development example doesn't work for you, think about any time you've moved into an apartment or house before your furniture. The space feels smaller because there's nowhere to sit down, nowhere to put your shoes, nowhere to turn on a TV. There's nothing to do in the room. As you populate it, up to a point obviously, but as you put some things in there, it makes the space bigger to us in terms of our actions we can take. The space is bigger, though really it's smaller, since it now can be compartmentalized and better utilized.

The same thing happens to our temporal schedule. When we have even fewer hours, because we're waking up early to run, staying late to lift weights, or we have commitments to compete on the weekends, that gives us more small chunks to work with in our schedule. Now, again, there's a cut-off point. You can't add infinite things, and, as I pointed out, it helps if it's a particular thing you find fulfilling. It should be something you chose and/or are in control of, something you want to be doing.

Out of people who take part in our online game development clubs, we've had people who join our groups that do for a day job the same kind of work they do in our groups, but the difference is because in our group they're doing it their way, a way they want to, to the degree they feel good about it, it fills them up and recharges their battery. It gives them more energy. It's not about the time lost, it's about energy gained. It leaves more energy for the rest of the day to draw from. When they do it for a job - and there's nothing wrong with that, either - but they're doing it on someone else's behalf, to someone else's specifications, how someone else asks and wants it done, making changes based on someone else's feedback. It's a different thing than when we do something because it's how we want to do it. That is what can fill us up and recharge us.

When we think about these considerations, consider not just what a task may lead to. Zoom in close on what does this task give me right now? It's not like it's just getting in the way of other things. If you pick the right thing, one that resonates with you as a person, if it's done in a way you enjoy, find satisfying and fulfilling in the present, that can help you get even more out of what else you're getting done this year, in the same way as those athletes got better grades in season than out of season.

[02:10:00 in one-file audio]

Before we talk about different kinds of ways to use the whiteboard tasks, and some recovery checklist stuff for what to do if it's not working out, let's take a moment to ask the most important question we can at the end of this section: did you, or will you very soon, find yourself a small whiteboard, a whiteboard marker, and/or, at least a pocket notepad and a pen you can dedicate to this purpose?

Please don't proceed until you do.

Let that be the limiter before you proceed to the next section. Go out, or order off Amazon, maybe find one at a local drug store or convenience store, maybe you'll find better options at an office store. But find yourself a small whiteboard and dry erase marker.

A simple trick that I use: rather than go to the nearest place that sells one, I'll go to a part of town that has some personal significance to me. Something a little out of the way. Maybe it's a part of town I used to live in. Maybe even when I'm back home visiting family.

This makes them feel a bit more sacred to us, in a way that, I don't mean religious beliefs, or implying anything magical about it, all I mean is it makes them a little more special to us, in the way we want to treat them with care. We want to use them well, and won't want to waste them. We won't be as careless about them.

We want to think of this with associations in ways that can tie our lives together. It's a simple thing. If it works to start out, get it from anywhere you can. I find it's a little thing that, for me, keeps it kind of fun, that I know my whiteboard, know my marker, and where I got these things. I know my pen and where it came from, know the paper and where I got it. That, to me, makes it a bit special, or different. If I lose it, no big deal. I'm not upset. I replace it with something that's convenient.

It's a simple, fun way to do it, if the opportunity comes up to get yourself, maybe while you're on vacation, a board or cheap pack of pens.

Let me be clear, too, I'm not talking about fancy stuff. I'm not encouraging buying detailed, leather-bound, complex, fancy expensive notebooks, pens, or whatever. I have found - and I tried in my experimenting back when I used to mainly do this on notepads - I tried getting those.

I never write in them. They feel too out of place, too fancy. I actually like the nearly disposable, less than a dollar notepads for my pocket, or for a small whiteboard, really six dollars, eight dollars, maybe \$10 at most, plain, generic, off-brand stuff. What can make it special is where it's from, if you went out of your way to get it, not thinking if it's gold-plated or something that's going to in any way deliver better results. That just makes us too self-conscious and too pressured about it.

If you already got a whiteboard by this point - maybe already had it, maybe you got one earlier in the audio because you wanted to get a head start on trying it out - you're maybe thinking, oh no, I wish I would have heard this tip earlier. Here's what I'm going to say: save this for your second board. We're talking a five to ten dollar purchase. Don't get a second one until you've proven to yourself you are using the one you have now, making a habit of it, really using it and doing it. Then, some other time, maybe when you're traveling or when you're visiting home, or anywhere else with a connection to you, maybe upgrade to one that can be your newer board.

However you find it, and wherever you get one in the near-term, before you proceed, I've got to ask you to find yourself a whiteboard marker or notepad and pen, or none of this works.

We don't want you wasting brainpower on something that can be so easily externalized like this. Another way to think about it, if it helps: it's like having a calculator when you're tackling an advanced math problem. It's not that someone doing an advanced math problem can't do the math that the calculator is doing. But, by having the calculator offload multiplication, division, addition, and subtraction, it trivializes that part so the brain can focus on the higher level question of which numbers, and why, in the bigger picture of solving a more advanced math problem.

In the same way, even if you could, in your head, keep yourself on task for what you're doing, that's such a trivialized thing, which the writing medium is so much better at storing.

Written medium can store something for thousands of years, it's really good at remembering.

Think about why paper is so much better at remembering than a living thing, or even than a computer that's turned on. It's because it requires zero power, no energy, to stay the same. That's not true about our brains. To keep something in focus, and keep ourselves on task, takes work. Truly, it requires effort, ties up energy, actually burns calories. Now, it's not a good exercise routine, but compared to when you put it on paper or put it on a whiteboard, it's going to sit there requiring zero energy to stay, saving whatever power it'd cost us to recycle in our attention, to apply instead toward doing the task itself.

This frees up your brain to be more strategic about what you're assigning yourself, rather than having to spend your own mental energy distracted on keeping yourself on task, or focusing on what the task is, fighting against all the different conflicting inspirations, ideas, thoughts, and notifications, all the stuff happening around us in the modern world.

Nowhere is this worse than on a computer, which is partly why it doesn't work nearly as well on a computer. In that computer is the window into all your email, social media, news, unlimited entertainment. Every distraction is there. I know that, it's why I had to develop these methods. That is also why it helps for this to be analog. I've tried it before, and I've had people try before, doing it on their screens with a notepad app or something - does not work as well.

When it's in the digital space it's too easy to ignore, too easy to hide by minimizing, too easy to forget. When it's on a physical thing, this keeps it there until you cross it off or erase it after you deal with it. This keeps it separate, keeps it real, keep it physical, keeps you in this physical loop of the moment your marker finishes writing it, you start, and the moment you finish doing it, you erase it with your eraser, or you cross it off on your paper.

All that seems like it shouldn't make a difference, but it does.

One last plea, before you proceed: if you haven't yet, get yourself a small whiteboard, whiteboard marker, and/or notepad and pen you can use for this. Otherwise, none of it's going to work. You need these materials for this to get you anywhere and help you out.

Chapter 8: Focusing Checklist

Whether, by this point, you got the board, or even just set aside a notepad and pen for this to do it before we move forward, is basically a sign of whether or not you're giving this a shot, and whether you're open to seeing if it can work for you.

If you're skeptical - and that's fair, I'm an instinctively skeptical person, too - you only get to be smug if you legitimately give it a shot, then find it doesn't work for you. Best-case scenario, it works for you. Worst-case, at least you can have the certainty of that, and aren't left wondering what would have happened. Could it have worked? Could it helped?

What I will also say is that when it comes to orchestrating our own action, in terms of really getting ourselves to follow our own assignments, follow through on our own orders, even if there's only a marginal gain, even if there's a one, two, three, five percent improvement in our ability to command ourselves to do a task and get ourselves to follow through on it, even if we find that for ourselves, there's only certain categories of tasks it works best for, there's only certain times a day when we can get it to work for us? That's tasks and times of day that, before, we lacked that control over.

That has a compounding effect, a magnifying effect. It can make an enormous difference in the long run. What I'm promising is better than 0. We can't get there unless you get yourself either the whiteboard, or at least pick out a pocket notepad and pen you choose to use for this, so you can follow along and do it.

We're going to begin this section with a short checklist on a series of questions where, if you find you're putting something down and, yet, you still aren't doing it, what to do. Let's explore some common ways that we can make some minor adjustments. When I work with people on this, if it wasn't working for them, where can it go wrong?

These aren't going to be complicated. Sometimes just hearing the question, something clicks, then it'll be fixed.

As a reminder - hope you're there - it's got to be an external, analog thing, either a small whiteboard, or notepad. It makes a huge difference. On a computer screen just does not work the same.

Is it in front of you? Is it, ideally, in your line of sight, on the table, while you're doing what you're trying to do? It does not work if left in the other room. It does not work if shoved in a drawer, hidden away, out of embarrassment. Does not work if face down. The words have to be there, because literally what happens, even when I'm still doing it, is we glance over to it and bounce

back into focus, because in looking at it we remind ourselves we wrote that because we want to be doing that. This is not a command from somebody else. This is what I told myself I want to be doing. The reminder makes it so more real. It has to be in front of you, or it's not going to work.

Did you write it past tense, first person? Reminder, key to this, is that you word it based on the action, not the noun. You don't say "soup" you say "cook soup," and not in present tense, but in the past tense, "I cooked soup, by 6:30 p.m." You give it to yourself past tense, so when you write it, it's not yet true. Before you go on to the next task, before you release yourself to do something else, before you consider it done, you have made that reasonably true, or at least gone to honest efforts to make it so.

Did you keep it straightforward, to the point, and actionable? Remember what you write down has to be something that is up to you - your action in it. You can apply to jobs. It's not up to you if they accept. You can submit to a competition, it's not up to you if you win it.

What you write down needs to be the part you do. You're not in control of anybody else besides yourself, and what you put down.

[02:20:00 in one-file audio]

Next question, and this one takes practice, and a bit of personal training to get through, though is key in what to work towards: did you at least begin as soon as you wrote it down? As soon as you finish writing it, do you start doing it? You opened the related program, or got yourself into the right context, as soon as you wrote it down, the moment you put down the pen or marker? That's when you want to initiate the task.

If you're not yet having that relationship with it, to go back to our other earlier advice: begin with something easier, or something smaller, maybe even something you might have done anyway, just to build up the routine.

Speaking of which: have you warmed up for it, first, by doing things you'd do anyway, or arbitrarily easy things? Remember, you can train yourself in the middle ground by picking some simple stuff. Give yourself something that needs to happen anyway, but you maybe would not have done right now, had you not written on the board and said, "I finished the dishes by 7 p.m." Maybe it's a Saturday, and you say "I vacuumed the carpet by 11 a.m." Not a thrilling task, not an exciting task, not moving your career forward, but showing that you're in control, by writing something down, then making it real.

As little as these sound, if you shoot straight for the big challenges, it's like if you play a game and go straight to the end boss's dungeon. You're not even going to get to the boss itself, you'll get held up because you haven't leveled up to take on the minions along the way to the boss. You've set yourself up to fail. You've gotta level grind, build up to it. Then, come back. It should be comfortable, should be smooth.

It may be a longer path there, but that's how this works. You have to build up to it.

Here's another reason why, sometimes, it fails: is the task you wrote down something you realistically feel you should be able to do in a few hours or less, in roughly one sitting? If you found out this is actually much bigger task than expected, scope it down, try again with a smaller tasks. This is, as obvious as it sounds, counterintuitive to what people do in the situation.

What usually happens is, let's say my goal for the week to myself, not on the whiteboard, just my own thinking, plan and calendar, let's say I'm writing a book. I want to write even one page a day. For some reason, two days have passed, and I've written no pages. I've tried writing on my whiteboard. I said, "I wrote a page today by 8 p.m.," but I didn't. What winds up happening is, halfway through the week, we try to make up for lost time. We say, no big deal, I'll stay on schedule! I'll just do three pages on Wednesday.

Can't do that.

If one was too much for Monday or Tuesday, you don't magically have the energy, momentum, confidence, or otherwise to do three times as much as the goal you failed on Monday and Tuesday. You have to dial it back, not dial it up. You don't make up for lost time, your schedule or scope changes instead. You figure out, "how can I work with two fewer pages?"

Maybe what's going on: is there a hidden step you've overlooked? This is especially common because, again, we're often using this in a space that's new to us, as when we're new to making music, writing a book, or programming games.

The most generic, universal hidden step is to figure out: what should your next step be? If you feel like you're not even sure where to start, rather than feel stuck because you're unsure what to put on the whiteboard, put on the whiteboard, "I decided on a first step by 5 p.m."

That work may involve a bit of investigation. Figure out some criteria, any basis for why you would do one thing versus another.

But, more generally, let's say you've already identified what you're going after. You're still hitting a fog, as though there may be some hidden step. You're having a hard time, and it's not quite as universal as picking your next step by some time.

Everybody, I'm assuming reading this, has gone through some sort of writing course in their educational pipeline. You know the importance of outlines, of brainstorming, of rough draft, second draft, and final draft. Yet, if you did not ever have that course, you may sit down and try to write a final draft straight off your brain, encountering all kinds of problems doing it. You need

those drafts. You're trying to skip those steps, if you're trying to go straight to one page of final draft.

Maybe that's why you're stuck? Maybe what you need to write down as your goal, instead, is to do some brainstorming. Maybe what you need to do, if you're writing, let's what you're trying to write about is a technical issue, or on history, you might write down, "I generated two pages of notes from research on the subject by 8 p.m." It's not that page I'm writing, but it's a step that was hidden between - and why I was blocked. I was trying to bite off too much at once.

If you're trying to write it down, and it's not happening, again, this may be your signal you're trying to skip a step. Zoom out. Bisect. Dig. Is there some other preparation you could do? Or, it may be, that just skill-wise, you're feeling stuck because you need a smaller tasks to bite off.

This is a challenge to being a beginner in any field - look at, say, ski slopes. Ski slopes have different symbols, different shapes and colors. Those shapes and colors indicate how advanced a hill is for a skier. Now, an expert skier, or professional skier, I'm pretty sure can eyeball the hill, and tell you how difficult it is. They're experts. It's what their experience is in. They know, extremely well, what it's going to feel like, what it's going to be like, how hard it will or won't be. Those indicators are there for beginners. The more beginner you are, the harder it is to assess.

You don't know anything yet when you're a beginner. Nothing's wrong with you. You don't have any experiences to draw upon for reference. The same thing is true in programming, music, art and sound, so things that can be difficult for a beginner don't look that much more difficult... because they're a beginner! They have a hard time assessing. They have no context for what's hard, and what isn't.

You may be stuck on a problem that, if you ask someone more advanced than you, someone who has more experience, they may tell you, "That's actually an incredibly hard problem you're working on. It doesn't look like it, seems kinda easy, but it's something people have spent years struggling against. The answer is usually either faking it, or some simplified way to work around the issue."

You might need to get help, outside perspective, from someone experienced, to help you size it up. Is it just taking on more than you should be able to? If that's the case, it's not that you did something wrong, besides picking the wrong problem first. That might be what's going on.

Did you give yourself a specific time to end it by? We want to put down the time we mean to do it by. What you're doing when you put a time on it is giving yourself boundaries. You're not just saying this is going to be done by five. What you're really answering is a more important question, saying, "I want a version of this that, at my experience level, can be pulled off by 5 p.m., because I've decided that that's how much time this particular problem is worth in the bigger picture, or within other phases and stages of my learning or on this project."

You could take the smallest task in the world, and iterate on it forever. You could take enormously complex tasks, and vomit something out. There's always a range. The timing is always squishy. You give yourself a time not just as a deadline, but also because it is a decision to yourself about its priority level, and about how much attention and care it does or doesn't deserve before you move on to the next thing.

If you are letting yourself get sidetracked, like we've talked about a number of times, it's okay, fine, part of the process. We're all human. Other stuff comes up, we get surprises. But, are you incorporating that into your writing a note at the bottom of what you're sidetracked on, so when you get pulled back to it, you are confronted again with the main task you deviated from? I do this so I can't ignore it, and can't hide from it.

If it's been so long that your initial task you wrote a while ago, here's something I've found helps me: erase it, and rewrite it when you come back from your distraction.

Feels like, wait, why does that matter? It was already on the whiteboard, now it's on the whiteboard again? What this is about is re-engaging ourselves in that training we're giving ourselves. Every time our pen or marker leaves the medium, we start it. I rewrote it, I finished writing, so I'm back at it. If that helps, reuse the board. It's worth the additional 15 inches of blue marker used.

Speaking of distractions, here's another thing. If you find there's a specific kind of distraction you mostly do, find yourself diverted to, keep side railing into doing something else that you don't mean to be doing - can you make that less convenient for yourself? Can you raise the effort it involves, even in some little way? Can you make it further away?

This is the kind of thing where I used the example of different browsers. It's the same sort of thing of like, if I'm eating these cookies that are on my desk, but I put them up on top of the fridge so it's not an afterthought, not just an automatic, I introduce more effort, steps, and energy to get into it.

This can help if you're one of these people who finds that even when you have your laptop up, you still have your phone on and you're fiddling with it. Can you put it on do not disturb, then zip it up into a backpack under the table? If you're at home, I find putting my phone in the other room helps.

You can even do a version of this *on* your phone: let's say there's an app you find yourself using often as a distraction. If you find you subconsciously pull up your phone, switch it on, touch a certain spot of your screen - probably low on your screen, maybe near where your thumb is, if I had to guess - take that icon, and move it somewhere else out of the way. Try the top edge of your screen, the opposite corner, another page, or bury it inside a folder, maybe get rid of that shortcut altogether so you have to get to it through a longer list of applications to open it. Anything can work that's going to disrupt the established automatic habit, this can introduce an

interruption, giving you an opportunity to a second guess, is this really what I want to be doing? It'll help you become more aware, when you're doing it, by adding the additional effort to get to it. You avoid going as far down that path before you can bring yourself back to task.

[02:30:00 in one-file audio]

This same thing applies on a laptop. If there's an icon you find yourself compulsively clicking on, move it somewhere else. If you make it less convenient, it can derail the automatic steps you've developed a habit around.

It doesn't sound like it should matter. Logically, rationally, this feels like it shouldn't be a thing. It helps, it does make a difference. Part of what our overall theme is, if it helps, then doesn't matter if it seems simple, and doesn't matter if it's a little silly. So is writing a couple of words on a whiteboard. If it helps us get it done, it's worth trying, isn't it?

If something's distracting you, can you make it less convenient.

This includes, I've invested a few hundred bucks in a worse computer. I own a decent laptop - I need it to edit video, and handle other serious work on it for my profession. I also own a Chromebook, because when I'm answering emails or doing certain kinds of writing work, I don't want the machine that is so capable it can also edit video or do all kinds of other tasks. This means when I'm on that computer, I'm only writing emails, or I'm only dealing with writing tasks.

It was worth it for me, in the long run, as an investment for my business, for a couple hundred bucks to have a weaker computer where it was less tempting to multitask, or derailing into doing other kinds of work.

Can you make less convenient whichever way you're distracting yourself?

Here's another thing you can also do with the distractions. If you find yourself getting squirreled away into something else, maybe work that needs to get done - as in you had to answer these emails, because that's important - or maybe something you feel, rightfully, you deserve to play some games, watch some shows, have some rest.

Okay, I agree!

What if, instead of having those as your distractions, you blocked out in your schedule a period of time where you allow yourself to do that as your main task. It doesn't have to be the distraction. It can become the main task. "I played games until 8:30 p.m."

It helps to know you have a block of time where you're going to focus on doing that, that you're going to write it, going to do it, and going to erase it after. What this can do is take the pressure

off trying to insert, inconveniently and inappropriately, at other times of day, thrashing which otherwise shreds our schedule.

This can help for a lot of different things, including answering emails, responding to social media messages, or dealing with LinkedIn. Instead of doing it ad hoc, randomly, whenever, if you schedule a time where you make it your focus, to really take care of it, to drill in and give it your attention, giving yourself a time frame to say, "I'm going to respond to those messages, but I'm going to do in the version I can get done in half an hour, because that's how much time they deserve from my day."

This can be so much more productive, because it's not constantly a temptation to yank you away. These are things that either need to happen, or you deserve some rest and break. If you give yourself a block of time when you say that this is when I authorize myself to do it, that can reduce the amount of distraction that it applies to all the rest of the day, instead of any given moment us asking ourselves, "Have I done that in a while? Should I do that next?"

At this point, you've got the core technique. You're ready to use it. You've got the checklist for feeling stuck. If you have not put it into practice yet, haven't got the materials, made it through that last section but got right back into the next, so you still haven't tried it, still have yet to use it? I encourage, before you go on to the next section: use it. Apply it. Try it a few days, for even a handful of things. Maybe give it a shot for a week. See what isn't working for you, feel it out, adapt or personalize a bit. That's going to help the next section connect much better than if you just cram it all into one sitting before you start putting it into action. It will help to have tried it.

When I was a mixed martial artist and a wrestler, it was far easier to gain from tips and advice that I would read, study, or watch a video of, based on something I'd actually tried, than something I had never put into motion yet. Put it into motion, give it a try.

This is still going to be here when you come back.

Give yourself at least a few days, or a week, of trying it out. Then, we'll talk about some mentality, other processes, other tips about overall ways we can be using this.

Chapter 9: How to Start New Things

Real quick, let's talk about a few short, easy wins here, on reasons why people put off starting things. We can, potentially, use the whiteboard to get ourselves to start, but we still have to overcome these kinds of mental hurdles.

One worry is that we're not sure whether we'll have a future with it. We're not sure if it's gonna have a place in our life.

That's actually backwards thinking. What happens is once you learn to do something, you'll find uses, as you become more confident in doing it.

All the time, there are opportunities in life where, if you knew how to play guitar, you might have played guitar at the campfire with your friends and family on that outing. If you didn't know how, it didn't even cross your mind. Whatever skills you're equipping yourself with, if you're getting better at Photoshop, at programming, project leadership, teamwork, whatever it is you're practicing, the more you get better at those skills, the more ways you're going to find to use it.

Rather than worrying, will I find a way to use it, give yourself the tools in your tool belt. It's one of these classic things - if we have a hammer, everything starts looking like a nail. You'll start identifying ways to leverage your skills. Without it in your background, those don't cross your mind. You can't see these until you pick up those skills.

Another reason people get stuck is because they worry if they've done enough to prepare. It's really a form of procrastination, to be over preparing.

You have to start doing it. You're going to learn a lot in the process. You'll learn so much more by trying it, and exercising it, than you can from reading about it, or thinking about it. You have to get in there and do it. A lot of skills, when you're doing them, are more like riding a bike, a lot less about theorizing.

When I say it's like riding a bike, I mean that in two ways worth illustrating here. The first is, obviously, how much can you benefit from reading about riding a bike, before you get out there and started falling off it? To an extent, you just have to do the thing. A whole bunch of people who I meet trying to get into making games have spent years reading articles and watching YouTube videos, thinking that that is helping to prepare them.

The moment they actually start doing it, they find out a bunch of that stuff is either not applicable, or not applicable to the type of thing they're now doing, or otherwise are years of experience away from where it would be relevant for their headspace - it's irrelevant when they're getting started.

The other way it's like a bike is in that there is a limit to how much we can detail, in advance, every possible contingency. Let's say before I ride my bike down the street - back where I grew up, in our neighborhood, my brother and I would occasionally ride our bikes down a few blocks to a convenience store. This was basically a big adventure for us. What if, before I left home, I first felt the need to diagram every possible thing that could happen along the way? What if a ball bounces across the street? What if a car doesn't stop at a stop sign?

There are an infinite number of things that could not possibly be predicted, that could not reasonably be anticipated, let alone, what about not just for this intersection, but also at that intersection, instead? What we have to do is trust that we can get ourselves out there, and on the way, in those situations we'll slow down, dodge, adapt, handle the situation as it arises.

Here's the skeleton key, hidden in here, on how to avoid this getting us in trouble. You might say you don't want to wind up lost, in which you start something, knowing only enough to start, but not enough to finish. What if you get in trouble? The trick, is why we start so small. It's one of the reasons why so many game developers begin with game jams, or my free course at Code-Your-First-Game.com to program something they can finish in an evening.

When you're starting, start with something such that as soon as you start, you can already see the end. It's not that far away. Each time you get through a cycle, start to stretch it out. You can build it out longer, with more confidence that, based on smaller adaptations you did along the way, you'll be able to take it farther, and farther.

The first time we tried to ride a bike, we didn't immediately go down to the convenience store, far out of sight. The first time I rode my bike down the driveway. I may not have even made it.

You start off with something where it's such a small, but full, cycle, so you can see the end from where you start. You only need to know enough to start, and to trust yourself that you'll be able to adapt to little changes coming up as you go.

In terms of which equipment or software approach to start with, there are a lot of options, any one of which could potentially work for some people, none of which work for everybody. The best way to find out is to start trying it, to give any a shot.

On the equipment and software side, I will suggest a tip we love from our audio trainer, Ryan Stunkel of Blipsounds: start with the cheapest equipment, or whatever free software you can find. Only when, or if, that starts to meet its limitations, and you can't keep being productive with it, that's when it's time to invest at the next level.

Don't start by going out and buying expensive stuff. If I want to be an ice skater, and go out to buy expensive skates, that's not going to convince me to start ice skating. In practice, they'll just gather dust in the closet. Use the equipment you already have, if you have any equipment. Start

with whatever approach you have access to. That will also help inform you with a deeper sense, later on, in that if your approach fails you, that's alright. Thereafter, you can be a better advisor to others from the time you spent trying that, and what you learned from it. That's not lost time. It's that much more knowledge you'll have going forward that someone else won't have.

In terms of ways to start, part of what's nice about the whiteboard system is that you can go out there and find all kinds of other algorithms, approaches, recipes, techniques, or steps that others recommend, and through the whiteboard, get yourself to go through with the steps to test them. It's like asking if a diet or exercise routine works - none of them work if you don't do it. If you can get yourself to follow the steps they prescribe, only then you can figure out how it is or isn't working out for you. With the whiteboard system, you're better equipped to at least try them out. Find three, or five, different ways to start. Make a plan to go through all of them using the whiteboard. Find out for yourself which ones click best for you.

[02:40:00 in one-file audio]

Here's an example from one of the people who piloted this system in an earlier edition. He said he was pleasantly surprised with how well what I teach here fits in with all of the Getting Things Done Stuff he's been looking into. What this person said is that, in fact, it seems almost like a missing element in the GTD methods, at least in this person's implementation. At first, he thought it would be putting aside all the other current productivity systems he's been experimenting with, reading about, and trying. But, it seemed to him like what I teach here can fit in just about any other type of organization system, planner, or productivity method that he's ever heard of, because those tools help focus on what you should be doing, whereas the tool I teach here is about getting you to actually do that thing. What I'm teaching here can be a compliment to basically any other system you're already familiar with, or might go out there and find, once you learn how we use these techniques here.

There's a question, too, of worrying, "what if I'm not creative?" This is a mistake about what creativity is. Creativity is not some sort of innate trait, that some people have a wild imagination, others don't. Creative - the root word is "create." If you create things, as a person who creates things, you are creative.

The more you make things, the more you'll begin to see the world in ways you can produce. If you get good at painting things, you're going to start having other ideas for what you can paint. If you get experience in programming, you'll start having other ideas for what to do with your programming. It derives from your act of creating! Focus first on creating. Creative, and creativity, will follow.

Speaking of which, you might be worried over who's your audience. From a business perspective, if you're raising money, you've got to make a case for your demographic and such. If you're just making art? If you're expressing yourself? In the same way as this technique, and the mindset around it, focuses on how to be both your manager and your employee, both your

teacher and your student - in the same way, it is worthwhile to respect yourself as both the creator, as well as the audience for it.

Isn't, quite often, what we're looking for is approval? We're looking for attention. Give yourself the approval. Give yourself the attention.

One reason why we look to the outside is we want to be able to correct our decisions on what we're doing. Marcus Aurelius, the Stoic, wrote in *Meditations*, as kind of a recurring theme, on how strange it is that despite the fact we might otherwise think highly of ourselves, we seem to put on a pedestal the opinions of others. To take that even further, and in regard to people's concerns about audience after their death, he points out that the people in the future will frankly be of no better type than the ones that currently inhabit Earth with us.

It's worth giving credit to yourself as a valid entity, to be worth impressing with your own work. That doesn't have to be as narcissistic as it sounds. What it means is you get to decide your direction. It means that you are not just here as a servant to some outside audience, or someone else's opinions.

And, again, this is why I'm distinguishing: if this is something you're trying to do commercially, to do profitably, absolutely the source of the money may, to an extent, be worth considering the opinions of. If this is something you're doing as an artist, as someone who wants to explore, find your voice, and figure out your own sense of identity? Allow yourself to be respected as a valid audience.

In terms of wondering what your team and collaborators will want to do, this is something where, if you're first leading a project, I often find people want to be way too flexible. They want to say, "we can do whatever." It's actually much easier to give some clarity for people to rally around.

Think of it this way. If I said, "Here's a bus, it's going to New York City." Some people want to get on a bus to go to New York City. If I said, "Here's a bus going to Omaha, who wants to get on the bus," some people are going to take a bus to Omaha. If I say, "Here's a bus, it's going to go... *somewhere*... we'll figure it out. Maybe we'll vote after we get on the bus." Very few people are going to be feeling safe, comfortable, or happy about getting on that bus.

The trap hidden here that beginners fall into, is they mistakenly think more people want to go somewhere else besides New York City, and so if I say, "We'll figure it out after we get on the bus," more people will get on. But, the only way that works is with people naive enough to assume the bus is going to go only to the place they want, and not where anybody else on the bus wants to go.

At the end of the day, it's only going to go one place. And at the end of a team project, it's only going to be one result. That's why it's important when you are starting out to set down a flag and make clear, "Here is where we're going, who's on board?"

Otherwise, the only people who are going to join are the people who are gullible enough, naive enough, or inexperienced enough to not know any better, to get on board in vague circumstances, assuming it's going to become what they have in mind. Rather, give a clear rally point, here is where we're going. This helps give clarity of direction, for people to know what they're getting behind. Then, there will be somebody it speaks to, instead of nobody.

If you're concerned about getting stuck? That's actually a good thing. The goal should be to get stuck. That's when you learn the most: when you run into a real problem, a real challenge, and you get stuck on it. You'll remember that, because you learn it in a real context, unlike in some sort of dogmatic class assignment. That's going to accumulate cases where you ran to a challenge, you overcame it, you solved it. Those stick. That's something that really builds up over time.

In terms of worrying if the work that you're doing is worthwhile? What I want to emphasize here is that doing it to completion makes it more worthwhile! Almost any project ever released, whether it's for someone's portfolio and for fun, for learning, or for profit - if they had stopped at 75% through, it would not have been worth doing. If they quit at 90% through, it would not have been worth doing. Only through finishing it, do we get the chance to learn from retroactive perspective, hindsight, and feedback. Completing it makes it more worthwhile.

Another note - software can't make up for badly mistreated hardware. If your roommate's laptop keeps boot cycling, but the thing's covered in sticky soda, and the monitor's part broken, and the thing is barely hanging off the hinge? Software can't make up for that busted hardware. Likewise: no process, no technique, no reading, no theory is going to help if you're mistreating your physical body, your physical hardware. There's a minimum baseline. I'm not saying you need to run in marathons, but moving around a few days a week for 25 or 30 minutes. It's always worth asking, is your physiology alright? Are you eating decently? Are you resting adequately? Are you moving around enough? Are you getting occasional sunlight, and outside air? Just getting outside for some open air helps me breathe, helps me think better, helps me go back to my work refreshed.

Little things you do to treat your body better will feed back into even the cognitive, intellectual, mental and creative work we do. This can include checking whether your environment is adequate to work in. Does it help you to go to a library, or help you to go to a coffee shop? Does it help you to go down the street to work at a friend's house? You might live in a disruptive space, where the air is not good, where there's mold, where it's noisy because neighbors are loud.

I remember when it used to be time for me to work on my research. I would think, okay, so I have a five-hour block. I can spend a half hour to get ready then get myself over to the library, work over there, of course half an hour on the other side coming back home, and essentially have a whole hour less to work, than if I do it all at home, where I can stay in my PJs, chill out in

the apartment, work alone. Naturally, what I found to be the case as I experimented, is much more got done when I got out of my apartment. It was really not a great work environment. More got done when I got myself over to that library, even though I had an hour less time! It was less about the time, and in terms of total net productivity, so much more effective to put in the additional effort and energy to get over there. Maybe, if only, because then I'd tell myself, "I'm not going to let the energy I spent getting over here go to waste."

Sometimes a change in environment is what you need. If you haven't tried it, consider making that part of how you expand your freelance work, solo projects, or hobby projects. Getting into a secondary environment can sometimes be a huge difference for us.

There are three simple techniques I want to mention, as well, for crossing the threshold of starting. These are very specific techniques. One is Ticking Placeholder, another is Foot in Your Own Door, and the third is Altruistic Hitch.

Ticking Placeholder helps get us past perfectionism. Something is important to us, yet we're putting it off. From the outside perspective, we're not doing it because we don't care, but what's really going on, is we care too much. We're worried about doing something flawed.

So, what we do instead, here's the core idea - you do an off-the-cuff, thrown up quick version. Put on your whiteboard, "I'm going to make whatever version I can in 10 minutes." Just vomit it out. Do something terrible, awful. Get something down, which is technically usable, but the barest of usable, and maybe not passable for other reasons. Now, this becomes a soft threat to ourselves, that if we don't replace this by something better by the real deadline, that's the version we're going to have.

The goal is no longer, "Can I produce something perfect?" It just becomes, "Can I do something better than the version I cranked out in 10 minutes?" Absolutely. Of course you can. You'll give it more than 10 minutes. At minimum, you're going to build on the knowledge of how you pulled off the 10-minute version. In game development, this is what we often call getting things to first pass, as in, it's not the best we think we can do, but we had to get something in place to fit all the pieces together. That allows us to then free up our energy after, to zoom out, look across all of our first pass answers, to ask, "Where's our energy best spent on addressing the next updates?" For some things, especially background details, sometimes you can get away with keeping the first pass version there.

This takes the intense pressure and anxiety off starting, from feeling frozen over worrying what if I'll have nothing to show when the time runs out? Now, for your fallback, you have an answer.

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As you replace it with a better answer, you're increasingly in a better position to iterate. You can look at it, and ask, before the deadline, can I come up with a better version than that? It's a

concrete thing to assign yourself on your whiteboard to do. It ensures you're going to have something to release on the deadline, yet, you can still do something better.

In organizations, when we put on an event - a conference, a festival, a meet-up - the first time it happens, if it happens at all? Victory, success, check that box. It happened. It existed. Next year when we annually repeat it, or next month when we do it again - now that it exists (as a flawed thing), no matter how much it was on fire - we can fix, improve, and build upon it. That's how things get great. It has to exist first, then you can iterate on it.

This gets us past dreaming and imagining, into really doing something. This makes it concrete.

Foot in Our Own Door - this is from a little research technique from the Compliance Without Pressure: Foot in the Door Technique, by Friedman and Frazier, 1966.

Here's how it worked.

There were two experiments. They called a hundred fifty folks and asked them what brands they use in their home. Some people who got the call weren't asked for details, they could do it at a later time. Others were asked to go around, and get the details on products they use in their house. There's a different level of buy-in there. Some people were asked to walk around their house, to other people they just said, "would you be willing to do this sometime?" Next, for the follow-up, scientists showed up at their houses, to ask if they could go around, invade their home, and look at which brands they use.

People who had already agreed to the level of buy-in to check the brands on the spot, when they were called, were far more likely to let the scientists into their house. They were already closer to that tipping point. The little action made the bigger action easier. The second experiment had a little sticker - and I'm simplifying it here - but one sticker was pro-environment, the other was a control. People were then asked whether or not they'd put a big ugly sign in their yard about environmental causes. People who said, "yes," to a little sticker about environmental causes were more likely to take the big ugly sign.

This is proper research, widely supported. We can use this on ourselves, too, though. Sometimes, you look at a small win, and may say that isn't going to count in the context of things, as if it doesn't really matter. What it can be, is that the smallest of wins helps make the bigger ones easier.

The fact that we made some small art asset makes it easier for us to do something else, because we got our foot in our own door to see ourselves as artists. It raises the level of how easy it is for us to take on a bigger art task.

Part of what holds us off is there's such a high barrier to writing a short book, finishing a game, or pitching a project, that we know we can't do it all at once. And we're right! Instead, we have to

focus on a small thing, a stepping stone, even accepting that it's just there as a stepping stone, that it's not the real goal. We're not getting delusional, thinking that is going to be enough on its own. It's getting ourselves to start, finding a way to do it. This sets us up, layer by layer, so we can elaborate on it.

This is in much the same way as my video course we start with for our game development club, code-your-first-game.com. It gets people past the hurdle of having never made a game before, and now for the rest of their life, they're working on increasingly better, nicer, and more original games, because they're past the headspace of, "I can't make a game, and I'm not a game developer," to, "I've made a game. I'm a game developer." That puts them in a whole different space, because they got their foot in their own door.

Then, lastly, this one has never been more important than it is today because, despite all of a lazy reporting and incorrect accusations that get thrown around, it turns out the data backs up that Millennials are, in many ways, the most giving generation yet. More than any previous generation, Millennials express the belief that it's important to work for companies that are socially responsible. More than any other generation before, a higher percentage of Millennials are giving to charity - even though they, obviously, are at a different phase of their careers and life, and in many cases in a career reality (just from how the economy has evolved) to have less to give. More of them are giving, anyway. It's the giving generation. We care about other people. That's why this technique is particularly important.

Altruistic Hitch is about connecting your success to help others you care about.

This is part of the power of when people form families, and start fighting harder for themselves in their careers, because they know the raise isn't just for them, it's for their family. This is part of why athletes work so hard in team sports, not only on the playing field, but also at practice, and in the weight room, because they know every gain they get helps not just them, but also all their peers they care about.

This is actually part of what's going on with the accountability buddy. A lot of people mistakenly interpret that as being someone else watching you, someone else managing you, holding you accountable. That's not really what's going on. Whenever there's a study group, what's usually going on is we care about those people, and we want them to succeed on their tests. If we're in a group project, we know that when we do our best work, it's going to help everyone.

The real magic isn't that they're helping us stay on track, it's that we've connected our being on task to helping keep them on task. We care about their outcomes. This can even be a future facing thing: I've known for some people, it helps motivate them, who are maybe not married yet, but who want to be a better spouse in the future, a better parent someday, or a better boss someday. Even if those aren't the situation someone's in, it can help motivate them to connect that, if they succeed, this is going to help them fulfill those roles better in the future, in a way that's really selfless. It's really about serving others. Ultimately, it still comes back and helps you

increase the level of energy and commitment you throw into it, increasing the true stories you can build upon, to tell about how much work you put in, and how it helps elevate an entire company, or team, succeed.

When I was struggling to reboot my company, some years ago, back into leaving graduate school to start a business again, one of the ways I got myself to do that more seriously, was actually to connect the success of my company to the financial benefit of a friend I grew up with back home. It's easy to leave ourselves behind. It's easy to say I don't need, or care about, fancy or expensive things. It's another thing to see how our success directly helps somebody else we care about, potentially reducing, even in small ways, some of the stress in their lives.

I've continued to see, as an entrepreneur, how growing my business and the amount of people it can help, and the way it can help them, is a great motivator. That has helped me reach new heights in my work, that if I was not serving and helping people through it, would be much harder for me to do. It can work at all kinds of levels.

It also works when you help an entire group improve, and you're part of that group. This is a major part of fraternities, sororities, college clubs, nonprofits, companies people are part of, or in IGDA - International Game Developers Association - chapters. It's something where, when they help a group they're a part of, when they help a company they're a part of, it helps them, too, even if why they're doing it is really to help those around them.

Again, that's what I'm calling Altruistic Hitch. We've connected our good success, our progress, our results, to helping others who are important to us.

Even if you are going solo, doing everything on your own, the things you learn along the way, every mistake you make and recover from, better equips you to, in the future, help others overcome and avoid those obstacles in their own journeys. That's been a big part of my life and career path, making and surviving some mistakes, and then finding ways to help systematically repackage, develop, or improve upon ways to help others avoid some of those same mistakes, so they can get faster where they're going on their own journeys, in their own directions. Each thing we work through helps prepare us to help others even better.

One other way you can think about this is in your networking life. Everyone you meet and network with, in addition to being added to your network, you're also helping everyone you've ever networked with, because you're adding that person to their network, too, with you via proxy. That's one more reason to get out there and meet people. Everyone you meet is another secondary connection to everyone you've ever met before.

If you can find some way to hook up the change you want to see in yourself to helping others in their success, it becomes way easier to motivate ourselves.

That was just a handful of quick and easy techniques for why people put off getting started. I know that much of our focus here is how we use the whiteboard, but to get started, at a conceptual level, in terms of our headspace it helps to be aware of how to overcome these other hang-ups we might have.

Chapter 10: Productive Mindset

Another simple technique to play with - and this is something you can do in combination with your whiteboard - is simple practical visualizations.

A lot of the self-help community focuses on thinking about when you'll have completed the goal. Part of why you're writing tasks on the whiteboard in past tense, is because we want to think about what it's going to be like for us when we're done. Sometimes, it can help to feel the relief a little bit ahead of time. It's not quite like we're eating dessert before we eat the food, because we still have to do it, but that gratitude we feel towards how we're going to be after we finish it can, in many ways, help us get through it. We want to make that true. We want to make that the reality we live in, in much the same way as you want to make the statement no longer a falsehood, that we wrote down at first. We want to feel the feeling we've already got ourselves a head start on, a peek at, rather than wallowing in how we feel from the pressure of having not done it yet.

There are people who will half-heartedly do something under the justification that, well, odds aren't good of it working out, or being well-received, anyway.

I can tell you, whatever the odds are, they are substantially worse if it's done half-hearted, than if it's done wholehearted.

If you've made up your mind that this is the right course of action to do, because the odds are in favor of this being the smartest decision, then I would encourage you to think about it as if your doing this fully is going to equal success at it. Now, big disclaimer there: that does not mean you invest fully in it. That doesn't mean that you throw your life savings into something. That means that just the attitude and energy you bring to it isn't holding back.

What if it's an athletics competition, and let's say that the odds are 50/50 for the sports team of whatever sport you prefer. The odds are supposed to be 50/50, but if one team goes out there and puts out 50 percent of the effort, because they think there's a 50% chance of winning, they're going to lose. You don't actually want to hold back in proportion of the odds.

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If there's a competition and a hundred people enter - anyone who reads that as an excuse to put in one percent of the energy is not going to win. It's only for people who entered it thinking this really could be me, I could be the winner to this, and I'm gonna do it as if making something worth showing as the winner, that is where it gets competitive.

In many competitions, 80% of the people filter themselves out, because they're holding back. They're pulling their punches, in the proportion of, it was only a 30% chance of winning this, I'll do 30 percent effort. They think this is smart, but it gives them a zero percent chance of winning in those situations. Go about it such that if you decide this is the right decision, and this is the right course of action put, then put your full weight behind it.

Another challenge, here, has to do with when you are trying to deal with imperfections. When you're learning new things, there are always imperfections in your code, your writing, your art.

I've always really liked animals, and I remember when I was a little kid, my mom said because I like animals, it'd be really hard to be a vet. She pointed out, and rightfully so as a thing to reflect on, a veterinarian by their line of work, because they care about animals, has to spend a lot of time around sick, injured, sometimes dying animals. That can be incredibly challenging, incredibly uncomfortable, because, well, you love animals. That's why you're doing it. You have to be around animals who are suffering.

Now, the reality is that these animals are suffering whether or not someone is there staying calm and composed to help them.

It can seem like a bit of an extreme, but I think here is a strong visual: when you are working with your beginner efforts, your beginner writing, beginner code, beginner art, beginner music or beginner sound, if you are real and frank with yourself, it is a suffering animal, and you are the vet.

This is how it works.

You have to look directly at those imperfections, and keep your composure, in order to learn how to make it better. The work is bad, whether or not you develop the courage to face it directly, admit its mistakes, and put it through a process that surfaces imperfections to do something about them.

Only through doing that is it going to be able to elevate past the work of others who slop it out and don't think twice about it. Admit and face the imperfections. Recognize that looking directly at them, understanding them for what they are, is what it takes to fix them. Even if that's uncomfortable, even if it's not pleasant, that's part of the work.

How this connects to the whiteboard, is what we can't write on the whiteboard is "I did it perfectly the first time." What we can use the whiteboard to do, in terms of guiding our actions, is to draft, then to push ourselves through proper process, in which there is an assumption there are wrinkles in it we need to smooth out, which we don't have any way to see until we run it by others to get feedback, actively test, or seek input on what to change and improve.

The expectation isn't that it's going to come out better automatically, simply because we want it to be good, or because we want to ignore that there may be something wrong with it. Instead, we're taking for granted that there are almost certainly things that need to be fixed.

We build in the steps of the process, and get ourselves to do those things, feeling more confident that by applying the right process, our output will be better than if we didn't. The reason why the whiteboard is helpful for this kind of step is because seeking feedback on something is almost always, regardless of your experience level, somewhat uncomfortable. It's not quite as fun as ideation, not as fun as getting out the rough draft by doing what comes naturally.

Inevitably, in creative work - and it's often for creative work - it doesn't feel good to fine tune, since it doesn't feel as high impact as when we had the initial rush of output. This is where, again, the whiteboard serves a function. It helps us consciously act on knowing I should do this, that the result is going to be better if I do it, and it will be better received by people if I do this, even if I don't really feel like doing it. If I put it on the board, and I've conditioned myself that I will do what I put on the board, I can propel myself past that next phase to get a better output than it would have been otherwise.

The Stoic Marcus Aurelius wrote in *Meditations* that a good doctor isn't surprised when his patients have fevers, or a helmsman when the wind blows against him - just like our vet is expecting to work with animals who need help. If you're making a book, you have accepted the role of working with text that needs work. If you are making software, you have accepted the role of working with programming code that needs work.

I'm reminded here of my friend who's a photographer, who once expressed frustration at how little her clients seemed to understand or appreciate about the difficult work that goes into photography. To this, I couldn't help but think, if her clients understood photography, they wouldn't be hiring someone outside their company to do it for them.

This is also the case that anyone doing freelance or consulting of any sort is drawn to where there's a problem, in much the same way as police people are called to where there are crimes, fire people are called to where there are fires to put out, or teachers drawn to where there is confusion. That doesn't mean that all houses are on fire, everyone's a criminal, or everyone's confused, but it can look like that if your experience of the world is through your professional role. You have, essentially, set yourself up to be put in front of the worst of it.

In fact, much of the richness of expertise and depth of understanding that goes into most professions comes through that experience of working with the problems and the issues that arise.

The philosopher Martin Heidegger had a lot to say about hammers. For our purposes here, we can focus on the fact that when a hammer is functioning, which is to say not broken, we don't

think about its component parts, its materials, how and why it works, or is connected in the way that it is. Only when a hammer breaks, when it malfunctions, do we become aware of its material properties and its individual component parts.

Similarly, when a person who works with computers has computers keep breaking on them, they come to gain a much deeper understanding through the act of trying to fix and reconnect its parts.

It's like if you've ever had a friend who was a particularly good auto mechanic, often the reason is because their first pickup truck kept failing them, so they had to learn how to troubleshoot it. In addition to their formal training, one of the reasons why a vet is so much more capable of addressing problems far faster than someone else, who doesn't spend day after day focusing on these problems, is because these issues keep coming to them. That's developed in them a much deeper, richer understanding of - to be slightly morbid - the component parts of the animals that they try to help. In all these cases, it is the professional's role to be there to help the problem that would exist anyway.

But whether we're bringing our cat to the vet, ourselves to a doctor check up, our business plan to a lawyer, simply showing someone else our rough draft, or having someone else playtest our prototype while we watch, the information being surfaced was already true. We need that information to move forward.

It's essential to take on a mindset that it's better to know, even if it's bad news. Even if it's something you wish wasn't the case, it's better to know that, than to feel some sort of comfort from hiding. This is related to the same kind of mindset we talked about earlier, on how important it is to not regret having taken the best action you knew at the time from the information you had.

If you start giving yourself tasks to investigate something, to try something, experiment, to release anything and put yourself out there, but then you wind up in a situation where you regret it because you find out in the process it's going to take more work, you find out in the process it's not accepted in its first form, you can't let yourself regret that. If you do, it's going to condition yourself to stop following through on your intentions.

There's people who get held up on ideas about starting something new. They're worried that if they start it, there's a thought in there, "what if I'm bad at it?" The reality, if we zoom out, is that anybody who is new to anything is bad at it. They have no experience! They have no reference frames to draw upon. There is going to be a steep learning curve. There are going to be some beginner mistakes to get out of their system.

Someone is already bad at it. They just haven't surfaced that news yet until they try it.

The idea that finding out bad news is going to cause us to regret our actions holds us back from following through on our intentions, because we're worried we'll find out something we, frankly, already suspect is true: we aren't naturally extremely talented. For something we have no experience in, that's an unfair expectation to set.

Temporarily bad news, we can move past. If we hide from it, it stays true. We just get stuck at it.

To put this more generally, you never want to be afraid of finding out that more work is needed - whether the more work is needed on your game, your skills, perhaps in some form or another, on ourselves, in terms of how we communicate or how we lead, how we organize, how we plan, or our process in going about something. The bigger concern should be not finding out more work is needed on our games, our skills, or ourselves.

When we think about assigning ourselves to find out new information, to try something, to prototype something - it needs to be from the mindset that more information is good. Even if that information is seemingly short-term negative, even if the information is something we'd rather not face. It ties back to our veterinary example: the facts are there whether or not we have faced them.

Learning it's not true is what enables us to be in a position to then assign our next actions to do something about that. If the game we wanted to prototype didn't come out as great as we thought it might, only by prototyping it can we move past that into either iterating on it, finding a different audience for it, or trying a different prototype. But we're stuck until we let ourselves surface it to find out. If we hide from it, it stays true, and we just stay stuck at it.

[03:10:00 in one-file audio]

Another mindset connection is to take some pressure off thinking of the current project, our next project, or this attempt as being our last or only shot at it. This is why when I'm training people in skills, I'm always emphasizing a long view on doing it sustainably, doing it in such a way they can keep it up project, after project, after project.

Rather than seeing the given song, book, episode, whatever it is that you're doing, as an endpoint, instead it needs to be measured as a part of a much longer arc, part of a bigger portfolio, part of your story. Then it becomes easier to accept there's going to be learning along the way, and that's the kind of learning that's going to accumulate throughout your progress.

When we hear statistics about how many businesses fail in their first several years, what's often missing from those is the point that the businesses failing are disproportionately people's first businesses. The businesses succeeding are, disproportionately, people's second, third, fourth, or fifth business attempts.

That can be a harsh reality because, obviously, no matter which business number you might be on, or whatever creative project might be on, you still have to, as we talked about already, give it a hundred percent of your effort. Give it a shot, and treat it as a fair shake, it still might work out, and sometimes that first effort or second effort does. Far more often, what's happening is it's the learning along the way from how things didn't work out earlier, that leads us to success we eventually reach.

There's this quote by Max Levchin, in which he says, "The very first company I started failed with a great bang. The second one failed a little bit less, but still failed. The third one, you know, proper failed, but it was kind of okay. I recovered quickly. Number four almost didn't fail. It still didn't really feel great, but it did okay. Number five was PayPal." If you didn't recognize the name, Max Levchin is the former CTO of PayPal, which, of course my business today and so many other businesses out there rely on.

There's no shortcut to being in business number five. You've got to be approaching whatever it is you're doing in such a way that you can make it and endure to attempt five or beyond.

How this ties back to the whiteboard is here is a case where, consider if we didn't have the whiteboard, if we were letting ourselves be dictated in terms of actions that felt comfortable and natural, then what if we do a project and it doesn't go well? What if we weren't measuring it in terms of, "did I do the right things at the time, with the best the information I had," instead we looked at how the outside world responded to it? Since it was beginner work, we are likely to wind up in a situation where we don't come out of it feeling in such a way we'd be able to do it again. When we frame the thoughts correctly, as in, did I do it as best I could from the information and experience I had at that time, if I can guide my actions based not on what I feel like doing at the moment, but rather what do I consciously realize in the long term is going to be what I want to have done? This gives us a little more confidence, more trust, that we will be able to do a project after this one, and a project after that one.

It one doesn't have to be either a success or a dead end. That amount of pressure on it will often contribute to it not coming out as well as it can.

Speaking of the pressure we put on it, the pressure we put on things is one of the reasons why, counter-intuitively, bizarrely enough, it can actually help your effectiveness to think less about something. That's another thing our whiteboard can help us with. This is a huge one to understand, because if you miss this point, what's natural is that if we are not doing something well - and I meet a lot of beginning developers who have this spiral, when they're not doing well - they feel their reaction should be to think about it harder. However, the more they think about it, they less likely they are to do it.

There's been some research that people who fantasize too much about their goals are less likely to achieve them, because they feel like they've already satisfied it. That's why we don't get too far ahead of ourselves. We might visualize, for the single day's tasks we're writing it down to

do, being grateful for it, and then making that true in one sitting. When we get too big on that arc, thinking too far ahead about the future, it's fantasizing, and we start to think about it instead of doing it.

This is the same thing as when people getting into conversation get clammy in a social networking setting, where they're not talking because they're thinking too much.

There are situations where you have to do the thing. You do the thing by doing it, as the old saying goes.

Sometimes, your thinking is getting in the way. What happens is, we come from a school setting, a theoretical, academic, intellectual setting. There are problems that are solved that way, and there are many other things in life where no amount of thinking, no amount of reading, no amount of concentration or discussion can make up for the fact that if you are building a birdhouse, you need to start sawing some boards, hammering them together, and putting finish on them. It's a doing aspect. If you think a little less about it, that can make it easier to do.

As you get better at this, you build up those routines, so when you write it you can shut off your thinking, then zombie through it, come back, and erase it. You can tap into a whole next level of getting yourself to do things, when you waste none of your mental energy overthinking it, and put all your mental energy into the act of doing it.

Here's another way you can think about what's going on. When we assign ourselves tasks where we have to switch off the thinking, and follow our own orders, picture it like you're two different people. You are wearing a manager hat, then you're wearing your employee hat. The manager gives an assignment, and when you're wearing your employee hat following those orders, part of your efficiency, focus, and clarity is that the person who's deciding if this is the right task to do anymore is, temporarily, off-site.

Trust is a two-way street. Even though we've so far been focusing for a lot of this material on learning how we can trust ourselves through repetition, pattern, and experience that we will do what we assign ourselves, the other side to that trust is learning to respect the idea that when I gave myself this task, and I decided this was the right task to do, it means putting full trust in myself from an hour and a half ago.

Perhaps, if nothing else, by completion of the task I gave myself, I'm going to surface new information and new realizations. I'll be in a new position to be a little more strategic about pivoting for my next action.

But, while we're doing it? Part of what allows us to fly in it is that we're taking off the constant internal struggle of, "is this what I'm supposed to be doing?"

Yeah, it is. We decided that when we put it on the board.

Outcome is not the artifact itself - it's easy to get tied up or stressed out about is this going to be imperfect, will people love it, or how's it going to rank. The artifact exists as a means to some other end. The artifact exists to improve your portfolio, to show more diversity in your background, to draw upon in future experiences, to make other collaborations open to you in the future based on things you've done. It can inform your decisions about what to do next. It can position you better for other opportunities.

It can even just answer the question of, "is this worth investing more time into?" The answer to that, based on your work, can be absolutely not, it's time to do something different. Now you know with certainty! It's like my mom says, when she sees a movie she didn't like, she says at least now she knows.

If you frame taking on challenges as doing it to find out what works, and engaging in it to answer your curiosity, to gain more and better knowledge, rather than thinking about it as the artifact itself, the time you put into it is a form of tuition cost. No matter the outcome, you're learning from it, gaining from it, accumulating portfolio from it. If you do it to be on the other side of the experience of having done it, solving the related issues at least once before, so next time those issues arise it's going to your second, third draft solving those issues, every time you're going to get that out of it. Those aren't conditional on the outside world, or on the outcomes of others.

It's like I said: on the whiteboard our focus is what's the action you control, not the outside world's reaction. By being on the other side of the experience, having solved these challenges, you are now mentally, and also in terms of demonstrable proof in your portfolio, better prepared to take on new kinds of challenges. This opens up more kinds of options than you would have if you hadn't done it.

Another approach this can be high-volume, low-pressure exploration. This is something I've done many times as a rapid prototyper, where I'll just make a bunch of stuff, without expectations or pressure on any of it, and then sit back and look at either traffic numbers, or see how I feel about how different ones are going, to decide and inform from that which ones to double down on for my next, bigger project.

As a straightforward example of this, the first ebook I ever sold was literally the top curated 50 or so articles out of five or more years I was writing weekly blog articles on game development. Distilling it down to the best 20% of that material, grouping it by category, and giving another editing pass to update things to make sure there was an extra layer of coherence applied created a lot of value for people. By discarding 80% of it, it gave me a lot more freedom to explore and experiment, even though at the time, I wasn't putting pressure on myself to be writing something that would later become content for a sellable book.

Or, from the digital prototyping side, for seven months in a row - two hundred nineteen days - I was building gameplay prototypes on my own time. This is called the "Interaction Artist" series.

A bunch of them are completely obscure, a bunch are a mess, a bunch are embarrassing or unshowable. But, a small yield of those, out of my wild experimentation during that time, did particularly well, in terms of people sharing it on the internet, people at the time using StumbleUpon or sites like Reddit to point to it. I took those projects that had the highest web traffic, and I ported those to iPhone. I adapted some of the others I felt really had a good direction, built those into commercial-ready applications, and in each of those cases, something great came out of it.

One became a finalist in showcase for an international games and arts festival.

One paid my rent in downtown San Francisco for over a year.

One landed me a six-figure deal with a game publisher in New York City.

Another was a key part in my admissions into graduate school.

Even though, maybe, the other two hundred fifteen of those are basically unshareable garbage, there's no way I could have come up with those several examples to build upon without that level of experimentation, and the freedom that came from just producing things, without pressure, freely exploring the space, experimenting as I went. There is no shortcut to get straight to those four without the 219 as a greater set.

This is in no way unique to gameplay prototyping, or working at that specific scale and duration of time.

[03:20:00 in one-file audio]

This is especially a great approach to when you're working in a field where you need to do something, but don't really have the formal training for a clear process to use a known path. As an example for this, let's say you're doing t-shirt designs for a club you're in, or a community you organize. You're designing a t-shirt, but you're not a t-shirt designer. You have no formal background in it, don't know anything about the principles of it, and don't know the first thing about fashion. Then an easy approach to this is, instead of going deep on the first idea that comes to mind, come up with 15 to 20 sketches of shirts. Then, look at those, as a human who has seen shirts before, and size up from among those which one feels like it's worth putting more effort into and moving forward on.

The same thing is true, if you want to take photographs of an event, but you're not a photographer, so you don't know anything about composition, or formal details of how to take ideal photography, as a professional might. If you, instead, are able to take lots of photos - which is convenient to do given how cheap digital storage is these days - you can then, after the fact, pick out the five or ten best, out of what might have been 300 attempts. That can help you get to a better result than if you overthink trying to take the perfect five or ten photos.

To an extent, this is actually a part of the process even applied, still, by professionals in either of those fields. In the same way, it's even done by people who have formal training and a great deal of professional experience doing it. When I spent time at a large game studio, there were entire walls covered with different versions of how a character might look, so the whole team could discuss which of those many experiments would be worth moving forward on.

Part of the process is trying out a variety of things to feel out which, holistically, is working best.

If you have concerns that this, what we might negatively call "spaghetti at the wall" approach, is getting the way of real or lasting learning, you can build in an exercise with yourself. Simply apply the whiteboard to get yourself to, after the fact, not just call it done after you picked the five or ten keepers, but to articulate to yourself: what is it about those, in particular, that led you to pick them, out of all the ones generated? This type of reflection can lead you in the future to, maybe still generate 15 or 30 possible options, but a stronger 15 to 30 examples to choose from, informed by your sense of where the hits and misses were in your previous attempts.

Another thing, and this can sound tangential, but certainly is relevant, is looking for ways to reduce moral stress. Moral stress is when there's a disagreement, or tension, between the work we do, and what we feel good about. This is where, even if we're doing a day job we don't feel is done the way we think it ought to be done, we don't feel is being done in an honest manner, these things chip away at us. It's hard to fully separate those from our evening, outside, weekend, own time. There are cases where it might mean some temporary compromise, to navigate to a different career path, to a different line of work, to try different fields. But if there's moral stress, tension your life in that you don't like who you have to be when you're at work, exploring other options doesn't sound easy - and it isn't - but it might be what it takes to unlock your ability to think, operate, and act clearly outside of work.

I raise this in the context of the whiteboard system for two reasons. One, it's a situation where, if your moral stress is destroying your energy outside of the work environment, that may be an added factor in your difficulty getting yourself to execute on your intentions outside of work hours. It's still hovering in your mind. Secondly, the whiteboard can be used as a step towards your hopeful escape route.

In the same way as you can use the whiteboard to play your own manager, or play your own teacher, you can also use the whiteboard to engage with yourself as your own career counselor.

You can use it to assign yourself to take stock of other options, figuring out where your strengths lie. You can assign yourself to find possible other jobs to apply to. You can assign yourself to apply to these jobs, in order to hear back opportunities and options.

You can assign yourself to find people working other jobs, to see if they'll let you pick their brains about what they do or don't like about it, this way figuring out whether they are happier doing what they're doing than you in your present situation.

One of the things this can be useful for providing us with is a sense of grounded perspective - to what extent are things okay, weird, or normal, in where we're currently at? We may find, as we look around us, okay, you know what, everyone seems about as frustrated with the pros and cons of their situations as I am. Maybe this is a case where it's a matter of how I learn to cope differently. In other situations, you may find out that there is, in fact, something extraordinarily unusual about your boss, your work environment, or your company policies, leading you to realize that even a seemingly lateral move could reduce your moral stress, having found out that level of abuse is not commonly tolerated, even in the same industry you're already in.

Another reason it can help is that by investigating options, you are taking concrete steps to explore getting out of your situation. That might mean assigning yourself on your whiteboard to study for grad school exams, sending out applications, or taking other steps to get out and explore new pathways, like a coding bootcamp. That act of taking steps to leave a bad situation, incrementally, gradually fit in a little here and there on a consistent basis during a typical week, helps us better cope with the current situation. This is because it shows us that we haven't come to terms with the idea that this is permanent, this is forever, as if we are doing nothing to take steps to change it.

One of my favorite physical embodiments of this idea, about taking steps to change our reality into how we want it to be, is Ferdinand Cheval. He made something called Ideal Palace. He was a French Postman back in the early 1900s. As a postman, he spent 33 years picking up stones along his route, accumulating these stones. At first, he used his hands. Later, he used his pockets. Later, he did this with a wheelbarrow. Stone by stone he made, alone, a small castle out of the stones.

This isn't just a model castle. I'm talking about an actual, walk inside it castle, stone by stone, with rocks he picked up along his way.

This is something which is still visited by tourists, nearly a century later.

What I love about this story, is here's a case where somebody wanted to have a castle. He realized nobody else was going to build his castle for him. Life did not make him somebody in history who got to say, "I want a castle, put it here." He didn't let that change the fact that he wanted a castle. So, stone by stone, day-by-day, he created a castle so that, sure, it took 33 years, but 33 years later, he had his castle.

How many of us wouldn't mind having a castle 33 years from now?

I don't want to get lost in focusing only on the end result. I want you to picture what that must have felt like for the 33 years he was picking up stones along his way, in his ability to envision what he was moving towards, his continual progress adding up, not making any kind of excuses as to why this couldn't be possible, or why no one else would let him do it. But, rather, by fitting in a little bit here and there, he saw how it could add up, and kept at it consistently while he made it happen.

Not that there's anything wrong with the man's profession, but picture, for contrast, how each day might have felt different for him, were he not collecting stones to make progress on his castle, versus the reality in which he was.

What's your version of the castle, that you can do even a little bit, one day at a time, or even perhaps once a week, every week, to build up to, over the next thirty three years? Maybe your castle is a skill you wish you had, maybe your castle is a job or a role or a place you'd like to live, or some version of a reinvented you. I understand that trying to find your way into a different situation or a new line of work to reduce moral stress can be daunting, it looks like a lot of work, and it is. But, surely, it's at least as doable as building a castle alone, by hand, across three decades.

Now, speaking of castles, and a place we want to live: let's go back to our previous note about exploring other options. Another thing we might discover, in the process of exploring those options, is something that happens to us when we are looking to re-evaluate our lease, one year to the next, in our apartment here in Los Angeles. We shop around a bit. We look at what are the other prices, the other amenities - where everything is expensive, and nothing's that great, because Los Angeles is a very expensive place to live.

[03:30:00 in one-file audio]

Sometimes, we evaluate 15 different options in the greater area, within commuting distance of my wife's workplace, and determine, all things considered, our current apartment setup is actually still the best choice for us to remain in. When we arrive at that decision, that doesn't mean that we feel like the time searching out more than a dozen alternatives was in any way wasted. That time was invested in the peace of mind. We did our due diligence to evaluate the alternatives, and determined that, in fact, this is the best current situation for us to be in.

It might also be the case that you find, through the process of assigning yourself tasks on your whiteboard to evaluate other options and figure out what your strengths are, figure out what industry or line of work you feel like you are a best fit for, you may conclude from doing that, that in fact, you are not in all that bad of a situation. Maybe the line of work you're in is a good match for your strengths and your weaknesses, the company you're working at is actually reasonably an appropriate fit for you, maybe as best as you can see yourself matched to something out there paying your rent. You then know that you are in a situation of making the best of all

possible worlds, as opposed to hypothetically dreaming for some other reality, without having actually looked into it or investigated that.

Everything has different pros and cons. It's about which cons you're comfortable living with. We joke about, whenever we browse apartments, that every apartment is going to have some one-star or two-star reviews. The difference to look for is why there one or two star reviews, and deciding which one of those reasons you're okay with.

For some it's the cockroaches, for some it's the rats, for some it's the bad maintenance, for some it's a jerk landlord, or the parking is a hassle. It's about picking which are the ones that are compromises you're okay with. In the same way, in career paths there are going to be different places that have different pros and cons. It's not about looking for the one that has no disadvantages. It's about finding the one that the disadvantages best aligned to where you're willing to be okay with that.

Along these same lines - which downsides am I willing to be comfortable with - there's a dangerous idea which we sometimes think differentiates moral stress in the day job from our outside projects, outside hobbies, or our long-term next steps. This comes up in an important way when we're calculating and making decisions about what we're doing outside of our workplace. One of the things that pollutes thinking about side projects, personal projects, or learning projects, is a side effect of our frustrations with what we perceive, in the day job or professional situations, as, "I wish, for once, we didn't have to cut a bunch of corners, shouldn't have to always look for the lazy way, to not have to settle for good enough. I wish I could get lost in doing every detail perfectly, planning and doing every little piece just right."

I raised this as an important point here, because it's one of the things that derails and ruins, black holes, personal projects or side learning with our own endeavors. We make the mistake of not realizing compromises are a core part of everything that exists in the world, and everything that ever gets done. The term we need here, which is not as common as it should be but sounds weird if you haven't heard it, is "satisficing." Satisfice is a word meaning we met the criteria necessary to move on, even if there may be a better solution for it, it meets what is needed for now.

Let's say you want to find a book to read. You could go about this by thinking you need to evaluate every book ever written. You could refuse to read ever again, until you are confident the book you're looking at is the absolute optimal, perfect, best by every definition, the perfect book for you to read next.

Obviously, you would go the rest of your life and never find that book. There are too many books.

Satisficing, instead, says there's a level for which this book needs to overlap your interests, and needs to be relevant to your experience level or your background. It needs to be about the size

that's in proportion to the time you'll give to get through it. This is how you actually wind up selecting a next book to read.

This comes up, across the board, in all the different ways when solving the hundreds of thousands of tiny challenges and tiny decisions we make in our projects, or in our lives in general.

What we need is not to find the ultimate, perfect answer for every single situation, like finding the perfect book to read is an ideal worth moving towards, it's an ideal worth understanding, but is also deeply unrealistic in the big picture.

As much as it may feel like part of our frustration with the workplace, and so part of what we wish were different in our own projects compared to what happens in a day job, is those compromises. In the big picture of something existing, everything that exists has flaws and shortcuts. That's how a lot of energy and time can be better put into the other pieces of it, or later going back to optimize and prioritize where it makes the biggest difference given hindsight.

Aim for first pass, a mindset that I need to do each part just as good as it needs to be so I can move past it.

Consider how satisficing fits into the bigger aim of avoiding distraction due to regret or guilt, worrying if there might have been some slightly better or more perfect solution. It was the rational choice to have gone head with the one that met our criteria.

If a group can't decide which kind of food to get tonight, so you throw in and say, "You know what? It's not worth worrying about. Let's just get pizza." You declare, this is the level of stress worth giving this problem. It would be absurd, if the next day, you got a phone call from someone in that friend group, who said, "I interviewed the others from our group. I got their weighted averages for their preferences. I did a spreadsheet matrix that calculated, given the cost of each food, times those weights, pizza was not, in fact, the ideal choice. The optimal choice would have been..."

Slow down, buddy.

That is a completely inappropriate use of our time and energy for what it was. Even if we had gone through that process before we got to eat, everyone would have been so hungry and frustrated, in a weird head space from not eating on time, that this would be the regret instead - that we had used our time so ineffectively and irresponsibly in proportion to the decision.

In Musashi's classic, *Book of Five Rings*, from 1645, he made a point that when building a structure out of wooden boards, such as a temple, there are boards it's more important to have attractive, because they're decorative in their positioning. It's not important for those boards to be strong. There are other boards it's important are strong and sturdy, because they're

load-bearing, but perhaps hidden, and so it's a waste of time to worry about the appearances of those boards.

If we aren't careful about how we allocate our time, energy, or attention for a task, we can wind up in the mistaken belief that every board needs to be aesthetically beautiful, that every board needs to be as strong as it can possibly be, whether or not it's even seen, whether or not it's bearing any load.

A strong enough board to be load-bearing might be harder to work with for aesthetic purposes. On the other hand, a board that is easy enough to work with for aesthetics might be nowhere near strong enough to bear loads. Whether we're dealing with art, code, or another piece, there will be parts which we need to keep like clay, and easy to rework, and there will be other parts that must be strong and rooted, even if ugly, because we're building on those.

If we fail to have that perspective, to make these kinds of trade-offs, between where and how we prioritize which features or qualities of work we're doing, the overall result suffers. We produce something inferior to what we could have done, had we been a little more clever about the fact that when there are a hundred parts of a program, every one of them is not equally deserving of the same level of polish, attention, and fine iteration.

Otherwise, you run the risk of getting lost on a side trail, like working on the perfect metal material, that will only be used on a jacket zipper, for a clothing item in a closet, which the player may never open to look inside. As unlikely as that example may sound, if we're not conscious of the real risk of us doing this, people do it in even more invisible ways than this jacket zipper.

All the time, I catch, and professionally coach through, programmers who get lost in aspects of deeply, deeply, deeply under the hood details. The code gets the job done. It works. It's fine. It serves every needed use-case, but they're off worrying, "our enemies system can only support 200 enemies simultaneously, could it support 20,000?"

So I say, hold on, look at this game you're building. Does it need to support 20,000, or 200,000 enemies? Does it need to support more than 50?

Satisficing is about optimizing your life and your time, and the number of projects you're able to complete, and the amount of things you're able to get into those projects, rather than getting lost in details like cleaning up code no one else may have to look at, and no one may ever need to build on again. The next time you need it, you're probably going to rewrite it, because you'll do a much better job of it with hindsight, rather than trying to wrestle it apart, untangle, and rehook the old attempt into something new. Satisficing is a mindset about the big picture, and not getting lost in details.

[03:40:00 in one-file audio]

While it's valuable to have an understanding of what the final result should look like, and what you want to move towards, while you're actually doing it you need to be asking, instead, "Is this the right level of detail for a rough draft? Is it an appropriate level of rigor for where I am in the learning process?"

Thorough playtesting is an important part of the process for commercial-grade game development. When people are working on their first few projects, there are so many very rough edges that they are still learning from that. You might still test it with a person or two, but the same level of large-scale testing won't make it any better. It's just an inappropriate match for that level someone's at.

There is a reason why every middle school science paper shouldn't be submitted through the peer-review academic journal process. It's not that the step is wrong. It's that the step is a wrong fit for that level of experience.

These things can sound absurdist, if we focus on fields that have existed for thousands of years, as part of the common educational path. But, if you're in an emerging discipline, if you're self teaching, and you don't have a facilitator to help pace you based on your progression and level, it can be difficult to get a read on ourselves, to allow ourselves to make those learning stumbles, and to accept this can be the right way to do it during our first month, or first year, in this whole new field to us. Warm up to the idea of satisficing, learn to be able to say to yourself this is a fine level of progress for my first book, first game, first podcast episode, or first song, then moving on to the next one.

If we zoom in, the same can be said for each phase. I may have spent as long as I should in pre-production, or preparation, before I need to move forward. I may have spent as long as I can or should in editing and revision process, before I need to move on to the next thing.

I'll get a more holistic perspective with hindsight.

Spending months editing someone's first YouTube video isn't going to turn it into something of an extremely high caliber. What that needs is more practice, going through the full cycle again, and again, and again,

I want to share one last story here related to this concept of satisficing, as we're emphasizing for the productive mindset. This one's a TV story, from The Adventures of Pete & Pete. This was a kid's show I enjoyed on Nickelodeon growing up.

There was an underwear inspector - as in, the person who worked at the factory to make sure on the assembly line that everything came out perfectly. Younger Pete noticed that every time he opened a pair of underwear, and liked them, there was a tag inside that said "Inspected by Inspector 34."

They found this person. He was a perfectionist - that's how the inspector ensured all the underwear so perfect. Everything this person did, he was meticulous about doing. So, they challenged him to eat barbecue, prepared by their father, because when you eat barbecue, it's a challenging thing to do cleanly. Inevitably, you get barbecue all over your fingers.

The barbecue was eaten, napkin set aside, and there was not a single stain, he didn't have sticky fingers. What the boys figured out, and the show illustrated, was this was the wrong way to eat barbecue! If you're doing it without getting sticky fingers, barbecue sauce on your face, maybe a minor stain on your clothes, then you're not actually doing it right. You're not doing it in the spirit of it.

As you're learning new things, and tackling new fields, as you're taking on skills outside your comfort zone, it can be valuable to recognize the kinds of imperfections that, in the big picture, are the better way to do things. It's not merely okay to make those kind of errors. If you're doing beginner writing, beginner poetry, beginning music, beginning programming, beginning acting, that is the correct way to learn, and move forward, to make these mistakes, to explore, to get them out of your system while you're still new to the field.

Make those errors at a time when it's most recoverable, while you have the least or no audience yet, to run into the limits of what happens. When you try to do things the way that seems natural to you that gives you, in the long run, a richer understanding than if, from the beginning, you instead try to do everything so meticulously, so perfectly, so thoroughly, as to never allow yourself to explore and find where those lines are, when rules can be broken.

Find where it fits your style, your voice, and your approach to do things in a way that's a little bit off the beaten path. The right way to do it might be slightly imperfect.

Chapter 11: Continuous Recovery

Let's talk about how to bounce back when it doesn't go right, because inevitably, it will not go right.

One of my fond memories from my years of wrestling was in the mornings, we would run laps around the gym. Whenever we'd finish that time running I would then - as a kind of stunt, I was really proud of myself at this age about my ability to do this - I would walk on my hands one lap around the basketball court. The trick to walking on hands is to realize that all you're really doing is falling forward and catching yourself at the same rate you're falling.

That's what to picture here for continuous recovery.

A lot of progress happens in the form of making mistakes, followed by recovering from them. Keep on, make another mistake, then recover from it. That's where the growth happens. This doesn't have to be a sign you're doing something wrong. You're going to falter when you're doing things. There are going to be parts that are imperfect.

There's going to be parts where you put down a task that turns out to be too advanced.

You'll put down something which intend to do, but it'll have been such a white whale, aspirational aim for so long, that you may find you've got mental hang-ups around the fear of completing it, and how that's gonna affect your identity.

These things are going to happen.

What I want to reassure you is that this is part of the process. It's like learning to skateboard, or to ride a bike. You're going to fall off. You're going to get bruises and scrapes. The problem is if you misread those minor imperfections and minor mistakes or slip-ups as a sign you're either hopeless, or doing it wrong. All these mean, when you're a beginner, is you're doing it at all.

That's how you learn to skateboard or ride a bike - in this case, to manage your attention - by making mistakes you would not have made otherwise. It's because you're really doing it. The people who aren't making those mistakes are either past it, because they have put in the time to get past those experiences and the beginning errors, or because they never made those mistakes, and so are not fluent in the thing you're practicing.

There's this moment when anyone's new to programming and they see a bunch of errors - errors in the compiler or script interpreter. Often, they're written in red. For a tense moment, they feel like they just got handed back a badly graded paper, or a final they failed, and wonder, "Am I screwing this up?"

The important context you hope the video course, tutor, teacher or their environment helps them understand is no, these kinds of red errors in programming are just part of doing it. While you're going to increasingly get more interesting errors, and harder problems to solve later, they're never going to go away. You may as well learn to love them as a healthy part of the process.

The same is true here. As your ability to dictate your actions grows, so too will you increase the scope of what you try to do with one sitting. There's always going to be faltering. There's always going to be a little scraping, some back and forth, and misestimating time. That's your sign you're still growing. It's a good sign. Embrace that. Allow it. Don't feel guilt or shame over it.

Be proud of yourself for putting yourself through it. That's how you know you're not plateauing, or not getting too comfortable.

Speaking of all that faltering and the scraping, there's a Winston Churchill quote, "When you're going through hell, keep going." If you're having a hard time, and it's not going the way you hope, you've got to keep pushing through it. You don't want to linger there, don't want to settle in, don't want to just let yourself sink down.

I say sink down - as a huge fan of the NeverEnding Story, and there is a devastatingly traumatic scene with Artax the horse. I apologize in advance for what I'm digging up for people, who saw this as a kid. In the swamps of sadness a horse is sinking down, and the boy Atreyu is just watching this horse, basically, drown in mud, right in front of him. It's pretty rough for a kid's movie. The 80s were a different time. That's what I picture with the way people beat themselves up, shame and guilt themselves over something not going quite the way they wanted it to.

You're calibrating an instrument here. If you looked into a microscope, or you look into a camera, and you see something is blurry, do you get upset? Do you feel bad? Do you get angry? Or, do you find the knob to turn, quietly and calmly adjusting until it's in focus?

Quietly adjust your dial.

Things are going to be blurry when you first look in. Things are going to not work out perfectly immediately. Getting upset, sad, angry, frustrated, flustered, sinking into that sadness, isn't going to fix or change anything.

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The feelings are valid. The feelings are worth acknowledging. The feelings, also, in many cases, aren't helping you back out from them.

Look for the dial to change for focus, make adjustments, and try again.

It's part of the path.

Speaking of a path, same thing - if you're walking somewhere, and there's an obstacle in your way, do you get mad at the obstacle? Or do you go around it? You go around it. When you encounter things that aren't going right, part of bouncing back is recognizing the right path around it may be a little longer, but if so that's the fastest path forward, in which case, why get frustrated? It's the path forward.

Celebrate any forward progress at all. That's another part of bouncing back: recognizing and giving yourself credit for wins you do have, even if they are small. Count the things that would not have happened, had you not set an arbitrary bar.

I knew a professional development director at a giant AAA game company, he always said his objective for the team was to meet 85% of the goals they set. Even he didn't think they should hit one hundred percent. He said, if they hit a hundred percent, you don't know if they're pushing themselves. Who knows how far past that they might have gone? 85%, he felt was a healthy level. So, if you're not nailing a hundred percent of your objectives, you might be in line with some professional business thinking. You're setting goals that are stretching you, moving you forward, and challenging you. That can be a good sign.

The goal exists mostly for direction. Think of it as a thing on the horizon you are moving towards. Your steps on the whiteboard are steps in that direction. You might find along the way, on second thought, it's much farther that direction than you thought, so you want to go in another direction you found along the way, towards a whole different opportunity. You could pivot your steps that direction. That might be fine. You probably can see things from having walked partway in that direction which you could not see before. That's now a new, more informed decision. That's not failing, that's forward progress. That's better!

Make sure you're giving yourself give yourself credit for what you've done. Even that you're challenging your comfort zone, that you even started using a system, this is already a win, because it means you're on your way to improving.

A classic thing about help is when we ask for help, and seek help, searching for a way forward, something to get us past what we're stuck on, we'll find it. We may not find it where we first ask, or in the fashion we first looked for, but the fact that we are now engaged in finding it opens us up, it means we've overcome the hurdle of thinking, "I don't need help. I am fine as I am."

You're past all that. That's a huge win, in itself.

If someone at the gym is feeling bad because they can't go for long on the treadmill, because it has been a long time since they were using one, that may be the best sign that they're in the

right place, doing the right thing, going the right direction, and simply have to do more of this, so it will become easier with practice.

If there's a specific task you're putting down that you're not getting yourself to do, and you're not having success in doing, it's important to scope it down when you come back to it. We cannot simply try again on the exact same thing. You're going to run into the exact same challenge each time, until you make a little smaller.

Here's what I want you to visualize when it comes to the importance of working with a smaller task, if the last time we tried the task it didn't fit. This might sound a little bit patronizing, it's a strong visual, I assure you it can help you avoid making this incredibly common, entirely human mistake.

You know those little block toys children play with, where they're trying to push through a big red square through the big red square hole, and a big blue cylinder through a blue cylinder hole? When people are very young they will just bump the wrong shape against the wrong hole, banging that square against the star, pushing the large cylinder up against the smaller circle hole. We can look at that and see that this is not going to work. If it didn't fit the last time they bumped it, I'm not sure why their brain thinks next time they try it's going to work.

This is a million times more apparent when we're dealing with physical objects. It's substantially a harder thing to size up, conceptually, when what we're dealing with is an abstract, complex work task. That's why it still happens to us as adults. We continue to take the task that is too big to fit in that time we're trying to give it. We will bump them together, finding it doesn't fit. Then we'll try to bump it together again. It still won't fit.

A special case of this I want to speak to, because it's incredibly common even for people who are, or used to be, relatively advanced at something, is a version of this that happens to people coming back to something after a long break away from doing it.

Part of what happens is they are still, mentally and by habit, trying to fit in tasks based on the level of proficiency and momentum they were at before they took the long break. You can see why this is a problem. Some people in our club who have been multiple time project leads, taken a long break, then had an incredibly difficult time getting back into the swing of things. The difficulty is, in part, a mental block caused by trying to jump back in at the same level that they were at, with all the momentum that they had.

This would be like if you used to run marathons, took a few years break, and then tried to run another marathon. You're going to wreck yourself.

When you're wading back into something after an extended break - doesn't matter if you're writing code, or writing stories - you have to work back up to it, a little like as though you are

new, using the same kinds of steps. You can get through the steps much faster your next time through them, but still, begin by working your way back up.

Think of the training routine someone might do to get themselves ready for a marathon. It doesn't matter that they used to do it, used to be in a certain kind of shape, or had a certain amount of momentum. They still have to work back up to it. It's easier the next time we do it, but we still can't skip those steps. We've got to go through the steps faster.

What if it's something you've been putting off, delaying it, and then you finally find a chance to start? You'll be tempted, because I've seen this happen to people, to binge. It's like the saying goes, strike while the iron's hot? Well now that we're in the mood to do something, we figure we might as well hammer at it, working for 15 hours on the problem."

Don't do it.

This isn't just about being anti-crunch - but I am anti-crunch. What happens here is if you exhaust yourself, guess what happens? You associate your action on this problem with the dread of exhaustion. You won't touch the problem until the next time you feel as though you can again put 15 solid hours into it, screwing up your next day due to being too tired.

We have to wade back into it, slow and steady.

What about once a week? Sometimes it's a minimum. But when you're trying to way back into it. having a hard time because you were making it too big of a thing to yourself, temporarily you might make that your maximum, to pace yourself, to ease back in. Give yourself small tasks to get some footing, and traction to build from.

Slow and steady consistency wins, like Aesop's classic fable, tortoise versus the hare. Over time, a lot of challenges are marathons, not sprints. To bounce back you need to come back into it slow and steady, even if you used to be kind of on top of it, you still have to ease back in.

That emphasis on slow and steady is going to fit naturally with our next section, leading to lifelong sustainability.

But, first, a note on continuous recovery, from the famous coach John Wooden. He said, "Things turn out best for the people who make the best of the way things turn out." When it comes to recovery, it can be so essential, this way to frame it, so that no matter what happened, and no matter how it went, what can you do to make the best of however it came out? By the time it's already happened, I can't change the past. How can I build off my learning from it? Maybe what I did is I discovered something new about myself. I may be equipped with one more note to be able to teach somebody else. Part of recovery is not getting stuck on our past mistakes.

My dad used to explain to me, and make the point about, one of the key skills in golf - which is such a part of his life that my middle name is literally Lee, after the golfer Lee Trevino - one of the key parts about golfing successfully if you have a bad stroke, and the ball doesn't wind up where you want it to go, you can't let that affect every stroke you make after it. Each time, you have to make the best of where the ball landed. Otherwise, you wind up getting mad at yourself, regretting, asking "How did I wind up here?" This thought is, by that point, only a distraction. It's secondary to the fact that here I am, now I have to figure out where I've got to go, and with a clean state of mind, do my best to get there.

Chapter 12: Lifelong Sustainability

One of the most powerful ways you can deploy the whiteboard (or your notepad, if that's how you choose to do it), if you haven't already discovered this trick, is you can use it to gradually force a habit.

For all the writing and literature out there about how powerful habits are, for transforming our identity, and improving our lives, changing our fitness or advancing our productivity - there is so much out there on the power of habits. A lot of that same research shows that if you can get yourself to do something for three weeks, 20 times in a row, or every day for a certain period of time with a certain consistency, with a certain rhythm to it, it forms a habit. Then, it takes a lot less effort to get yourself to do it.

Think of the connection here to your whiteboard. We have it specifically because, though there are tasks you don't need it for - you were obviously doing something already before it - there are also tasks that you might need a little bit of an aid to do. The key realization we want to concentrate on is that these are not two static, unchanging groups. It's entirely possible for you, through repetition, to move something from the group of things that you needed an aid to get yourself to do, over into that category of tasks that you don't actually need it for!

[04:00:00 in one-file audio]

Think about it like taking off the training wheels.

Another good thing to arise, is we start to form evidence to ourselves that it's either not so scary, that I can do this, and that I have real experience to draw upon. Past a certain level of skill, it becomes fun. Everything is a struggle when you're new to it, while everything's new, so everything is a question and everything is uncertain, that all makes us uneasy. The more we start to find a flow state, we start to like doing it. We feel good at it. It's rewarding. It's satisfying.

But, that doesn't happen until we're put through the slog of learning the chords, overcoming the basics, going through the exercises. The board can help you push through that hard hurdle at first, without having to become reliant on it for the rest of your life.

It can work like a spark plug for the first five or 20 times, until you get the habit going. A neat book on this is Atomic Habits, in terms of picking the kinds of habits you want to target. It's by James Clear. He's got a lovely quote in there. He says, "Every action you take is a vote for the type of person you wish to become. As the votes build up, so does the evidence of your new identity." (That's, again, from James Clear, in Atomic Habits.)

If you can get yourself to do the things you write on your whiteboard, and can convince yourself that this is a habit worth forming, as long as you can control enough energy to write on the whiteboard what you mean for yourself to do, it's leverage to get yourself to follow through on it - you then have the power to change your habits in a way that, before, involved a much greater deal of struggle.

Let's zoom out and look at the big picture of how this habit formation, and about doing something in order to make it easier to do and in order to continue doing it, how this fits into the overarching scheme. What happens is, initially, there's something we put down, in part, because it was hard for us to do, because we knew there was a gap between what we want to have happen, and what was going to happen if we didn't do something additional on top of our usual, to steer ourselves into doing it.

Let's say, it's to exercise at 8 p.m. on weeknights.

Perhaps I start out with doing, "I worked out by 8:00 p.m." Or, maybe, "I went for a jog around the block by 8:00 p.m." When we first start doing it, it's a necessary change to our prior habit. We are out of shape, so it's harder to do, and it doesn't feel so good, which leaves us winded. We are unimpressed by our pace, at the distance we can cover in that time.

But, as you continue to do it, it gets increasingly natural to begin itching for, soon even feeling like it, when that time of day rolls around and it's our time to do that. We don't get quite as winded. We don't get as stressed from it. We don't feel as ashamed over the distance we cover, or the pace at which we do it. This is because it gets easier, the more we do it.

In this way, it moves that, from the list of things which we needed to technique to do, over to the other lists of things where we were going to do it anyway, but maybe we still put it on the whiteboard only to maintain that important habit of not only using the board only for things that are a stretch for us.

This potentially bumps something off the other list - from the things we used to have to put on the board just so we had something going on that wasn't a stretch. Maybe it's brushing teeth, maybe it's pouring breakfast cereal, something that happened automatically.

Naturally, since we've added to the list, we can bump something else off it. This opens up another gap on the list of what we are growing towards, the stretch goals. Now that we feel we are in better shape, feeling like we're in better condition, perhaps we apply a new stretch for ourselves. Now we'd like to start practicing racquetball, join a club sport, or try beach volleyball on the weekends.

We have moved in the direction of what was previously within arm's reach. Like Tarzan swinging through the jungle on vines, along the way we are taking what used to be in reach as a stretch for us, and putting it into our background

We use the technique to push through that steepest part of an early learning curve, the slowest parts of audience building, through our struggle with confidence when we're starting out on something new. The aim is that by keeping this up, at some point, we will find ourselves putting things on our board, to assign and direct our attention to do, which when we first started doing this, we would not even dreamed of putting there. Things that seemed so far away, and out of reach. Perhaps, from where we started, it was out of reach. We've moved ourselves through that space, progressing from what we could do next, towards new things to do next from there.

The next point we're going to focus on is keeping things to once a week at minimum. You've either got a job, full-time classes, in some cases maybe a family you're taking care of, but you don't have a lot of time. I cannot emphasize enough: at least once a week, you have to be doing something, or you're going to lose the thread.

How this applies to using the whiteboard, is if you go more than a week without putting things on the whiteboard, the habit is going to fade away. You're gonna lose touch with it. You want to be using it at least once a week on something. For each particular thing that you're doing - if you're working on coding, art, music, whatever that thing is you're doing - if you can touch that thing at least once a week, and I really mean touch it, making some sort of change and not just looking at it, not just listening to it, but to open it and make a change at least once per week: over the year, you're going to get a 50X multiplier on that. (I subtracted two vacation weeks.) That's a substantial amount of progress to show, even for something done only once a week.

Sometimes we'll get carried away. Sometimes you mean to barely get started on it, but then realize this is working out pretty well, it's easier than expected. Suddenly, we put two hours into it, and we have something cooler to show. This only happens if you give yourself the chance to touch it once a week.

The modern world's rhythm is based on weeks - TV schedules, weekends. Even if you're a freelancer, a student, on some sort of non-traditional work schedule, the week is still a good-sized cycle.

If you go more than a week without it, what it means is on a typical week, you're not fitting it in, anywhere. Life is, for better or for worse, a series of typical weeks.

Can you not tell me, concretely, that you do it on Wednesday nights? Or you do it on Tuesday mornings? Have you picked a time and said, "This is my target for when I'm going to use my whiteboard to assign myself a task," - to move forward on this thing, whether advancing through a video course, or doing a next exercise? Then it's probably not going to happen.

We have to find a way to fit it into a typical week, or we are just fooling ourselves. I've advised hundreds of projects in the past 15 years. One thing I've discovered holds true, almost without exception, is if a typical week passes without touching a project, and something from the outside

isn't compelling us to stay on that project, so we're not being forced to, that project will slip away. The thread will get lost. If we're not careful, it will go unfinished.

I stress about a typical week, because when you have holiday weeks, vacation weeks, those need to be used for holiday or vacation. Don't count those. If we expect that in those two weeks we're going to make up for all the progress of when we did nothing during typical weeks, that's not how reality works. You need that time to rest, just in order to function the rest of the year.

Part of fitting things in weekly, as well, means you're making compromises and adjustments as you go. It's less about are we producing what the initial vision was, and more about are we producing something releasable on the target deadline? Are we making something at all? That might mean we're cutting as we go, as for every week we look at what we didn't do which we thought we'd get to, deciding, were some of those things not as important? If we carry something forward, then it knocks something else off the schedule we thought we were going to do.

You can't make all the cuts at the very end. You have to make adjustments as you go, using your feedback from yourself in how when you try to do something, how much got done? This is used to recalibrate the size of the exercise or part of a problem you're taking on. The short-term deadlines say, I've decided I want to have the version I can get done tonight. Again, think of it as a draft you may later come back to redo. That's fine. What it gives you is kind of an artificial, micro panic emergency, an early deadline to enforce a real checkpoint.

You don't have to actually have to panic, don't let it overwhelm you, don't get nervous or mixed up over it! But it can give you that sense of just enough urgency, that this has to happen tonight.

This is how, for five years, I wrote a weekly blog entry on hobbygamedev.com every month. I told myself. I'm releasing four articles. I said whatever articles I can come up with that time, my goal was to keep to one per week every single month.

To do that I'd scope down my articles, even if that meant doing one that wasn't as well researched, or I didn't feel as proud about. That was my pivot to keep to my goal. I kept myself doing it, and the momentum was important to getting the progress I needed out of it. Even if it meant some little compromises along the way, I kept producing articles, moving on to new subjects, instead of getting stuck for seven or eight months at a time trying to craft the perfect one. I was able to take many more chances, exploring many more topics. That set me free to go on to more things, because I said here is the date at which I'm going to move past this, to focus on the next problem. It helped keep me thinking, moving thoughts forward, so five years later, I was hundreds of articles further in my thinking than I would have been, had I never kept up that habit.

The same thing happened for my daily videos, my vlogging, which in some ways partially is responsible for leading to the existence of this material here.

On this point of how we can advance our thinking by talking through something - this works even when it's not about the response we receive. There's a general pattern for this called "rubber ducking," or "rubber duck debugging," to use the programming version of it. In programming, rubber duck debugging means you are talking through the programming problem with someone who is not trying to fix it for you, who's listening as you talk your way through it, so you can untangle the problems yourself, mostly by putting the issue in order while verbalizing it.

[04:10:00 in one-file audio]

It's called rubber ducking, because in the programming community, you can literally find programmers who have a duck on their desk. It's half a joke, but half because genuinely, even speaking out your problems to an inanimate object, or an unresponsive audience, can still help you untangle your thoughts around your situation. Now, we can go one further - in many cases, talking through it with a person is at least slightly more effective than an object. We might still call that rubber duck debugging, if we're talking about it with a friend, a significant other, somebody else who just doesn't have the relevant expertise to bounce back actual solutions to us, or to help us troubleshoot it. It could be anyone who keeps us going and talking about it, whoever can tell that there's something bothering us which we might like to talk through until it's unwound.

If we set things up on a recurring basis, it can be a valuable way to help ourselves keep moving forward on our goals, and in our thinking, about what kinds of things we may assign ourselves on the whiteboard.

If we set up an ongoing meeting with someone to touch base, then we keep ourselves moving forward. I'm reminded of when I was a graduate research student, and I would have a meeting every other week with my grad advisors. I'd make progress on my research papers approximately once every two weeks, because I knew that I needed to be ready to show up and talk for awhile about what I had been doing.

What is nice about the rubber duck technique is that, unlike in the case of graduate research, you don't need to find somebody who has a PhD to listen to you. You can use the buddy system with a close friend, a significant other, someone who is in something only very roughly adjacent to the field you're in. For this to work, it's not important that you are in the exact same domain, so long as you both care about each other enough to be willing to sit there, and nod your head as they talk through something. They're talking through for their own benefit, just as you'll be doing.

Like everything here, I practice what I preach. I have multiple groups I take part in, where on a semi-regular basis we meet up, and mostly rubber duck with each other what we're currently working on. That helps us hold ourselves accountable. By doing this a semi-regular basis, we're

able to have checkpoints as far as what we're aiming to have done by next time, keeping track of progress, and keeping ourselves honest for the next time we report in - did I do the thing I thought I was going to do by this time? Maybe it adjusted a bit. Maybe it pivoted somewhat, but at least we don't let that time slip away, completely losing track of where it was going. That allows us to better spread it out, to think more long-term, and so to do it more sustainably, helping you to see it through.

What I hope you'll really take with you is the importance of lifelong sustainability in your approach to doing the things you're aiming to do. This has a special significance to me, as a trainer of game developers, because so many game makers - this is a pervasive thing across our craft and across the industry - burn out before they get anywhere near accomplishing what drove them to get involved in doing it in the first place, long before they made a single game of the genre they wanted, before they reached the audience or type of audience they were wanting to speak to, before their skills got anywhere near creating the kinds of things that inspired them to get into it.

We are of no use to our players, from a practical standpoint, or to ourselves creatively, if we're burned-out, worn down, going out like a stick of dynamite, instead of like a candle.

Every so often. I'll meet a beginning game developer who joins my training group, and thinks they're going to impress me with aggressive, severe, over the top level of passion, wanting to skip ahead to our advanced sections. Every single time, and I've seen enough times to know, that's not actually promising. What that is, is a manifestation of impatience, a lack of maturity needed to really, truly, develop the skills as a foundation to ever reach the advanced levels.

Skill development, results, audience growth, all those kinds of things take time. That means we need an approach for doing things in that we can pace ourselves to realistically, reasonably, and stick with it long term, without it needing to take over our life as the only thing we're doing merely to be able to keep doing it.

If you want to give yourself a fair shot, and I can't imagine why else you'd be doing something, then you have to be reasonable with yourself in finding a way to do it sustainably, lifelong.

Chapter 13: Fears and Self-Sabotage

Avoiding a fear of failure comes down mostly to reframing how we see failure.

It's important to emphasize, going back to an earlier point we've been making throughout, did we take the shot? Did we give ourselves the chance, and put ourselves out there? If we did, then what we saved ourselves from in those situations is regret for having not given ourselves the chance.

Failure becomes if you hadn't applied to the job, or if you hadn't at least attempted the project you wanted to build.

There's another side, across from fear of failure, we're going to put more time into, because for many people it's a bigger hang up than fear of failure.

That's fear of success.

Success can mean different things to different people. In examples that follow, I might refer to success as a monetary metric, because for a lot of people that's the most quantifiable. It's designed to be the most universal currency, quite literally, for it, but there are many other forms it can take. For some people, success is getting direct engagement with a professor whose research, or an artist whose work they admire, and getting a chance to meet, in a way, some of their inspirations. For some people, success is pure traffic numbers.

Speaking of game developers, we're going to hit that specific example here, because although I know it's not the world all people going through this are coming from, it is the one I train people in. You'll be able to extrapolate this pretty easily into what you do.

As we make these examples, and talk about success here, we'll establish a few different things. We'll show how success can be defined as a way that it is absolutely, one hundred percent, achievable and realistic. We're also going to draw upon some examples that address the anxiety or discomfort around success, for cases that may sound like hitting it out of the park.

I've met beginning game developers who felt hung up on, or uncomfortable about, looking at examples like what happened with Flappy Bird, a tiny game that took off in an enormously unexpected way, but through that drew a lot of unwanted attention to the developer. Or, even, a case like Minecraft, which sold for a ton of money to Microsoft, but the relationship of the original author to that project has been an unfortunately complicated one.

Even though the odds of this happening to any given person round down to zero, even still, if somebody sees very vivid examples in media, and thinks of it as, would I buy a lottery ticket

where that was the prize - is that actually something I could even want to have happen to me - and if the answer is no, then they're going to shy away from doing anything that might even add a nonzero chance to find themselves in the situation they don't want to be in.

So, I know it's going to sound like, in a few cases, we're addressing some very high levels of success or visibility, even though it's, again, not what everyone's looking for, and not likely to be many people's experiences.

If we haven't settled our nerves about what action even theoretically may lead to, that can be one more factor causing us to self-sabotage. That's why we want to address it.

For some game makers the success they're putting off, resisting, or fighting is even just building the kind of game that they most want to make. This may be out of a concern that it won't come out as well as we hope, or it may be out of fear of becoming unmoored if we won't know what we'll do next.

When we look in the direction that we want to go in, we actually are deeply, instinctively, driven to back away from it, scared about what might have to change. It's scary. What if we won't be satisfied? So we squirm, struggle, and resist to make progress in the direction that we know we mean to be going in.

If we listen to the things that we're resisting, listen to those things we are pulling away from, that we're shy of what might happen if we explore down that path, sometimes that can be our guide. That can be our signal of which way, exactly, we should be moving in.

The direction is most important. That you found the direction is already a win.

Part of why I carry a compass with me, one that looks like a pocket watch, is a reminder: too many people are first concerned with how fast they're going, instead of which direction they're going.

If you've identified your success to be afraid of it, that's already a good sign. At least you know your direction. You've identified your compass. That's step one.

Let's talk about why you might not be moving that direction - why you're resisting it, and shutting down when you start to make progress.

This is incredibly common. It's experienced by more people than not.

The whiteboard is focused on the near term, but if we have this problem hanging us up and don't address the challenges causing it, we're going to steer ourselves in the wrong near-term direction with the whiteboard. We'll do the tactics wrong, because at a high level, we're afraid of where that's going to lead.

It doesn't matter how directly you are in control, if you are trying to get someplace, but every time you see that you're about to be there, you turn away from it.

I used to live in Atlanta. There's a highway 285 that encircles the city. If your goal is to get to Atlanta, but every time you see "now entering Atlanta" you deviate from that, turn away from it, you will find yourself encircling on the 285 saying, "Maybe I can take the next exit. Not right now. Not just yet." If we're not careful, we can spend years encircling our actual goal, project, or target, that thing which we think we're building towards, when really we're dilly-dallying around the periphery of it, because at a higher level we're sabotaging. If we are pushing away from the actual end target, our localized control won't matter. It's a failure to realize we might be using our control to specifically steer against our objective!

[04:20:00 in one-file audio]

Not to scare you, or make you uneasy, but something I've certainly seen with a lot of people is that they've circled moving towards their goal for so long, that at some point, something in themselves, or in their outside circumstances, changed, in such a way that it was no longer an option. They always assumed they could do it later. They assumed next year, next week, five years from now - someday, I'll get to it.

They lost track of time, so who knows how long it was, but now it's no longer an option.

There's another reason this catches people, and time gets away - we get better at what we practice. If you practice not doing it, year after year, you're going to get better and better at still not doing it.

It's habit-forming, to keep passing those exits.

There are people I've met who for years have gotten a lot of practice at making excuses for not doing the thing that, on the surface, they say they want to do. Somebody who spends 15 years doing something is going to become an expert at it. Somebody who spends 15 years not doing something is going to become an expert at not doing it.

There is reason to prioritize. If we're not moving towards it, if we are not making active progress towards the direction we want to go, we need to. We do not want to take for granted that we have infinite time. None of us have infinite time.

When we frame it correctly, even if our instinct is to back up a little, that can be like we're backing up to get a running start to jump across a gap, instead of backing away in retreat.

It's not as absurd as it sounds, to resist making progress in the direction we know is best, that we want for ourselves. I've met people who have lost years of their lives to it. There are periods of my life where I was one of these people.

In my experience, it tends to take one of a few different forms.

One of these is due to having awful or negative role models. This happens because we see examples in the press, on videos, in media, even in fiction depictions, and we tell ourselves, "I would never want to be like that person." We further rationalize, not only do I not want to be like that person, but their success in this is what made them a jerk, maybe their best selling game or their best-selling app put too much pressure on them for their next project, shutting down their creativity. The explosive growth of their company, or even their day-to-day career, forced them to prioritize something they don't love because it was too successful. They lost sight of their creative drive, and the reason they got into it. They love to teach, but now have to be an administrator. They love to program, now they have to be a manager.

Is this starting to sound familiar?

Another common cause - we'll hit the causes first - is worrying about issues we imagine, or may even be based on real stories, successful people might face, that people who are less successful (by conventional measures) don't need to worry about. Doesn't anyone with a high profile on the Internet wind up with trolls and hate mail?

Built into some of this is a fear over what if I had more to lose? Won't we be too twisted up with fear of losing it, and couldn't that give me horrible anxiety over it? There's a classic Turkish proverb: he who sleeps on the floor will not fall out of bed.

A third concern, that also leads to struggling against our own success, is defining ourselves by the struggle. We tie ourselves up in a martyr identity, feeling pride in an infinite task, like that of Sisyphus. We feel as if the struggle is, for its own sake, somehow worthy of merit.

This often happens to indies who make enormous multi-year projects, where it never has a clear deadline. The struggle against the game is their identity. They feel fearful over who they will be after it finishes. Perpetual tinkering is often how this goes on, when there's no deadline, no vision, and no defined end state.

It might be easy to dismiss this possibility, as if this isn't really the problem you have, if you don't have a mess that you're ignoring. Let me ask you this - I think this may put more people on the defensive - right now, how many emails are unread in your inbox? Is it dozens? Hundreds? Thousands? Is it more than a dozen or two?

I'm not even asking for inbox zero.

There is something comfortable about having a pile sitting in there. It makes us feel busy, it makes us feel important, it makes us feel connected.

But that's nonsense.

A bunch of that is spam, auto-sent, notifications, garbage newsletters you are not even reading.

If you're not wallowing in a mountain of emails, maybe think about how many tabs you have open. If not on your desktop or laptop browser, what about your phone's browser?

What this is actually doing is distracting your focus, within an environment which has immense productive potential. The email inbox is a remarkably powerful form of communication, getting chewed up by all this mess.

We could probably cut through it, in half an hour or an hour - maybe use a whiteboard task to give ourselves an aim to clear it up.

A lot of people won't.

They see the mess as a comfortable thing to sit in. They wallow in it. It's from tying up identity with feeling the world is on our shoulders. They're not sure who they will be after they solve it.

Let's go back and focus on these three obstacles.

In the bad role models case: become the role model you wish you had. That's going to help other people live a better life, when they see you being successful, by whatever metric's important to you - not saying it's money, fame, or sales charts, whatever the metric is for you success - when people see you are successful in that way, and maintaining your integrity, while being visible about it, without it turning into a monster? That can help other people overcome that hang up you had of not seeing positive examples.

There are actually quite a few successful, good people out there. They are not as memorable as the ones easiest to target and dramatize. When you heard me say to be a great example, while making it visible, part of what you thought might have been, doesn't that seem egotistical? You're right. For that reason, some of the best people out there, at least in terms of their giving back, in this sense that they have maintained success and integrity, are unfortunately going out of their way to not attach their names and public credit to the good they do in the world.

This doesn't make them inherently better people than anybody else. What it does mean is there is an unfortunate effect on visibility, in that good role models are hardest to see. Part of makes them a good role model is they're not braggarts. They don't want all that extra attention. They don't want credit. They give credit to somebody else. They'd rather maintain an illusion some organization is doing it on its own.

It's not that there are no good examples, it's just that they're so much harder to see or find. Don't let that play tricks on you. Success does not always corrupt or mess up people. Those are just the easiest to see, because those people hang on to all the credit they can get.

When it comes to fear over having something to lose, here's is a place where I'd like to share a short story about getting out of a rut.

Say you live in a muddy hole, underground. This is a deep hole, a dark pit. It's all you've ever known. It's moist, because of groundwater. There are lots of bugs. But, you've made it work, and it's all you've ever known. You got moisture out of the dirt, figuring out how to suck water out of it. You figured out some recipes using the gooey bugs living 45 feet underground. You got used to all the shade.

What can start to happen: the moment that person, who lived in the pit for their whole life, gets out of the pit, up to the surface, it's all so bright, there are no bugs for any recipes they know, they can't even find dirt wet enough to suck on. They panic, because they don't know how to operate in this new situation.

It's hard to not feel like, "I'd be way better off back in my hole. At least I know how that works."

This is a real effect that happens all the time: people know how to make their life work in a crummy situation. Then, they achieve some kind of traditional, conventional metric of success, and soon become deeply uncomfortable in that they do not know how to make this work.

Here's the thing. If a person is hardy enough to make things work in more difficult circumstances, you better believe they can also figure out how to make things work out in better circumstances.

They can learn to overcome the alienness in how to operate *a grocery store*, instead of bug recipes. It takes adjustment. It is a transition period of discomfort. If anything, this situation gives us confidence that if it ever wind up back in that other situation, we'll be fine. We know how to do it. We've been there. We're capable of that. It's in us. We're not left wondering, would that wreck me, will that crush me, am I that fragile? Of course you're not.

You've survived it. You've done it. You figured it out. You made it work.

Again, if you can make it work in a rougher circumstance, you definitely can figure out and tough it out to make it work in a more comfortable circumstance.

On to that Turkish proverb, about being unable to fall out of bed if you aren't sleeping on a bed. I've quoted Stoics throughout this program, and will probably quote at least another one in our

time remaining. It's a modern confusion to perceive that philosophy as one endorsing self-denial, or idolizing simple - we may today refer to as Spartan - lifestyle, for its own sake.

[04:30:00 in one-file audio]

The contemporary Stoic William B. Irvine did a great job of clarifying, in his *Guide to the Good Life*, that besides our most extreme example of Marcus Aurelius literally being emperor over a majority of western civilization during his lifetime, other Stoics included people like Seneca, who is basically the world's first investment banker, wealthy by it, a senator, and a successful playwright.

It's, of course, also the philosophy of Epictetus, whose quote this audio program started with. He was born a slave, banished, and lived throughout his life with a physical disability in a time and place where the culture was not particularly accommodating to it.

The point of that philosophy isn't to deny [conventional success] for its own sake. It is about not overstating the importance of it. It is to not hinge our happiness or identity on whether it happens, or on whether or not we hold on to it.

Traditional success can be, to an extent, incidental to whether or not we are living right, by proper priorities.

In maybe a more casual example, and easier to visualize, Cato supposedly dressed himself quite poorly, since he felt fashion wasn't a suitable thing to be worried about. I would argue that, from the lens of these other Stoics, if indeed it's unimportant to dress well, then dressing to blend in makes it less a subject of focus, than to go out of our way to dress poorly and make a contentious point over it. That keeps it a focus of conversation, rather than allowing it to fall into the background. If pride is over it's not being important, are we truly living by that, if we make a point to loudly reject this thing we insist is unimportant?

If, as a person who's creating things - writing podcasts, videos, books - finding your voice, in just the same way as you might not wish to warp what you're doing just for the sake of audience, if what you are doing happens to find an audience, you should no more be willing to shy away from that crowd for its own sake, as though to prove a point that doing it in obscurity, or unsuccessfully by conventional metrics, is in any way something to be proud over.

If you find yourself with some audience, but then the audience begins to find its way away from you, you don't want to chase them. In doing so, you would not be true to yourself. But, it's every bit as true, that if you are doing something and an audience comes to you, running away from them is, likewise, a deviation from what you were already on track to do, make, and communicate.

To look at this same point from a more classical angle, in *Nicomachean Ethics* we hear a perspective by Aristotle that when honors are bestowed, it says more about who is doing the bestowing, than about who is receiving them. If you wanted to have a certain kind of game exist - since, again, games are just the universe I come from - there's two ways you could go about it: one, you can try to build it yourself, but another possibility, or two, is you could try to have a contest that rewards the best game of that type, according to you. As long as you can bring traffic eyeballs, or offer other kinds of value to the people who win this contest, by bestowing the award, you get to decide, in a way, what gets made, or at least what gets emphasized about these things being made.

When we allow the audience's outside perspective, including that of our teacher, coach, or professor, to steer our work too much, even if indirectly as we reject too actively or rebel directly against how they try to steer our work, either way, we put them in control of what we make, instead of allowing it to be determined by our own compass.

Another reason this matters is that any of these other people - including those who choose to be a follower, part of your audience, or a fan - they are still learning, too.

I remember in our wrestling matches, we would have some disagreements over calls made by referees. In the narrow mindset of the athlete, a referee should somehow be a perfect, objective character, but obviously these are people too. The referees are getting experience in refereeing.

There are numerous games awards for which I've been among the curators or judges - longer ago for IndieDade, a while back in relation to some GDC awards - but in those cases I realized how everyone else deciding it was also still learning in the experience about how to be a judge: making mistakes, working from imperfect tastes, and not knowing all relevant information.

Someone may do something exceptional, and it may not win an award. There are humans in the process! It is not as though it's bestowed by some all-knowing being.

This is not even just a matter of taste. This can also be up to each judge's personality.

This will come as a surprise to nobody, but I was a bit of a science fair nerd. I'm proud to say I even ranked in international science fair. But, the judge who came to my booth was clearly much more energetic, passionate, engaged, and more outspoken than the other judge I observed in the same category, just across the aisle, assessing other projects. In an international competition, there are hundreds of projects considered for the same rankings. Somewhere, there must have been a huddle - out of sight, but you can tell this had to happen, since different judges looked at different projects. As also happens in games contests, art competitions, or even applying for jobs, different people were assessing different candidates.

In that huddle, I bet it helped that the person who saw my work happened to be more outspoken, showing more charisma and better delivery. Surely, the other judges saw brilliant

projects, but were maybe more shy about it, not as strong and persuasive a character. This has nothing to do with the project, it has everything to do with our luck of the draw for which judge we each got. This, again, is all the more reason to not put too much faith in the decisions and choices by those bestowing honors.

If you apply to a company with an entire HR department, you can't know who there was vying for you, or who was not, but it absolutely plays a role in who will wind up picked, and who doesn't. This is separate from, and not any objective measure of, either your skills, your ability, or of your potential.

Which, as a quick tangent, one of the other things Aristotle emphasized in *Nicomachean Ethics*: excellence alone cannot suffice. It's not whoever is the strongest or fastest who wins the Olympics, it's whoever is strongest or fastest that competes. There are many people who would like awards, to whom it could be useful in their path to have the option or possibility of winning some, but who have never even entered a contest, and never put their work out there.

Remember our point that you are not in control of if you win, but you are in control of what you apply to.

You can use the whiteboard to get yourself to apply. It's not a mistake to do it, just because you do not have control over winning. It can still have been smart to apply, to give yourself the assignment, "I submitted the materials for my project by 5 p.m."

People making the calls, for all these subjective decisions, they are flawed, as well. They are doing their best, working to get better at it. You don't want them to control what you do. Their learning is not your learning. Their priorities and values are not your priorities or values. It does not matter whether someone is an art curator, professor, or a fan who might know a lot about the type of thing you work on. They are developing and refining their tastes. They, too, are a function in many ways of their times and experiences.

If you allow them, and whether or not they choose to honor you with their following, selection of your work, their honors, then you have put them in control, instead of yourself. At that point, your criteria for success has essentially become, "Did I do what *they* wanted?"

That is a tough game to win.

Rather, challenge yourself to say, "Did I do what *I* wanted? Did I create what I meant to? Did I achieve what I set out to do?" Because you are in control. You are in the driver's seat.

On that subject of audience, and on not putting too much stock in their reactions, one of the things someone might struggle with who has some popularity, is trolls.

I have, at the moment of this recording, 7 million YouTube views. In influencer terms, this is not a ton. Obviously, it is a gajillion miles from PewDiePie. It is enough to have brought with it a certain amount of troll baggage. I would wake up and have the comment filter clogged with pretty terrible stuff to read through.

The thing to realize in those kind of cases, is that those are not personal. Those are not about you. Those are about that person. It's a struggle [that is] coming from their situation. If anything, feel sad about it. They are in such a rotten, unfortunate, negative space that they are lashing out to whoever else may be around them.

The same person might be yelling at their TV. The same person might be yelling at a pet. I imagine they are probably being cruel, rude, and negative to other people around them.

[04:40:00 in one-file audio]

Maybe it goes without saying, but some of these times, it is straight up an eight, nine, ten, or eleven-year-old, who has for this little window of time discovered what they feel is a space where they can escape their parent's constant, watchful eyes. When it's through text on the internet, you can't tell.

In case you haven't heard about how this works, if you are ever in a situation where you are arguing with someone who is 8, 9, 10, or 11 years old, you've already lost, because you get into an argument with someone who is 8, 9, 10, or 11 years old. You are not going to convince them. They are not looking to change their minds. They are not looking to learn from it. In many cases, even if they wanted to, depending on the context of the situation, they're often not mature enough yet to follow what you're trying to say, even if you wanted to help them.

Speaking of which, for folks who are really trollish: even if they have a misunderstanding, and it's something you would like to help improve and fix their perspective on, if they are not open to it, you simply cannot teach someone who is actively resisting. This won't work any more than for someone who is simply not mature enough yet to follow what you are saying.

For a lot of these same folks, their same kind of confusion would be directed at whoever is in front of them. The nature of the internet is it can be unpredictable in who it puts in front of who.

That same volume of traffic on my viral videos that brought me some trolls, and plenty of negativity to wade through, also brought to Gamkedo Club [now HomeTeam GameDev] some incredibly productive, engaged, happy developers whose lives have been changed for the better through their interactions in our community. I would not have found or reached them, might never have discovered them, were it not for the volume of people reached by these videos.

Another way to look at what I'm getting at here is yes, there are new downsides. You have to not let those obscure the fact that there are also new upsides that, far and above, can outweigh these new downsides that you're learning to navigate.

Lastly, in the example of Sisyphus, identifying with the difficulty and struggle involved - this touches on a topic from one of my first YouTube videos that picked up. It's titled, "No one cares how hard you worked on something." It brings up a point from when I was in English, and a girl, I guess she had straight A's all her life, went up to the teacher with a paper and asked, "Ms. Stokes, why do I have a B on this?" Ms. Stokes tried to explain why this paper was not as good as it ought to have been, to which the girl got upset and said, "But I worked really hard on this."

Then, of course, the teacher pointed out that is not what the grade is a reflection of.

That is not how this works.

It turns out, in many cases, if you could deliver the same end result, and it took less stress, less complexity, less difficulty, or less strain, the customer or the player might not actually care.

Now, of course, it often takes work to compete with others. I'm not saying things should be easy, or to look for a lazy way out. What I am saying is that adding struggle for its own sake, may lead to finding yourself working hard at something that, maybe, was the wrong thing to even work on. It's important to not mistake struggle itself for the creation of value.

The other part of this is not based on the intensity or difficulty of the struggle involved, so much as the perceived endlessness of never letting it wrap up. In part, this is from unease about not being clear on what life will look like after it, or what we'll do with our heads once we can no longer commit so much of it to this particular problem space that we've been spending time getting comfortable in.

You are never going to run out of problems to solve. You will get increasingly interesting problems to solve, just like within the scope of a project, you're continually working on increasingly more interesting problems, as you make progress in it, so, too, for every project you release, the later projects are going to be more interesting. They can build on everything you finished, all that you've wrapped up. Everything you get behind you will make your future more interesting.

Let's go to a game playing example. If you're really enjoying a game, and you can tell you're reaching near the end - I do this, and my wife does, too - you may start to drag it out. We do this because we don't want it to end. Had this experience? You get to that final dungeon, so you start to put it on hold for months at a time, or you go back and complete little random one-off stuff which you're not even into. All because you don't want this to get to the wrap-up point.

If you'll find another game you're looking forward to playing after you finish this one, suddenly, it's much easier to get back in there to put a bow on it.

If game playing isn't your thing, this same effect happens when you slow your pace to a near standstill with a book you've been chewing through, or a series on Netflix that you were basically binging, but then as you approach the end, you get slower and slower, until you essentially froze up. You don't want to leave behind these characters and settings you became invested in. That's, in part, because it's so hard to picture where your headspace will be next.

Thinking and writing concretely about what you're planning to do next can help get you past the current stage.

What do we do when I have training clients who work on a game for far too long, and they need to move on to their next thing - they know and agree - yet find themselves dawdling on parts of the project that shouldn't be a priority? What I have them do is to think concretely about what's the next project they're going to build. Before you know it, they're jazzed about the next project, excited about finishing the current thing, because they know what they're going to get into next, once they step off of this ride. This goes a long way.

If you're feeling like you're stuck, holed up, cycling, holding back and resisting completing this stage of life due to feeling unsure what the next looks like, write on the whiteboard, give yourself an assignment as a short written exercise, to write two pages about your next project. Or, write two pages about your next phase of your life. Maybe write two pages about your next job.

Whatever format you want to give it, get it out of yourself. Making it concrete makes it easier for you to get past where your current headspace is, and the current challenges or current stage of project and life. Let's set you up to close it out, ship it, the current thing you've been stuck on.

What do you want to do next? There are always going to be new, interesting problems in your future you can find and pick.

Chapter 14: Become Who You Want to Be

Much earlier in this material, I quoted a Stoic, Epictetus, on his line, “First say to yourself what you would be, and then do what you have to do.”

I reiterate this here because, as you wrap up this book, I want to leave you not just equipped with, okay, so now you can do things, and can better get yourself to follow through on doing what you're trying to do. I want to make sure that this is not something we only use to accelerate what the outside world is asking of us, and that it's not only something we use to do things we were basically going to be compelled to do, anyway.

I hope that where this power for getting yourself to do things can be used most is to let yourself steer, to take over control, and move yourself more in the direction you want to go in.

For some people, that may be a thing they haven't thought about in a while. That's maybe a question that hasn't come up since when they were younger, and either parents or a high school counselor would ask what they wanted to do when they grew up.

One way to look at it, is the answers to questions we are asked can lead us to a better future. A question creates a fork in our road. Ordinarily, and in many cases, it's someone else who puts this fork in the road there for us, by their asking us a question. By using the whiteboard properly, you can assign yourself questions.

You can put a fork in your own road.

You can put down that you've made a decision on something important to you, by 5:00 p.m. When or how does such a decision get made, if not one sitting at a time? How else does it ever happen, if not broken down into pieces we can attack one by one, each by a certain time, on a certain day? It's not going to happen on its own. No one else is going to do it for us.

We're never going to get in a direction which we won't take steps towards.

You can equip yourself to evaluate some different directions. You can equip yourself to follow through on the direction you decide is best. Like Buridan's donkey, frozen between two options, even by just exploring any decision, however briefly, you may find out that bale of hay is rancid, and by this, be more able to move towards another, better direction. Even if the direction turns out to be a path you are already on, now you'll have renewed certainty and peace of mind, confidence that you more fully understand what you are not missing from that alternate route.

Often, when we hear the word “existential,” we hear it in regard to having an existential crisis: confusion or vagueness of purpose. Just as Stoicism in popular usage often is misunderstood

through a gross oversimplification, the existentialists fixated not on hopelessness, but on choice - not about there being no purpose or value, but on deciding your purpose, and your values.

It was never about no meaning. It was about it being up to you to determine meaning for yourself. To a practical end, it is about each person accepting responsibility for their own development, with action, through intention.

If you find yourself muddled in an existential crisis, my hope is the mindsets and techniques shared here may serve as climbing gear out of that hole.

I remember, back when I was a young adult, I put off learning how to drive for nearly a year after I technically could have started. I probably would have been embarrassed, at that time, to admit why. In hindsight, it was likely due to feeling anxiety around the aspect of adulthood meaning I would then be in control of where I go, and when.

There was comfort in someone else being responsible for where I needed to be, how to get me there, and when.

[04:50:00 in one-file audio]

It was nice, just sitting in the back, trusting that parents, athletics coaches, and bus drivers would somehow take care of getting us where we needed to be.

There is a feeling that it can somehow absolve us from responsibility, if we'll let someone else be the one concerned with what we should do, and how we're going to get there. However, as soon as we're old enough to be capable of taking on that responsibility for ourselves, there is no more shifting the blame. That's on us, if we choose to put off the responsibility, and merely ride along, instead of setting about in and on our own way.

When you can get yourself to do things, and to fit things in on a weekly basis, to keep yourself on task, even when it's something you're not being paid for - perhaps yet, or even if it's something there's no market purpose or function for - when you can get yourself to do the things you mean to be doing, this equips you to become more of who you want to become.

I hope it has been clear throughout that my goal in all of this has not been, in any way, shape, or form, to decide for you the way you should be, or to make you somehow similar to myself, in the way I've made my decisions. It is instead to help equip you to better become who you want to be.

And, so, if it's not a thing you have considered in a while, maybe because for a while, it seemed as though efforts to change yourself or to move yourself in a new direction weren't sticking or coming to fruition, and weren't working out, my hope here is that through improving in doing

what you want to do, you are now better prepared to revisit that question about who you want to be, and which actions you can take to move yourself toward that direction

Thank you so much for reading. I hope this has been helpful.

If you have stories of how you've adapted it to situations that worked for you, I'd love to receive email from you to let me know.

Speaking of which, if you have found this helpful, I hope you'll encourage others in your life to check it out, and to share this with them. I will go one further on that, than I think many other people would - this is one of the reasons why I self-publish my content - when you share this with somebody else, I encourage you to literally give it to someone in your life. Give them a copy of the files.

Don't tell them to pick it up from my online store. Tell them, "This helped me out. I'd like to send you the files."

I will ask, as a caveat on that, please don't post it online for the whole general public, please, not posting a direct download link on Twitter, or that sort of thing. Only from you, to people in your life - straight to your friends, your family, or your colleagues. If there is someone you think could benefit from this material, share it with them, completely free, from you as your gift to them. This even applies if you received it as a gift from someone else. Still counts. Pass it along to someone who you know will be able to put it into use for their benefit.

Speaking of passing along to others. I also want to add one final note. I mentioned, throughout, my game development community. For the past four years, it has been known as Gamkedo Club. As of incredibly recently - literally only days before I wrote this - we've rebranded to "HomeTeam GameDev." As in, HomeTeamGameDev.com

If you, or someone else you know, might be interesting in learning by doing, with teams and mentors, point them our way. We have a lot of processes in place that embody the spirit of these strategies and methods we've covered here - though, of course, we apply it to developing games together, online.

Thank you again for taking the time to read this, for trying out this technique, and for putting in your work and energy to practice it. I wish you all the best in becoming who you want to be, through doing the things you want to do.

The end.