

Self-Doubt

Overcoming thoughts that stop us from starting



Bonus audio for [Self-Command](#), on taking a chance to try things you haven't done

CHRIS DELEON

Founder of [HomeTeamGameDev.com](#) and Gamkedo LLC

Part of the audiobook/ebook bundle from [Self-Command.com](#)

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	2
INTRODUCTION	4
Section 1: STARTING	6
1.1 Am I losing all the progress that I've made in my current field by switching to something else?	6
1.2 What if there's more I can learn about this first?	6
1.3 What if I can't decide what to do first, or how to do this first part right?	7
1.4 What if I run into a question or a complication and I don't know how to proceed?	9
1.5 What if this project is not a great idea, or the right idea?	9
1.6 What if I'm not sure how to start, or don't have a good idea to start with?	10
1.7 What if I don't have the best equipment, programs or training?	11
1.8 What if my documentation is wrong? What if my tutorials are out of date? What if my development environment is less than ideal?	12
1.9 What if nobody gives me the opportunity to do it?	13
Section 2: TIMING	15
2.1 Did I get into this too late because everybody else seems to have already had a head start?	15
2.2 What if I'm too old or too young to be doing this?	16
2.3 What if I don't have enough time in the plan or the schedule?	19
2.4 What if I find having a full schedule or calendar overwhelming?	19
2.5 What if I don't have the luxury of time to sit and plan, reconsider, question, or pivot?	21
2.6 What if I can't do it because I have a day job, class to attend, or family responsibilities?	22
Section 3: INDECISION	24
3.1 What if I can't decide what to do next, or even first?	24
3.2 What if I'm juggling too many things to do?	24
3.3 What if the approach or method I found doesn't work for me?	26
3.4 What if this skill area just doesn't work for me?	26
3.5 How will I know which project to pursue?	27
3.6 What if I run into a situation where something's either asked of me, or I've set myself up to do something, that I just don't know how to deliver on, and I'm truly stuck?	28
3.7 What if I don't have a plan and not really sure how to start on forming one?	29
Section 4: PERFECTIONISM	31
4.1 How am I ever going to learn all of it?	31
4.2 What if I just need to do some more planning first?	31
4.3 What if I can't know or control all the details?	32
4.4 What if I do the work and then there's something wrong with it?	33
4.5 What if by the time I finish it, I could have done it better?	34
Section 5: UNCERTAINTY	35
5.1 What if things happen that I can't control or stop?	35
5.2 What if things change?	35
5.3 What if it turns out completely different than I intended?	36
5.4 What if everyone is counting on me and no one can do what I do?	37
5.5 What if I'm surrounded by noise?	37
5.6 What if I'm facing lots of ambiguity?	39
5.7 What if I have regrets about the choices that I made?	39

5.8 What if later information reveals that I made the wrong choice?	40
Section 6: INSECURITY	42
6.1 What if I don't have the same advantages as somebody else?	42
6.2 What if I can't find the answer somewhere?	45
6.3 What if I don't follow through and stick with it?	46
6.4 What if I'm not an artist? (...or programmer, or a musician, or a dancer, or a writer, or speaker, or a leader?)	47
6.5 What if someone comes along and obsoletes what I'm doing by doing this other thing?	47
6.6 What if I won't know what to do in a new situation as well as I can in my current situation?	48
Section 7: MONEY	49
7.1 Shouldn't I stick to doing what's stable and easy, that I already know pretty well?	49
7.2 Am I going to feel guilty for taking time to do this? Am I being selfish to put energy and time into things important to me?	49
7.3 What if I don't need more success, wealth, network connections, platform or otherwise?	50
7.4 What if I'm realistically not going to earn enough money doing this to sustain myself compared to other things I can do with my skills, education level training, or network?	50
7.5 What if I can't be the best at it, or not even particularly great at it?	51
7.6 What if I don't feel comfortable charging for my work what I'd need to keep doing it?	52
Section 8: RECEPTION	54
8.1 What if people dislike me for the way this work comes out?	54
8.2 What if people misunderstand or misconstrue what I'm doing, and why?	54
8.3 What if I encounter rude and unpleasant people?	56
8.4 What if I don't want to ask people for feedback?	57
8.5 How do I know when to stop asking for feedback and testing?	58
8.6 What if my first projects are kind of a mess?	59
8.7 What if my image, song, video or other contribution comes out pretty rough?	59
8.8 What if this won't be good?	60
8.9 What if people don't like my voice, style, or how I look?	61
8.10 What if other people don't want me to succeed?	61
8.11 What if I get told no?	62
Section 9: TEAMING UP	63
9.1 What if it's too much for me to do all on my own?	63
9.2 What if I don't know anyone else who does it, and no one else around me has a similar interest to what I want to do?	64
9.3 What if I can't find someone who thinks enough like me to work with them?	65
9.4 What if other people that I'm working with make mistakes?	65
9.5 What if I encounter problems with my partners or teammates?	65
Section 10: DOING IT	67
10.1 What if I'm stalling out or not seeming to make progress?	67
10.2 What if I keep procrastinating or putting it off?	68
10.3 What if it just needs a little bit more time?	70
10.4 What if I'm feeling lethargic, and low energy?	70
10.5 What if I don't feel like I'm getting anything done, and time is slipping through my fingers?	71
ENDING	76

INTRODUCTION

First, I just want to do a real quick high level explanation of what this material exists for, why I'm creating it, and where it fits in. Basically, it developed from a few points I made in my productivity audiobook, Self-Command. Self-Command is about helping yourself stay on track for a task.

There's a few points from there that I realized kept coming up when talking with my training clients, people I help with game development, about why they wouldn't begin a task, why they wouldn't even trust themselves to start down it.

These ways of thinking, these questions that pop up in our head, these doubts that occur - they're perfectly natural. They happen to all kinds of people, regardless of age, cultural background, regardless of training - even if you have the confidence of a related degree or work experience - still when we're independent, when we're trying to explore our own territory, break new ground and grow in new ways, these kinds of questions come up and challenge us.

This is about problems far more general than game development, which is where most of my practical hands-on training and support experience is. Really they're more broadly about creative endeavors of any kind. If you want to produce your podcast, if you want to write a story, if you want to do something else, maybe making music with no relation to games, these same questions and doubts arise.

The whole goal here, too, is to keep it short enough that it's not going to expand into a massive tome. Because I know often, one of the challenges is, if it's too much material, we might not start. Thinking about the reasons why we won't take on a task, why wouldn't I give it to myself on a whiteboard using the Self-Command method? Part of it is when there's just too much there, right? We look at the mountain and we say I can never climb that. We look at the marathon's length, we say that's too far to run.

So we're going to be framing these in a way we can talk about pretty quick.

But before we do, I want a special thank for their early testing and feedback reviews Patrick McKeown, H, Abhishek Keerthi, Gabriel Cornish, Barış Köklü, Andy King, Luis Montaña, Klaim/Joël, Jeremiah Franczyk, Rodrigo Bonzerr Lopez, Simon Hoffiz, Ashleigh M., and Fahad Muntaz, as well as several other members and colleagues who took time to listen to early drafts and offer feedback, but chose to remain anonymous.

The material ahead will be focusing on these questions that bubble up inside us, these self doubts. And what I want us to do here is just a simple, rapid fire combination of question, and then how to counter that question. It's about the questions that arise internally that can block us from making progress, that can stop us from assigning ourselves a task, or from trusting

ourselves to even try starting it, and then how to take it apart. What thoughts can we counter it with that buries it so you can move past it confidently.

Section 1: STARTING

1.1 Am I losing all the progress that I've made in my current field by switching to something else?

This can be a really scary one, especially if you've been at what you're doing for a while now. You've made some progress, seen some growth, seen some achievement, and been rewarded. It can be very tough to feel like you're starting at the base of a new hill.

Everywhere you go, everything you ever do, you're taking with you all of your accumulated experience, all your other concepts and knowledge and tools and network. That other perspective - that blending of toolsets, those additional connections or viewpoints - that really is what will set you apart from other people who only started and stayed in one field.

Certainly in game development, we see a lot of the cool advances happen when a programmer takes on an artist mindset, or when an artist goes about it using programming tools, when there's someone who makes music using their strengths as a networker, or someone approaches marketing using their experience in music.

When you go from one field to another, you're still you. You still have your unique history, that fingerprint is going to always be with you. Even if you don't take the same tools, the same exact techniques? Your concepts, your ways of thinking, the examples that come to your mind and the people that you know will set you apart and make you unique in that space.

On game development teams we see them as technical artists, as technical game designers, as people who are at a Venn diagram. They may not be as deep in software engineering, or in design. But that combination of spaces makes them great bridging communicators, giving them a different way to interact with the medium.

In all kinds of other fields, you'll see the same connection between people who may come from one kind of background, but that's what makes them a unique writer, or that's what makes them a unique voice on YouTube, different from somebody else who didn't share that unique background.

1.2 What if there's more I can learn about this first?

There is always more you can learn about it. There will always be more material. There's essentially infinite material to learn from because not only is there more already in existence,

probably online, probably free or affordable, than you could ever get through all of, but more of it is being produced faster than you could ever consume it.

That's just the pace of technology and information these days. Because of that, you can't keep putting off doing things until you've learned every single thing ever written or said about it.

Lots of folks use it as a form of procrastination: once I finish this book, once I finish this video, once I finish this tutorial series, then I'll get my hands dirty. It does take a little bit of a foundation to get started, but a lot less foundation than people think they need to give themselves before they start getting real, hands on experience doing it.

Your ability to absorb and act on the benefit of what materials are out there, that are written and spoken, vastly improve when you have context to have better questions, to have seen how the things you're finding fix actual issues you've run up against, from having first tried doing things in a way that came naturally to you, or that were the best you could do from the things you had read and seen so far.

Until that point, so much information is sliding right off of you. It's only by diving in that you become part of that community of people who are doers, in that field, instead of on the outside looking in from a distance, an observer or a commentator on what's happening. So much of what we think of as learning only really sticks, if we have put things into practice, if we have tried it, if we have done it. Until we've put into practice, it's going in one ear and out the other. We need to be doing it and applying it, and then from that, situating knowledge in and around that. It's about applying what we learn to fill in gaps that we're running into, to fix problems that we surface, and to take us to the next level.

But to tell where we're at, we have to be doing it.

So sooner than later, you want to be doing the things, making the stuff, applying what you can do so far. Get it out of your system, in the way it makes sense to you. By doing so, it's going to fit in and click much tighter and better, last and stick, when you learn why there's other ways to do stuff. You'll be able to contextualize that and situate it in, "Ah ha! That fixed the problem that happened when I approached it in another way."

The sooner you can actually start to do it, to put it into practice, to trying it, the sooner the real learning will begin, and the more value you'll get out of all the time you put into learning it.

1.3 What if I can't decide what to do first, or how to do this first part right?

For many kinds of work, certainly it's a thing we do in game development, a thing we do in writing, and a thing to do in business, it's often easier to start by making a mess. Get it out of you, just putting it down in some form. Then, once it's outside of you, clean it up.

One way that I like to visualize this is if you picture trimming a hedge, carving it into a shape, you have to let it overgrow first. In the same way, often it helps to start off by having too much down, to then be able to refine it back by looking at it overall and figuring out what, after I remove the weakest parts, is going to have the shape that I want it to have.

Put it through the process. Put it through testing. Give yourself some rest and then come back with a fresh set of eyes. Put down the ideas, just get them out of you, in whatever order they come out.

Do the editing pass separate from the writing pass.

Want to talk about how we make a schedule? We put down all the tasks we're going to do, in no particular order, and then we go back to switch and rearrange them in a way that makes increasingly more sense.

When I'm not sure what points to make, in what order in a talk? I first just practice speaking improvisationally about it a few times, then I figure out what those points are recurring in a pattern, then ask is there a reason why some of those points might come before others? Sometimes the order matters, sometimes it doesn't.

It's easier to tell once it's outside of you.

We get held up when we don't want to let ourselves speak until it's a final draft coming out of us without the process. But we'll never get that. That's not a professional writers or speakers do it, either. Just get something out of you to be doing it. Once it's out of you, iteratively clean up the part where your efforts make the most impact on it.

There's also just a huge strategic point important for giant projects like we take on as game developers. There're so many pieces that we could get lost into cleaning up and polishing, making better and better and better. What works well is to get everything that we possibly can working together, in first pass, first. Then we figure out where's our attention and energy best spent? Where do we get the most bang for our buck? Where are the problems most noticeable? Which problems are easiest to fix?

So rather than getting stuck on trying to do it perfectly, let yourself do it imperfectly. Then, after the fact, iteratively make it more and more perfect.

1.4 What if I run into a question or a complication and I don't know how to proceed?

That is what you want to have happen.

Picture that you're digging on the beach, then you hit metal. That's the treasure chest. The next step is to figure out what you've got to do to open it. Do you need different tools? Do you need some help from other people? But that is your sign that you found what you're looking for.

You want to go until you get stuck.

When it comes to people scheduling calls to me for support and training, it helps if they've got to a point where they're blocked, and they don't know how to proceed. They're in a bind. They're feeling stuck. That's when it's helpful to reach out for help, not until that point. Until that point, they can and should explore independently. That's exactly what you do up until you bump the wall, then once you hit that barrier, that's when you're going to get some real value out of digging online for examples, or reaching out for help, in teaming up with others, since you've started to identify where is the gap in your understanding.

Finding what is the thing that you need to address, that's the sign of progress! You've made enough motion to identify that as where your learning, growth, and new opportunity is going to happen. But to do that, you have to make enough progress to bump into the obstacles, to discover where they're at.

In classical Stoicism, Marcus Aurelius in *Meditations*, as you heard from Self-Calm if you picked up that audio or read that free ebook that I released, there's a notion popularized as "the obstacle is the way." If there's a large fire, then the things that try to block it just become fuel for its way forward. They guide it by what tries to block it. This is exactly what we're talking about here: those things that you run into, and you feel stuck on? That's great! That is exactly what you were digging for. You found it.

That's your feedback that you're taking the right direction.

Now, you might have to adapt your approach a bit. What got you down to that treasure chest may not be the same tool you use to open it. But you're on to the next stage.

You should hope to hit questions and complications where you don't know how to proceed. That should be the goal when doing things to advance your learning.

1.5 What if this project is not a great idea, or the right idea?

If we picture across the arc of your lifetime, the best ideas and timing that you possibly might have - all planets aligning on exactly the right time to do exactly a certain thing - you don't want to pollute that one with your beginner errors. You don't want that to be the one where you're first learning about every single piece of the process.

Sometimes, when I meet with people about starting their game development journey, they have these ideas for big ambitious projects that they want to take on. What we first do is we make a stepping stone plan of some smaller projects that build them up to the confidence, preparedness, and background so that by the time they're taking on the bigger ambitious project, no piece of that is their first time tackling that part of a project. They've already done one or two UIs, one or two types of relevant AI, one or two types of sprite art, backgrounds and 3d modeling. That way, they can better conceive of it in a way that's going to maximize what they can do with their tools, with their experience, and with their skills.

You don't want to start on your best ideas. Even if you could somehow tell - and maybe it's hard to tell - but if you feel like something is your best idea, it may be best to not start with it. Build up to it. Take it apart to build a plan around what are the stepping stones to get you there. That way, you can tackle it with more confidence.

What that does is it helps build you a bridge to the fact that, again, it may be too daunting, too large to start, because you don't trust yourself with it. And, not to be too harsh, but maybe there's a level which if you're totally inexperienced, you might be right. You may not be ready to climb that mountain yet, you may not be ready to run the marathon yet.

Speaking of marathons, think about how what impresses someone about a runner of a marathon isn't that they went into it unprepared, that they did something completely bananas and decided overnight to go do it. It's because they decided to do the training to prepare themselves, so that doing it was the next natural step in their progression.

1.6 What if I'm not sure how to start, or don't have a good idea to start with?

In a lot of crafts, and I say this because I've mostly seen in game development, but out of every piece of that from modeling, sounds, programming, to design and so on, it can often help to start by cloning something else that exists.

I'm going to put a huge asterisk there, that the expectation in doing this isn't actually that you're going to produce an exact clone - it's that in the process of having some momentum, clear direction from the start, positions you to start putting your own twist on it. You'll start doing it your own way, finding where and how you'll personalize it once you're situating real decisions about a real thing that's being built and going into motion. By the time you produce what comes out, it's very different from what you started with.

Notch is pretty open that Minecraft began as an Infiniminer clone. But it took a very different direction, and scaled to a much different audience. The same idea works for a lot of people starting game development: start with a generic project, such as a generic space shooter or generic racing game. If you're working on a song, pick a genre to start by making a generic piece. If you're working on a recipe, pick something that's an established way to make something.

From that, begin to explore ways to deviate, personalize it, put in a twist to make it your own. But it gives you enough to start getting movement going. That movement allows you to start having a meaningful decision as to how and where you're steering it differently. It's harder to tell in advance what you're going to like, because then you can't test it piece by piece as you go.

1.7 What if I don't have the best equipment, programs or training?

The important thing to remember when countering this thought is that you don't need those things to start. In fact, in many cases, it's kind of a waste to have them when you start.

If you just want to start getting fit, it would be inefficient to find an Olympic training facility, or an Olympic training coach. If you wanted to learn to start playing music, you probably shouldn't start with the most expensive violin on Earth.

First, use what's available to you. Use what's in reach.

This is also what we've seen happen for, say, people working in game audio. One of our former audio trainers, Ryan Stunkel of Blipsounds, he'd basically encourage people to use the tools available to you until they no longer serve you for the level you're at. Even before you're starting to buy a microphone, you know what? Your phone has a microphone. Work on game audio with your phone's microphone, or your laptop's microphone. When or if you start to reach the barrier of when you can no longer do what you need to do next with the tools available, that's when it's time to look for an upgrade, to take it up a notch.

Part of what I really like about this is it avoids the unrealistic, unfortunate thing that happens where we buy the exercise bike and don't use it, where we buy the ice skates and never skate. We may invest in something financially thinking that's going to steer us to do it. The reality is that it just gathers dust. There's a lot of folks out there who have more money than time, they'll buy something intending to use it, thinking it's going to help them use it. In practice, often it won't.

What's the best way is to show ourselves, to demonstrate for ourselves, to create evidence that I will put it to use, I am going to get value out of this? First, use it till the wheels fall off on the version you have so far, or with the cheapest, entry level version. You can start podcasting with

a \$60 mic, or with a \$30 mic. You don't have to start at the highest tier professional grade stuff. You can work your way there.

This is exactly what happened for me for my YouTube content and my podcasting. I started off with literally my laptop webcam, then a cheap webcam. I started out using a cheap microphone on my laptop, then a little better one, then a little better one. Now I'm at a much higher grade of gear for the stuff that I'm doing. But it's only after first putting in those reps, and the time, to convince myself that I am going to keep doing this, so I might as well level it up. Because I'm not backing off and I'm not quitting, so I might as well take it up a notch.

Start by giving yourself that evidence, until the thing that you have in reach isn't working well enough for you.

1.8 What if my documentation is wrong? What if my tutorials are out of date? What if my development environment is less than ideal?

They're always going to be.

Certainly we see a brunt of this in what I help people with, in game development. In general, by the time the documentation is fully caught up to the systems, those systems are ancient, and they're no longer relevant to us.

When I was making launch titles for early iPhone games, back in 2008, the audio example code that Apple provided didn't even work on the device. When we were working on Wii games, when that was a new platform console, there were issues that I can't speak too much to because it's behind NDA (Non-Disclosure Agreement) stuff, but it was pretty rough.

If you want to be the cutting edge of doing things that have never been done before, if you're working with new technology, if you want to work with virtual reality or other emerging spaces, then inevitably what you're going to run into is that the documentation is flawed. There are still errors in it, and there are always going to be.

You'll see a lot of people complain online about their tools, whether the tool they're complaining about is Unity, Unreal, Godot or JavaScript or C++ or whatever tool they're using. All those complaints really tell you isn't which tool has problems, it's just telling you which tools people use. You see so many Unity complaints because Unity is so popular. No matter what tool they're going to use there's going to be some flaws with it, some cruft, some less than ideal things, some tradeoffs, compromises, and issues.

By the time it's honed perfectly, it's historical. You got to learn to get things done, despite that - despite the slightly out of date documentation. Learn how to work with slightly out of date examples. If people wouldn't build things until their tools were perfect and the documented methods were all solved, nothing would have ever gotten built in history. It's like saying construction shouldn't have started until power tools existed.

If you wait for perfect documentation, you'll be waiting forever. Expect there to be some imperfections. Work with those imperfections, get things done anyway, in spite of it.

That is also what's going to be one of your advantages, because that's a barrier to entry among other people who are trying to do what you're doing. It's the same hurdle that anybody else trying to do the same stuff at the same time is also going to do. Some of the big advantages that I had among early iOS games was that I was getting pretty fonts on the device before other people were, that we were getting physics engine code on the device before other people were. By the time everybody else could do that and was doing it, it didn't help a game stand out the way it did when we found a way to do it first.

That difficulty in doing it and navigating it, while it's still such an in-definition space which is constantly evolving will be to your advantage.

1.9 What if nobody gives me the opportunity to do it?

What I'll do here is I'm going to flip the question around to: have you given yourself the opportunity to do it? Because, ultimately, you know yourself better - or at least longer - than anybody else. Other people are going to assume that if you haven't given it to yourself to do, that you know something that they don't.

This came from me some years ago where there was a person who wanted to do video editing for an organization. The organization's rightful response was okay, can you show us some of the video editing that you've done?

That's one of those many different skill sets and things where in a modern environment, you can find free or very affordable tools. It doesn't have to be ultra time consuming, and doesn't require a degree to do it. Therefore, if you haven't done it, it raises questions about okay, well why haven't you? Why are you suddenly going to start doing it if you do it for us, as opposed to how you've never done it for yourself?

For so many skill sets, certainly in most domains of game development like level design, programming, writing, sound effects, music, and art - all these different things! - we can give ourselves a shot at it. It may be on a different scale than what we'd like to aspire to someday be doing. But if you haven't given yourself a shot to do it then somebody else is going to read into that as a sign that they shouldn't give you a shot to do it, either.

Give yourself the opportunity to do it. Give yourself the chance. That greatly increases somebody else's ability to transfer that thought by seeing, okay I see you've been editing video - sure, we could do some video editing help, so help us out.

Section 2: TIMING

2.1 Did I get into this too late because everybody else seems to have already had a head start?

You're never too late.

Looking back on it, you're always going to wish you had started earlier. Which means that right now, as the time you're having this thought, that's when future you is going to wish you had actually done it.

You don't want to look back on the fact that you thought about, "shouldn't I have started already?" only to feel bad because you didn't, then still haven't started, or have another year pass and you still haven't done it.

The other thing is that in a lot of cases, the people who you think have a head start on you, because they've been doing it longer, maybe haven't been going in the right direction. It doesn't matter if they've been going longer, if they've been going backwards.

Things are changing constantly. What was the right direction two years ago, five years ago, 10 years ago, today is no longer the right direction. What happens is people who were doing the right thing at the time, who were making progress, in hindsight, are going to have a lot of relearning, unlearning, changing their approach, tools, pipelines, adapting their network in new directions. Because of that, you actually have about as good a footing as they do.

Now, they might still use that experience to get their foot in the door somewhere. They're certainly going to get some confidence boost out of it. But part of what's wild about how technology is always changing - and this is also true for a lot of other creative fields, too, where the trends are constantly moving - is that somebody else who may seem to have a head start? Their head start was in a now obsolete direction. You're much closer than you think to catching up to them. It may only be reading a few books or making a few projects, before, you might be surprised, you're about as adept as anybody else at certain tool pipelines or topics, and at the very least able to get out there and be doing it with everybody else.

What's most important is that you're out there doing it. You're not just reading about it, you're not just thinking about it. It really comes from once you're doing it, everybody else around you will respect you as a peer who's doing it. Regardless of if they had a head start, regardless of if they've been doing it longer, or if they're going about it in a different way than you. It begins by being someone who's doing it.

I'll also throw out there as another example of where for me, as a game development trainer, what I've often seen happen is I'll give talks about topics or training for techniques and tools and so on, where one of my barriers I have to contend with is that someone says, "Okay, but you learn this stuff a long time ago, you've been doing this stuff for so long. How can you put yourself in my shoes as a new person?" My answer, of course, is that I'm helping a lot of people who are like them. I help a lot of people who are at where they're at. So that's a little different lens.

But it's often the case that if somebody sees there's a talk by someone who has been doing this for 5-10 years, but they also see someone else on YouTube who's starting it right now, learning as they create YouTube videos, talking about or giving tutorials from the perspective that I just learned this yesterday, here's how it worked for me - that recency, that freshness is actually really appealing to a lot of people. They seem closer to their level, so people assume they can relate better to what they're doing.

You might surprise yourself if you think that you have to be a master in order to teach. There were classes I taught in grad school where I was literally just two weeks ahead of the students I was teaching. That's all it takes to teach sometimes.

The same thing is true for no matter what your experience level. There are people who are behind you in it, as long as you've been doing it. That begins when you start to do it. And to do that you have to not panic yourself over, "Am I too late to start?" or, "Did too many other people have a head start."

Now is the best time to do it, so you don't look back later and think about how you wish you'd started the last time you thought about whether it's too late for you to do it.

2.2 What if I'm too old or too young to be doing this?

The wild thing about this objection is that in the 25 years of doing what I do, I've seen literally the same people go from saying that they're too young one day, to complaining that they're too old the next.

The same person who thinks they're too young will say that they're too old. There's no perfect or only age to do it at.

If that age switch over sounds hard to picture, because you don't personally know someone who set an arbitrary division in which they switched from saying they're too young to being too old, consider the more common case of people in your peer group who perhaps said they didn't have time to do a certain thing, because they were in college, who now when ask them about the same subject, or when they talk about it, they'll say that they can't because they're no longer a student anymore.

Because of what I do, game development and its related skills are often where I see this happening for people, but this same thing absolutely holds true as well for people who talk about weekend sports activities, exercise routines, training for marathons, or picking up other hobbies.

Let me tie this for a moment to a weird experience I had back around 2010 when I had the bizarre privilege and surprise of being part of the first Forbes 30 Under 30 list.

It was literally the first list, so whatever you might have heard about people trying to get onto it and making it an important thing to them, I wasn't even aware of it until they approached me. For what it's worth, I made zero effort to get on there, I wanted to lay that out front.

As another note about it, it's actually 30 people per category, of which, depending on the year, there were between 12 and 15 categories. So really, we're looking at like the Forbes 360 people, per year, every single year for 10 years and running. There's 1000s of these people.

So I'd go to these conventions a few times, where once a year, they get people together from those lists. I was just curious to see who else is on it, and how'd they get on there? What the heck is going on? I was hoping maybe I can make some network connection there that either might help me in my line of work, or perhaps help me introduce people to somebody else to make things better for everybody.

There are sometimes some celebrities who are on that Forbes list, and let me be clear, none of those people show up. I wasn't hanging out with Lebron James or Justin Bieber.

What was strikingly obvious was that a lot of the people who were there in the different categories were doing things that really, if somebody was in their 40s or 50s and accomplished that, it might not be all that groundbreaking, it might not be that big of a deal. It's just a thing that people in their adult lives, in the normal path of their lives, own and sell some real estate commercially, might start a business, might launch some VR titles. The same was true for what was weird about me was the things I was doing when I was 27 years old, but really, if I had been 37, no one would have thought twice about it.

That under 30 distinction, it's not about "you have until then to do it or it doesn't count." What that really is: it's a weight class. If you took that cap off, saying it's only people under 30 being compared against each other? Most of them would be immediately rendered irrelevant, not noteworthy or newsworthy at all, for what they'd done, again, compared to plenty of others - thousands upon thousands, tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands of - just adults in the normal course of their lives.

It's like someone would be good for a child pianist, but they still are easily not comparable to an adult pianist.

It's getting first prize in little league baseball.

It's a reflection of some combination of luck and privilege and other factors, for sure. But it's really just people who had a little bit of a head start, compared to a whole bunch of other people who, again, on the normal course of their lives, do many things that are, frankly, bigger news.

So it's really the wrong way to look at it to say that if I'm across 30, is it too late for me to do certain things? No, in fact, now it's actually the normal stage of life, when many more people do the same things that get a lot of people on those under 30 lists.

It's not an important indicator of what you're capable of. It's just an arbitrary cutoff point that would be strange if certain things happened by this arbitrary milestone.

This age dimension has also interacted for me in a kind of an odd way where I'm now well into my 30s, but I've been identified at conferences, people thinking I was 26 years old, even 19 years old, just because I have kind of a baby face. I just look very young. This also results in some YouTube comments on my viral videos where people would say, "Man, wait until this person gets older!" I had to be in the comments saying like, sorry, this is probably peak performance for me at this particular skill.

I remember thinking when I was first starting a business, that it was a problem that it looked so young, because I couldn't get other people to take me seriously as a teacher, and I couldn't get other business people to take me seriously as a peer.

Enough time has passed, or certainly after the pandemic's tolls and stresses on me, I'm visibly a little older than I used to be. Or, as at least one friend puts it, now I look like I'm 26 but trying to look older, at least.

So then I have the opposite problem of people who won't listen to me on YouTube because they think, "What am I going to learn from that old guy?"

There's some different pros or cons or disadvantages or advantages in either difference. There's an old John Wooden quote about this: "Do not let what you cannot do interfere with what you can do."

Look for the version of it you can do from your situation, instead of stressing about how the opportunities you have to do it might look different if you're 15 years old, versus if you're 45 years old.

Though there may be a change in the approach, the style, the format, the priorities and how you go about it, maybe the pace at which you go about it, no matter what you want to do, there's almost always a version that you can adapt to the stage of life that you're in, the age that you're at, the skill level and situation you have.

Taking that one step forward at a time is the only way anybody builds anything up.

2.3 What if I don't have enough time in the plan or the schedule?

A point you might hear recurring from me in Self-Command and other productivity material I've worked on is that a lot of different tasks that we do are kind of squishy. There's the fast version, there's the slow version, there's the ultra slow version - where we go out of our way to improve, iterate, get feedback, test and so on. We have to scale to the level we decide on, deciding we'll get the version out that meets the amount of time we want to give it.

If we want the version of a song we can give ourselves in a week, in two weeks, in one month, in half a year or two years? It's just going to be a different approach, but it's an act of choice. We decide how to close up the loose ends, polish it up, package it for delivery, title it, choose who to distribute it to, and how. Focus on fitting the phases, piece by piece, into the interval that you give yourself.

The only alternative is it not happening at all.

Even teams with enormous budgets and enormous experience to draw from on a huge team - they still have limitations. They still wish they had a bigger team. They still wish they had a bigger budget. They still wish they had more years on their project.

If you can't learn to work with the amount of time that you give yourself, then there's no amount of time you can give yourself that'll fix that.

2.4 What if I find having a full schedule or calendar overwhelming?

This is a natural reflex some people have, because it can feel like it's too much to look at.

It's like I spoke about in the intro, briefly, about how if it seems like the journey is going to be too far, too grand, too big, we're looking up that mountain and it's just too much to take on, then we won't even start. This scares some people away from wanting to put down on paper or in a Trello, or on their calendar, a schedule for their projects.

There's a few ways to overcome this.

The first is a matter of how we frame and think about it. The important thing about a calendar or a schedule is it's actually not about having to look at it all at once. It's really the opposite: it's the ability to only look at the nearest, current week. It's to know that we can put one foot in front of

the other, take just the next task, trusting that everything thereafter, if we just keep following the plan we put down, is going to come together. To put it another way, the calendar is about all the things you don't have to worry about, and shouldn't be thinking about, yet.

I want to say it again, because that's so important: the power of a schedule or a calendar is literally in the things you're giving yourself permission to not look at yet. That's most of it! Forget everything except what's next.

This also is for whenever you have a thought that there's something that needs to be done, and it's got to be a part of this project, initiative, or learning this new skill, there's a thing you know has to get done but now is not the right time to do it. That is going to happen all the time when you're in this kind of headspace. Having that schedule or calendar gives you a way to put it somewhere else into your future. It's so you can say that this is a problem for next week's me, this is a problem for a month from now, or this is a problem for two weeks before release.

This simultaneously ensures that we won't lose track of the task, and it frees our minds from it because we don't have to think about it right now. We don't have to remember it, and we don't have to do it, but we're not going to lose it.

But to do that, you've got to have a schedule. Obviously, whatever is coming up next is the current thing. That's where you implement the Self-Command method, to target your attention on just that task, forgetting and trusting the future you to deal with everything thereafter, one task at a time.

The other thing about that schedule is that the other part that scares us is if we get too deep into the details, go too deep into the weeds. We worry over trying to articulate every single possible contingency, detail, spelling out all the information. But, in that future situation, you're going to have much better information from progress that you'll have made, from the state of things as they're progressing, to make those detailed decisions. If you start to paint too specific of a future for yourself, what happens is you can paint yourself into a corner, where it becomes so much to tangle with, that reworking and modifying that schedule to stay agile becomes more work than the project itself.

I've seen this happen to game development teams. It's a very real thing that happens. If you put too much information into your detailed plan, you're creating a problem for yourself. You're losing your flexibility, because you won't want to rip pieces of that apart.

It's best to keep it at a milestone level. Not about "how you've already figured it out" but "what is it you'll be figuring out" at that time.

The task for yourself becomes to define the player character, rather than trying to lay out all those details when laying out the schedule. That defeats the purpose of the schedule, the whole point of which was to not think about that detail before it was time to.

The most important part of this is how it's giving you permission to forget those things that aren't next, to free them from your mind, while trusting that you're not going to lose them.

2.5 What if I don't have the luxury of time to sit and plan, reconsider, question, or pivot?

Every now I'm going to work with somebody who says that they can't fit an extra 15 minutes or 30 minutes in their day to think about what they're doing for their week.

If that is somehow true, then there is absolutely no way that they can afford to be using their week wrong, on the wrong thing.

The time when we figure out what we're doing is some of the most important time we can use per week, or per day. You can't do the wrong thing well enough to make it the right thing.

In many cases, the right thing done less than perfectly well is still going to move you so much further ahead in the right direction than no matter how well you had spent those extra 15 minutes, or half an hour, doing the wrong things.

You have to build in time for this. It doesn't happen automatically.

The other thing about this? No one else is looking out for you to do this anymore. When you're a kid in school, you've got a guidance counselor helping you figure out how if you don't take this class, then you're not going to finish. When you're early in your career, maybe you've got some manager looking out who is saying if you don't work on the skill area, you're never going to be promoted.

You've outgrown those things. Especially when it comes to your side projects, your personal business, your things you do on your own time, under your own self teaching and under your own direction:

At least quarterly, rethink the direction you're trying to go. That's a great use of half a day once a quarter

At least monthly, reconsider if you're making the kind of progress and the kind of pace you need to, or if you need to recalibrate your expectations, about quality or deadline, or both.

At least weekly, double check for 15 minutes: what are the things I'm trying to do with this week?

If you don't do those things, you can spend years only to look back on it then realize it should have been spent differently.

So long as you're spending that time to reassess what you're doing, you might even still find, in many cases, that you're right on track. 95% of the time, or even 98% of the time, you're going to do the same stuff. Even then you've reminded yourself about what you're going to do. That gives you two benefits:

1) You get that due diligence benefit in that you did reconsider, and still felt it was the right thing to do. It reaffirms that you know you're doing the right thing. And then...

2) Related to that, this gives you the confidence to not hold back or drag your feet, constantly second guessing whether you're doing the right thing. You gave yourself a chance to reconsider it, and decided this was the right thing to do.

That's where, again, we go back to our Self-Command method: put it on the whiteboard, target it as what I'm up to right now. This is the right task that I figured out already, and now it's the right time to execute on it, instead of constantly second guessing and wondering whether I'm doing the right thing.

Making time for that will save you from spacing that time and indecision across everything else.

You don't have time not to be rethinking if what you're doing is the right thing, if you're on the path and on the pace that you intend to be on, and if you're using your time the way you meant to be using it.

2.6 What if I can't do it because I have a day job, class to attend, or family responsibilities?

I first heard this problem in college from people who said they couldn't make games because they have tests and homework. What baffled me, is that they would say this in a room of people who were also in college, and also had tests and homework, but were making games.

I've seen this same challenge occur for adults who say I can't do it because I have a day job, or because I have kids. And yet, there is no shortage of other people who find a way to fit it in, and find a way to do it, despite or alongside those things.

Now obviously, there are extremes, and temporary special circumstances, everyone's situation and energy levels are unique. I'm trusting here that, if that applies to you, you recognize that.

Otherwise, it is valuable to stop comparing yourself to some hypothetical, imagined, or hyper rare, example of someone who truly has nothing else to do, with no other obligations, no other responsibilities. Instead, look for the countless real examples of people who sustainably consistently find a way to do it, showing that it can be done.

In fact, the people who most consistently fail, at least in the area that I'm in, are people who quit the day job, thinking that way they have all the time on Earth now to do it, but now their day is unstructured and nothing gets done. Time blurs together, they lose a sense of value for each hour they can fit in. Before you know it, the runway runs out. They pick up work again, and having not moved forward at all, they also have never learned how to sustainably have it in balance with others responsibilities they have to maintain. They never unlearned using as an excuse that I can't do it because I have work. When they had time where they weren't working, they used an excuse that they weren't currently working, either.

Regardless of the situation, there's a way you can fit it in, there's a form you can fit in. There's always going to be a version of it that, to some budget, at some point in time, is the level of which it's either going to happen with some compromises in the way that it can happen, or it won't happen at all.

Choose the way that you can fit it in. Choose the form that fits your scale, your energy, and your time.

Section 3: INDECISION

3.1 What if I can't decide what to do next, or even first?

In Self-Command, I talk about the example of Buridan's Donkey, a parable from philosophy about indecision, in which a donkey faced with two equally appetizing bales of hay starves to death because he can't come up with a good reason to start eating one instead of the other.

In so many areas of life, our possible ways forward, choosing projects to pursue, skills to start learning, books to read, or movies to enjoy: the wrong answer is none, and the right answer is any of them.

Even the worst of those choices would still have probably been better than sitting there frozen, unable to pick any. Even if it means you pick randomly, even if it means you pick the one most convenient for you to start next, or, maybe start on the one that's least likely to seem like the one you would have done - just to challenge yourself and grow a little bit.

Do something. Be someone who moves forward, who is constantly finding a thing to do, not being stuck with indecision.

Very quickly, what you're going to find is if that was not the good way forward for you, then at least you're going to know. That way you can pivot back to another direction that you're going to feel better in, then knowing what you're not missing from the other path.

3.2 What if I'm juggling too many things to do?

The first thing to accept about this question is you may be right.

In all likelihood, especially if you're feeling it, you're probably right. It's very common. People get the problem of their eyes being bigger than their stomachs when they're in the buffet line, seeing lots of things you want to do, each of which you are interested in, but having a tough time making choices between what you do.

Let's say there's only one that you put your time towards. As soon as you add a second thing, you're literally making it take twice as long to get to the first, you've cut your time you can put towards it in half. While it may not seem like a big deal, thinking okay if I already have several things I'm tackling and I add just one more, really am I adding just a sixth to it. But really, you're taking away from every other thing that you're doing.

In these kinds of situations what I often urge people do is first, take stock of what are the things that you're doing just because you did it before, because it's what you did last week, or the month before, or last year. What have you been doing for a while, but aren't really seeing growth in that space, progress, it's not factoring into what you're doing today. Being brave to explore replacing those can be hard because it's a shift in our identity. We saw ourselves as someone who did that, who wrote the blog entries, who made the podcast, who did YouTube videos, who made a certain kind of project, or engaged in writing short stories. But freeing yourself from that is what creates the vacuum you can fill with a new and different identity by taking on new tasks and new learning.

Periodically, I'll think, if something were to happen to me - and obviously hopefully it will be a while before I'm gone - but if something were to happen to me, what are some things that I'm doing that no one else would take my place in doing? I don't mean that they couldn't, I mean that just wasn't delivering enough value to other people, didn't leave enough impact on people's lives? Certainly there are things that we do that are valuable, that do make a difference in people's lives, that do enrich other people's life experiences, and those, someone might want to maintain or find a way to emulate.

There are other things that we do that, well, when we started, it was just for us. That was an OK way to start, but it's really never grown beyond being just for us. And that doesn't make it inherently bad. If you're still getting value from it, if you're still growing from it, learning from it, or even just find yourself affirmed and comforted by it, then that's okay.

Think of it like if you're just trying to go through and get rid of junk you've accumulated physically, as opposed to temporarily. Does it have a purpose for somebody else? Does the school or your job need that projector? Or is it something that's meaningful to you, in which case, hang on to it! If that old ticket, airplane pass, memento, keychain - if that's valuable, meaningful to you, then certainly, save that, too.

It's the stuff that fits into neither category, the things that you just had because you used to have them. It's equivalent to that, in your time: things that you're doing only because you used to do them, in a way that don't continue to have justification in your life today.

How else could I better spend that energy and time on doing other things, which might be new directions, might be exploratory, maybe I've never even tried yet? First, you got to create that space by backing off from saying yes to all things, especially because there's always devil in the details. Everything takes longer than expected, drags out, has more complexity than you didn't see up front. But what are the things that no one else would carry on if you weren't the one doing them? You might be able to find you can scratch those off your list sooner or later, because that's a sign it's not really adding value meaningfully to the lives of others.

We have to get rid of that accumulation to make room for the new.

3.3 what if the approach or method I found doesn't work for me

Two things here.

First of all, there's a non-trivial effect that I observed back in my weightlifting days. There'd be a bunch of different people who worked out, who had totally different strategies for their breakdowns of Monday, Wednesday, Friday, which might be like chest, then biceps, then leg days. Some people would have a different regimen, such as the "bigger, faster, stronger" plan for these certain lifts, and then those other lifts.

What I eventually figured out, was that more than any other kind of science about this muscle group healing while using that one, or anything else about the ways people try to overcomplicate it, really what's going on is when you have the clarity of a plan, you don't waste as much time. You just do it more efficiently, because you're not constantly doubting and second guessing. Inevitably, because of that, you fit more in. You get more done.

The same thing is applicable, whether it's for business strategy, a format for giving a speech, how to give a good talk opening, how to plan out a project, or architect your code - just having any plan at all, you'll tend to get some clear benefits by virtue of the fact that you have any plan, versus no plan. It starts to put you on some rails, gets you to pay more attention, and gives you the confidence to drive forward, wasting less time constantly second guessing yourself.

Even if it may not be the ultimate, best plan for you, the fact that you've picked and acted on one means you're already going to see some benefits from it.

Secondarily, the only way to tell that the plan isn't for you is by trying it out. You can't just sit there to think more about it. You can't just read more about it. You can't ask other people if it worked for them, because it may not work for you the same way it works for somebody else. The only way to tell is to try it out. The sooner you try that plan, the sooner you put it into action, the sooner you try to exercise it for yourself, the sooner you can replace it with a better one, the sooner you can tweak or adapt it to a way that better suits you, the sooner you'll have the clarity of knowing it wasn't the right fit, so you're free to go on to the next strategy you want to try.

3.4 What if this skill area just doesn't work for me?

You might think of this as sort of the inverse of talent, to put it another way, what if I'm just not gifted in this domain?

You don't want to get confused here and mistake being new to something to being bad at it. That's just setting yourself up to be stuck at never picking up new skills. Somewhere between

playing guitar well, and not playing guitar at all, there is going to be a stage where you're pretty rough at it.

You want to do it at least long enough to give yourself an honest try.

In the long run, there's going to be a big difference, in whether our reaction to not being good at something is to do less of it, or to do more of it. It's the difference between a fixed mentality, and a mastery mentality. In one way, we try to avoid it because we're not yet good at it. In the other, that's what drives you to do it: so that you'll become good at it.

Do the things that you want to get better at. Or simply allow yourself space to do the things you want to do, even if you're not the best at them.

But you're definitely not going to get any better at something that you're not doing.

One of the things that's been important to me as a trainer is that if I find someone who is at, let's say, a seven out of ten on their skills, I help them get to an eight or nine. If I find someone at five when they meet with me, I work with them to get to six or seven. If I find somebody at a one or two level, then I'm going to help him get to a three, four or five.

You've got to give yourself that same sort of flexibility. Whatever your skill level is at for something, focus on the next step. How do I level up from where I'm at? That's how you get better at it.

Though the clickbait is compelling, there's usually no shortcut from a one to a seven, or a five to a nine.

Try a variety of things to figure out which ones you're enjoying, liking most, come most naturally to, and are happiest with the community it connects you to. When people are trying to figure how to divvy up their various interests, I encourage them to, rather than trying to attack it all in parallel, give yourself a quarter of a year, a month or two, but pick the amount of time you want to use to explore one domain. Use that to try making some models, try composing some music, or try out writing some code. Take the sampler platter approach.

But you can't just think your way out of this problem. You can't just wait longer. You can't expect that someday someone else is going to come to you with the answer. It's something you have to move forward on exploring for yourself, and then double down on that. But there's no way to tell besides trying it. And the sooner you find out, the more clarity and confidence you'll have going forward in whatever domain you do pick.

3.5 How will I know which project to pursue?

I think probably around my sophomore year in high school - and I suspect many of you took creative writing as well - before we decided with drafts to move into second and final draft, we first tried to write a number of rough drafts. It might be five, six or seven, out of which we only really picked two or three of those to take forward.

That same approach has been very useful among my game development communities, where they'll often prototype more things than they'll necessarily kick off and take into full production.

Among my business efforts, before I doubled down and figured out what were the areas that made the most sense in terms of the best overlap between people's needs and the services I can provide, I tested what I knew to be too many things. It began by starting a little too broad, doing a few too many things at once, but knowing full well that the plan was not to proceed with all those things forward, to keep all of those going in parallel. The goal, rather, was to figure out which of these has the best traction, which one has legs, which one of these it makes sense to double down on. Then we can bring the energy, effort, and attention away from those other things into that main one.

In this balance between how do you not spread yourself thin, but how do you also make sure you're not putting your eggs in the wrong basket? What has often worked for me and people that I train has been starting out by doing a few too many things, planning to not proceed too far with those, before you make a decision based on the alignment, how they're going, how well you think it's going to be able to carry forward.

This is also important because there's so many things we can't predict until we try it about how our version is going to be, or about how it feels for us until we've tried on the shoe for a little bit. Start broad, narrow down over time. Don't keep yourself spread too thin, but also don't pick one at random to drive forward on from start to finish.

3.6 What if I run into a situation where something's either asked of me, or I've set myself up to do something, that I just don't know how to deliver on, and I'm truly stuck?

This is a tip I got many years ago from a mentor. In this situation we want to avoid saying no, it can't be done. Instead, come up with two, maybe three options, that involve different trade-offs. One might be, if we gave it more time here's the way we could handle it. If we need to try to hit our deadline, here's what we could cut. Another version might be more of a wildcard, a totally different approach, could it scratch the same itch? That allows us to make a conscious choice or defer to a boss - manager, lead, collaborator - different options they can weigh between and still have a sense of steering and control, understanding the trade-offs. Then, rather than being a dead end, it's able to proceed in a version that still lets the rest of it all not go to waste that you've done so far and have on track to still do.

We're often faced with the situation between making some compromises or it not existing at all. Once again, I'm going to keep going back to the fact that at the core, it's better for it to exist, released and done, even if there are some trade-offs made. If we zoom out enough, we'll see that there's trade-offs made in everything that exists, in everything that's real.

If we expect it to be perfect, it's just not ever going to happen.

3.7 What if I don't have a plan and not really sure how to start on forming one?

It's counterintuitive, but when you're making a plan, especially for projects, or maybe for things that are new to you, really what you're doing is you're making a pile of problems. It's a list of all the different problems that you're going to have to overcome or solve. Put them in an order, then chip away at them, one at a time.

Now, as soon as you put them in order, you might find there's ways to rearrange them a little, if certain things are better to do earlier than others. Maybe there's more questions to resolve, more uncertainty there, or certain parts can benefit or accelerate because other parts get done earlier. In many cases, there's just a huge pile of problems to be solved.

If you can enumerate the reasons why it's going to be hard, if you can enumerate the reasons that you're worried about it, those are the problems to tie up. Those are the plan. Put those down, spread out over time. In whatever format you want to use - a text file, a Trello, Google Calendar, whatever system and format works well for you - lay them out in any order, just tackle them incrementally.

Having laid out just the pile of problems, you can focus on one at a time by using, for example, the Self-Command method, to keep yourself on task for one thing. Over time, it gives you the confidence that whenever you're ready for a task, with a little bit time to fit in, you can take one thing off of that pile, the next in the sequence (ideally in an order) and that you when you do it, you know it's building up towards something else.

This is great, because that allows us to tap into the motivation of not just the payoff of this one task, but thinking of the longer arc of how when you finish this whole series, it's going to become greater than just the individual pieces.

In games, we see this effect in how any given asset from a world famous, much beloved game, like a texture map on a character in Horizon Zero Dawn, or a model in Call of Duty, any one of those pieces as a standalone wouldn't be very valuable to people. It's the combination of all those things together and their functionality in the way they sound, the way they move. All of that combined is it gives them value.

When we say okay, there's this thing I'm going to take on, but I can see that there are obstacles and problems, those obstacles and problems are your plan. Untangle one of those at a time. Have a finite end in mind that you're working towards, so it doesn't drag out forever or keep expanding on you. Get to work one task at a time. Again, I recommend the Self-Command method, as I find it works for many people that I train. If somehow this audio got separated from it and you want to find it, that's at Self-Command.com

Section 4: PERFECTIONISM

4.1 How am I ever going to learn all of it?

The bad news is also the good news: you won't.

You can't.

Literally no one has, or ever will be able to, learn all of it.

Almost every field that's interesting is full of problems that are creative, dynamic, or technologically evolving. It's massive, historied, and constantly not just changing, but also dovetailing in dozens or hundreds of directions. Rather than see that as overwhelming, because there's too much to wrap yourself around, embrace the chaos a little bit, accepting that in order to navigate the seas, you don't have to do all of the ocean at once, you just have to do the area around you.

This is part of the power of teaming up, the power of specializing, or the power of not feeling limited by what we can do alone. It's accepting that you can't learn all of it. Over the span of your lifetime, any given piece you're involved with, someone else could spend their whole life on that deep specialization.

You're making conscious choices constantly about whether you'd like to go broad or deeper on certain skill sets. Those are often valid choices in either direction. There are people who thrive on a lighter level of abstraction, and people who hyper specialize and connect more with others. It depends on what you want to accomplish. There's not necessarily a wrong choice. But there are just different choices that we make in navigating what different opportunities we want to explore, prepare ourselves for, and have behind us.

To think that we can't do it until we've learned it all is like thinking you shouldn't write or speak until you've read the entire dictionary. Learn enough to start using it, and then learn the rest as it becomes relevant to what you're doing.

4.2 What if I just need to do some more planning first?

This is one of the common forms of people procrastinating by over preparing.

There's a level of detail in which it is impractical, and not useful, because as soon as you start really applying your plan, breathing life into it, things that you thought were going to work great won't. Things that you didn't think were going to work will surprise you, and may work just fine.

Meanwhile, other obstacles and challenges that you couldn't have possibly predicted are going to pop up. You just have to put it in motion.

If you're trying to plot a trip from where you're at to some other city, you find your destinations, find your major exits, you establish on your Google Maps plan or otherwise, just how to get from point A to point B. But you're not trying to anticipate in advance what if a car comes across the road at the wrong time, or there's a ball bouncing in the middle of the street. You're going to accommodate those things as they arise. The same is going to be true in the details for most of your plans, where you don't want to think about every single possible contingency ahead of time.

Come up with enough of a plan to get you from here to there. Trust yourself to handle the details as they arise.

4.3 What if I can't know or control all the details?

This is a big one that I run into because a lot of people that I work with come from a technical or programming background. In many situations, they are pretty tightly in control of exactly what the machine is going to do, based on the instructions fed to it. As soon as other human beings get involved, as soon as bureaucracy gets involved, any human organizations, institutions, customers, and other people, there's a great deal of uncertainty about what people will think about how things are going to play out.

The important thing to realize is that for most things that are really going to have a big impact on more people's lives, reach more people, change more people's lives for the better, because it's necessarily going to involve other people, it's going to mean managing, navigating and getting comfortable with a certain degree of uncertainty.

Look at that not as something that makes you uncomfortable, so you're going to retreat from it. It's something to see as necessary and essential to take what you're doing to a level that's going to improve more people's lives, be more successful for you, your reach, and your audience. See it as a point to specifically grow in the discomfort of living within a space of uncertainty. Operate in a space where we don't know everything, and maybe can't, but somehow within that still find a way to still get things done, deliver results, and help more people.

It's a huge limiter on yourself if you will only do the things that you can fully control. It's a bit like questions that have a specific right answer or a wrong answer. If that's the space you insist on

operating in, you're going to be working with such contrived, simplistic, elementary grade questions that you're going to be steering clear of all the interesting stuff.

The really compelling questions, the interesting questions, ones that we can grapple with our entire lives, are questions where there is no perfect answer, where there are many potential possible answers. That's going to involve some uncertainty.

4.4 What if I do the work and then there's something wrong with it?

This is unfortunately one of the ways that schools - and I'm not blaming teachers or any school system for this, there are systematic reasons why it happens - one of the ways that schools kind of mess us up.

Often, in the classroom, we hand in an assignment, and get handed back red marks on it. It's just wrong, and it's permanently wrong. There's no way to go back and fix it. You can't retake it, and can't redo it. The mistake has been made. It will stay wrong when your grades get assessed later.

In real life, in the adult world, quite often there are opportunities - certainly in game development but also lots of other creative fields - to go back and patch something, to release an update, to make a tweak, make a 2.0 version or sequel, a follow up, Director's Cut, another edition to it, where you gave it another pass, made a few new additions or new revisions, another edition of your book.

Get out there and do it. Fully expect that there are going to be some little ways that you would like to tweak it later. Then you can assess, from how big of an audience it's reaching, and how bad their complaints are, whether or not it's worth you going back to change something else up in a re-release.

Expect that there are going to be things wrong with it. Be energized about finding out what it is, so that you might change it, or so that you can do it better the next time.

So much of this actually ties back to the importance of not putting all of your weight and pressure on the very next or first thing that you do. You have to think longer term than that, about how it fits into a bigger picture, a longer arc, a future of projects you'll be taking on.

In this way, the mistakes that you make in the near term become mistakes you won't make later on. You'll be able to draw from more experience, more applications, on more personal learning in ways that even if you had been told, shown, or read about why and how you shouldn't do things certain ways, only once you've made that mistake yourself are you really better inoculated against not doing it again in the future.

4.5 What if by the time I finish it, I could have done it better?

This is perfectly normal. What I want to encourage is not starting over.

Accept that learning. Take it forward to the next project. Bury this past project in a pile of future better work.

The difference in your experience, insights and abilities, by the time you finish a project compared to when you started it is a good thing. You want that. That's a sign that you're improving, making progress, and that having done it is moving you forward from where you started.

The best way to keep learning is to apply that learning to a new project. Much of the learning occurs from our hindsight, looking back on it from how people responded to it, getting feedback, or the results of what we submitted.

Finish it up on schedule. Hit your deadline. Move on to the next thing, applying to it what you've learned, and hope that by the time you finish this next thing, by the time it's done, you'll realize all the things you would have, could have, or should have done differently. Great! Take that with you to the next project, and the next project.

Keep on doing that.

That's what's going to accumulate to your experience, and going to bury into your distant past work that, at some point, iteration would have been diminishing returns, would have not been time well spent. Instead you're able to factor those lessons learned into how you craft and conceive of your next project's and next stages.

Section 5: UNCERTAINTY

5.1 What if things happen that I can't control or stop?

By definition, this is something that is always possible. Things can happen that are outside of our control. In which case, there are two ways to counter this thought.

One is to look at, and say, well, if it's always the case, then you can't let it stop you. If anything, you're going to feel good because you did it, before something outside of your control stopped you from being able to do it. That you did it while you could is worth something looking back, versus regretting that we didn't do it while we still had the chance.

Second, this is just risk mitigation 101: identify what are those big risks that may be out of your control, then come up with a backup strategy, at least sketched out. You don't want to get lost in the details or go down into the weeds, you don't need to plan it out like it's a primary plan. But have a backup strategy, for if this changes or if that domino falls, if this piece gets yanked out from under me, maybe because Facebook's algorithm changes, or something about the format I'm distributing through doesn't keep on working in the way that it used to. What's my pivot plan? Under what conditions do you trigger that pivot?

Just having that as a sketched, back of the envelope or napkin-sized note, about if this happens, here's what we'll do next, can settle our nerves. It calms our anxieties around things that are out of our control, where we don't know what's going to happen. It shows us that if something does happen, we can adapt. We'll make do. We have a plan in place of what we're going to explore if a primary platform, technology, tool, pipeline, etc, changes underneath us.

5.2 What if things change?

Things are always going to change.

The only constant is that things will keep changing.

The worst possible prediction is that things are never going to change. Given that, if you're going to be someone who does something, then you have to warm up to the idea that you are going to be someone who does it even as things around you change. You'll find ways to adapt, navigate, and adjust as new information becomes available.

You can't let yourself be shocked or surprised when things are changing. The marketplace, audiences, platforms, distribution, tools, trends and methodologies - everything is always changing all the time.

Get the best footing you can, and anticipate it's going to keep changing.

5.3 What if it turns out completely different than I intended?

The goal is usually not to produce exactly what you thought you were going to produce.

When you make a plan, part of what you're doing is predicting the future. You're predicting that this is what you're going to want to have by the time that this is done. In the process, you're laying out a map for how to get from point A to point B, so that if nothing else better comes along, you'll wind up in a place worth being. We'll call it again, point B.

If along the way, halfway there, maybe three quarters or 80% there, you identify a detour, that perhaps you could have never seen if you have not made the progress towards destination B, then by all means, assess if you should pivot towards it.

If you set out for New York City, then you discover along the way that Chicago is a place where you're much happier and feeling good about, you didn't fail to make it to New York City - you wouldn't have gotten to Chicago if you hadn't set out for NYC.

If you started college with the intent to study history, but while there discovered you have a different interest in, say, architecture, and instead took that path, you didn't fail at college, you succeeded at identifying a greater interest. The thing to beat was studying history. For you, you found a way to beat that.

It's always still useful to have that map with a tentative answer for the direction we're going in. The initial plan helps get some initial motion from us, having clarity of a direction to go in, towards that point B. But you're not failing if what you end up with is different than what you initially imagined. We can't predict the future. We don't know what we're going to know in the future, based on the things that we'll have tried, based on the things we can see as opportunities which are adjacent as we make progress.

A game development example I love for this is that there's this Doom bible, an original design document, from Tom Hall. It was about his plans for that game, and it had a whole bunch of narrative. This is a game where you're shotgunning zombies and demons in Hell and on Mars, it's wild, it's pure action and pure adrenaline. It would have been bogged down if they had kept the narrative, and these other additional talking character roles in it. It's for the better that what they produced is different than what they initially set out expecting to build. But it was impossible to tell until they started on that journey, and got themselves in motion.

The plan you come up with is really there to give you direction and clarity, to get good momentum moving. After that, you don't fail if what you produce is different than you intended.

The goal is to do something that's the best you can with the time you got. At any given time you might be reassessing, based on the progress you've made, if there's a better detour based on what you're learning as you go.

5.4 What if everyone is counting on me and no one can do what I do?

First, I want to draw upon an old Thoreau quote: "We exaggerate the importance of what work we do."

Sometimes we overestimate to ourselves, perhaps as a survival mechanism or justification of some kind, that what we're doing is irreplaceable, and that no one else could possibly figure out how to do what we do. If we look around us, we might actually be surprised at the number of folks who could get used to it, and could figure it out.

Second, I will say that this is actually sometimes a systematic concern, as a company grows or an organization matures. You actually don't want to be a fragile point of failure for your team or your company, any more than if any given computer falls into a puddle, you shouldn't lose a bunch of unbacked-up work.

It's valuable to document your processes. It's valuable to document your learnings, knowledge, and findings, so that if or when someone else does need to fill in for you, temporarily or permanently, you're not leaving everybody else who was involved in those efforts high and dry, or scrambling to find a way to fill in the gaps.

Help the organization be more adaptive and robust by helping it be bigger than counting on just you and what's inside your head.

5.5 What if I'm surrounded by noise?

I mean this mainly in the sense of signal to noise, but, let's actually address both, because it also could mean what if I'm in a noisy environment?

What if there's jackhammers out on the street, my neighbors are blaring the television in an apartment next to us, so I can't concentrate?

It's worth acknowledging that that is a real, psychological, measurable cognitive effect. If you're in a noisy environment, then you can't think clearly, you can't think as deeply, and you can't solve problems as well. What I've done, years ago, is I went to the hardware store and bought myself a cheap pair of earmuffs. It's the cheapest sound cancellation you can imagine, because I just fit earbuds underneath them if I need to listen to computer audio. This took something that was out of my control - noise outside of my home, noise beyond anything I can do anything about - and gives me something that I can do about it.

Regarding the signal-to-noise ratio issue in the sense of noise as information that connects to nothing else, so is not useful or relevant to us. It's true that there is plenty of that on the internet, there's a constant deluge of it, a tidal wave of information. Most information doesn't relate to you or what you're doing or what you need next.

One thing to look for is which content has gone through process, editing, testing, and filtering. Not always, but often, that information may not be free. Now, I'm not saying there's no good free information out there. I've certainly, over the years, tried to produce what I consider a decent amount of hopefully, okay, free information. But when information gets released for free, consider that the creator of it, at some point, confronted the question, is this information worth paying for? And decided that no, it's not.

When there is a payment layer, it has often had to go through more development, testing, vetting - more eyeballs.

There is sort of a loophole here that's often pretty functional to pay attention to. This is how, for example, why my free video course which has reached 300,000 people can be at the caliber that it's at: this is because it's directly connected to my paid video course and my textbook. Plenty of folks didn't necessarily transition from one of those to the other, and that's totally fine. For some businesses, they're looking at what's the conversion ratio, or how many of those do I get from prospects into paying customers, but I'm looking from another lens. I'm proud of the fact that by having a paid business that I operate, I can support and sustain that, at scale, at a higher quality, completely free to more people who otherwise might not have access to it.

It's the same way where when you play a demo of a AAA game, it might still be much higher polish, better mechanics, reflect more experience and preparation than another free project you might find. And I've played plenty of free games. I'll continue to make free games, I'm not saying they're bad. But if what you're looking for is to prioritize information that has been well cooked, curated, narrowed down, to the stuff that's worth it for you, and trying to save yourself time? Looking for where it's at least somehow connected to a more full process than off the top of someone's mind, in a raw state, can make a difference.

You can even organize or order things that were once chaotic, static noise, into something more valuable by giving them a sequence. The arrangement of that information gives it value in much the same way that the words in a book, if they were jumbled, would be less useful to us. A lot of what people are paying for when they're getting education in university isn't just access to the

information. That same information could have been obtained outside of that environment. It's the sequence to it. It's how it's combined and put together coherently in a way that on the outside is just another textbook floating around.

The cool thing about signal and noise is that there is such a high volume of information that any given day, there's enough signal that you could fully fill your day purely with that. It becomes an exercise in being strategic about which of this will I take inside of me, because it's not about how much is out there, it's about how much you let into yourself.

Just because there's noise out there doesn't mean it has to become uncertainty or distraction for you. That's a choice we make and work on one day at a time.

5.6 What if I'm facing lots of ambiguity?

This is perfectly normal, it's a natural issue people get hung up on when there's uncertainty ahead.

The answer is that that ambiguity is, basically, identifying your next step. Your next step is to bring some clarity to it, to unblock yourself.

You can't act on steps you haven't defined, and you can't follow a plan you haven't made. Where you can see that there are decisions that haven't been made, great, put =on your to do list to make those decisions. Even if you eventually change your mind about decisions that you've made, or you don't feel like the way you're doing it is no longer the best way to go about it, the only way to inform that process is to start giving some clarity where there isn't.

Picture yourself a bit like a janitor bringing order to where there are messes. You look over there, and you see that there's a lot of chaos and disorder in that direction. That's your sign to head over there and put things straight. This makes this place easier for you and anyone else on your teams to work in.

5.7 What if I have regrets about the choices that I made?

In many cases, we can learn from those choices. They can help inform which things we won't do in the future. In some cases, perhaps we were able to embody more of our mistakes in one project, so we won't make those same mistakes in our next ones.

In order for that bad experience to pay off, you have to keep doing it.

Sometimes people will have a bad experience or two, and take that as feedback from the universe that they shouldn't be composing music, telling stories, or making YouTube videos. But that experience, where they didn't get it right, is what sets them apart from someone who doesn't have that experience. It's why they are less dangerous, or less of a liability to a team, than somebody who has not made those mistakes before, and (this is important) acknowledged that those were mistakes. They recognize that those are things they don't want to repeat, not things that they'll do again.

This is why in Silicon Valley, out of potential founders for companies the investors are looking at, they would in many cases feel more comfortable seeing someone who has a failed startup or two than someone else who has no startup experience whatsoever. Those are, to put it very bluntly, landmines that the person won't step on again, things that they know to look out for sooner and better, with more clarity to recognize the patterns, they can notice and have the eye for, in a way that somebody else may not, may be naive or oblivious to, until they've made that same mistake personally.

I'll say the same about when you're thinking about your potential collaborators. Don't judge too harshly if they've made some mistakes, if they have some flaws in their background or their story. You can see that as an opportunity where those are mistakes they won't make with you. That's an opportunity for them to bring different lenses on spotting those problems earlier than somebody else who hasn't made that mistake.

When you take this lens of forgiveness and growth to people around you, you start to recognize that there's a lot more potential collaborators around you than you knew about or saw before, because you're no longer looking for someone who's perfect, but for somebody who has learned from different mistakes than you have.

5.8 What if later information reveals that I made the wrong choice?

All you can ever do is operate on the information you have at the time.

If you let information that you don't have until later affect your interpretation of whether or not the past was a good choice, all that's going to do is freeze you up from ever doing anything, because no one can predict the future.

Make the best decision you can from the information you have at the time, move forward with it, and then if future information reveals that maybe that wasn't the optimal or best decision at the time, at least feel good about the fact that at the time you made what was the smart choice from the information you had access to. That's all we can do.

This is so much the case that if you could go back in time and make the decision again, I might even suggest you'd be better off making what was the smart choice at the time from what you knew, than to have to go against that best information you had access to, and made a wild guess, even if it later turned out to have been a lucky roll for somebody else.

The thing to remember here is that there are downsides to literally any decision and ultimately, the ones you're going to see up close, in the most gritty detail, are the ones that are nearest to you, because it's the path that you've taken. Be careful to not fool yourself into believing that if you'd only made a different choice then you'd have no complications or challenges. Almost always, at best, you'd have different ones.

Any decision, any course of action, any choice has its share of pros and cons. When you're evaluating which choice to make, of course it makes sense to look at each side of each choice. But once you have made that choice, and once that fork is in your past, focus on the pros of the choice that you made, and the cons of the choices that you didn't. You don't somehow get better results, better outcomes, or some sort of brownie points for tearing yourself up in anxiety over hypotheticals. Those aren't helping you move forward.

I'll tell you what is important: how you're feeling, your ability to concentrate, and to feel affirmed that you're making the best of the situation that you're in. If that decision is already in your past, again, focus on the positives, the pros of the choice that you made, and the cons of the choice that you didn't.

Make the best of the things that are outside your control. That includes decisions that are already made, or events in your past. No one can predict the future, and no one can change the past based on their hindsight. The movement that comes from giving yourself clarity and permission to do the things you mean to be doing is what enables us to learn from lessons from our past, to pivot and account for in the future.

Section 6: INSECURITY

6.1 What if I don't have the same advantages as somebody else?

This one's huge, and a real pain point for people. As a heads up, this section's going to be a little bit longer than some of the other Q&A's. There's a few different key questions that I've sprinkled throughout here, really these could be a whole set of material on their own, due to how almost universal they are, but also due to how many different ways there are to untangle them.

This one is such a block that so many people feel, encounter, manifests as jealousy, or as beating ourselves up, and holding ourselves back. I want to equip you here with a variety of options and different ways, different angles to come at it from, to make sure that it's no longer holding you up.

To bring it back to our actual question we're attacking as the subject here: what if I don't have the same advantages as somebody else?

Not only will they say that this might be true, I'm going to say that it's definitely true, because everybody has different advantages. One problem is that if you're focusing on someone else's advantages, then you're not paying enough attention to building on your own. Your own advantages are the ones that need 100% of your attention. You can't build on what someone else has. You can only build on what you have.

Remember that scene from the film Apollo 13, where they dump trash on the table? They say ground control has to help us figure out a way to fix the spacecraft using only these pieces, because that's what the team in space has. Maybe that's how your advantages feel sometimes, like you're working with scraps. If that's what you have, then that's what you have, and you've got to focus on it. Those are the things you have to solve the problems, to take you to the next step.

I've also met people over the years at conferences and events, through the work that I do, who cast what might appear like big advantages, somehow as disadvantages anyway. The things that we're aspiring to, they already have, and they somehow find a way to see it as holding them back or a problem. Their family has so much generational wealth that they worry nothing they do will measure on a scale that matters to people they know. Or, for example, they've had a game that was so successful that they're unclear on how to ever follow that, and a way to grow out of that shadow that they cast on themselves. They've had so much given to them by opportunities, ease, advantage and friendships, that it doesn't feel like they really earned the things that they have sometimes. Or, their work is so well known that it's made it really hard to network casually and make normal friends in the industry the way they used to.

It may sound like those are good problems to have. But they are problems nonetheless. It's about trading problems that you have now for problems you'd rather have. We're going to continue to have problems until the day that we die. Part of this also is the human brain's adaptive nature. No matter what situation we place ourselves in, it's going to spot where its attention is needed. It asks what should it be working on next? What else is the current point of pain? In a weird way, it'll often scale that no matter how many layers of safety, security and advantage someone is given. If we're not careful, the brain will still stretch whatever little things happen until they fill that same space, prompting all of our attention, energy, and anxiety around it. It becomes a proportionally big problem for us.

When we are feeling even a little bit ill, when we have a runny nose or headache, we'll often find ourselves with the thought, if only I could just breathe easily again, if only I could just have a day where I didn't have this headache, then I would be happy. How grateful I would be to not have to keep blowing my nose. And then, you've probably seen this happen, within a few hours of healing and recovering, we very quickly have gone back to being annoyed that the game we wanted to play is releasing two months later than we thought it was, or something else on that scale. We've lost perspective on appreciating the thing that we really knew we wanted.

A more positive spin on the health lens comes from an old example from an early business self-help book. I'm pretty sure this was Zig Ziglar, and you know how much I love to credit where I'm getting my things from but honestly, I cannot remember which book this is from, might be one of his old audio CDs or cassette tapes, even? He made the point that one way to frame your health, and not take it for granted, is if someone could build a robot with all the powers of mind and body that you possess, with eyes that do what your eyes can do, a brain that's as agile and flexible and able to learn as yours, with hands that are as dexterous and mobile as yours, imagine how much they would charge for every single piece of that robot. Imagine how valuable that would be. This machine that you already have access to, that you are the sole owner of, is incredible. Let's not take those powers and abilities for granted, just because you have them day to day.

You might notice that for these health related ones, a lot of it is about advantages that you have that maybe lots of other people have, too. That's actually another lens here on the question of not seeming to have the same advantages as everybody else. Sometimes we lose sight of the advantages we have, because other people have them too, even if they're not making good use of them.

Let's shift over from health, which can be kind of an intense one, over to the subject of public access of the property that, in some sense, you own, or at least, have reasonable ability to access and use. Anything in the country that you're living in, that you're paying taxes towards - public libraries, public roads, public sidewalks - think about that as property that you own. Now, obviously, through shared agreement with others, there are boundaries drawn about people's use of it. And that's because everyone benefits if someone's not misusing what the park is for. But that's land that, again, quite literally, you can access when you want to, as long as it's within the boundaries that the community has agreed upon, you can use it the way you wish. The

same goes for public libraries, or even many non public spaces, like private spaces that are publicly accessible, including your ability to safely walk into a shopping mall.

These are things that we have access to in our lives and opportunities that for generations, for so much of history, didn't exist, or weren't available to most of us. This includes perhaps even in other countries where you're not a taxpayer directly supporting it, but you are welcomed by agreement between the governments to be able to safely and conveniently travel, if and when you have time and means to do so, to visit and use those spaces. For most of history that was all inaccessible to pretty much anyone in the world, unless they lived in walking distance, unless they could afford a horse trip to get there, unless they wanted to brave the dangers of a covered wagon or a ship across the ocean that may or may not make it.

When we add up all of the lands that you have safe, public access to, to share, if you add on top of that picture all the land owned by truly the wealthiest people in the world - Musk, Bezos, Zuckerberg - if you add up all the private land they own, which for some of them includes probably literally an island of Hawaii somewhere tucked away, mansions and castles, plural - add all that together, it's still a drop in the bucket, probably less than a percent more than you and they both have access to out of the shared communal property.

Recognize, too, that in a modern landscape this ownership, in terms of what you can explore, utilize, and have access to, extends digitally as well, into vast online communities for discussion and information sharing. That has only existed for the past 40 years. Kings didn't have access to that. Rockefeller didn't have access to it.

All that private ownership of property amounts to for those multi-billionaires, and in some cases nearly trillionaires, is that's just the property and access that they don't share, which is wasted when they're not using it, and not put to any better use, like all of the great things that we share together.

Now, you might be wondering, what does this have to do with my craft, whether that's game development with some other hobby, side interest, whatever personal lesson you're trying to work on? How does it help that I can go to the park, or the public library?

There's two parts to this. The first is realizing, and not taking for granted, that there are advantages you do have, that can be hard to see, because our baseline is often subtracting out what advantages other people have. We think we don't have the same advantage of somebody else, because when we do have the same advantages we erase it, divide it out, and just don't see it. The same goes for online resources for learning, or technology to be able to connect with others around the world in a way that for most of history was never possible. It's practice at not taking that for granted.

Secondarily, you can only build on what you have, not what you don't have. But in order to do that, you have to recognize the things that you really do have. I wrote a great deal of Self-Command sitting in a park. I found it really helped me to distinguish my mental state from

when I was sitting in front of a computer where I do YouTube videos or Zoom calls for training game developers, versus when I was in writing mode. I'd take my USB keyboard out and a little stand for my screen so I could have it closer to eye level, and go set up at a picnic table at a local park. Having the separation of space helped me in a way that if I hadn't been able to do that, that material would have come out very differently, or perhaps not at all.

The dorm that I lived in as a college freshman specifically had smaller rooms. It was one of the newer buildings, but had some of the smallest rooms compared to other dorms on campus. Maybe this is just clever marketing, but basically the housing people in charge of that building found a way to cast that as a positive by saying that having a smaller dorm room actually would help encourage students to not spend too much time inside there, to go out and explore the many other advantages of that campus and the surrounding city. Saying that if we had basically a castle inside with everything we needed, we wouldn't have gone out. Rather than keeping it as a chip on our shoulder, or in the back of our mind and feeling bad that we don't have more space, recognize all the space that you do have, whether or not you choose to use it, or potentially ways you could leverage it to shift your gears from one kind of work to another by sitting in a coffee shop, using the WiFi in a mall, or even just visiting a public space for inspiration.

Focus on the advantages that you do have. Take stock of the things you have internally, starting with your body and with your mind, then with your friends, your professional peer network, within your experiences.

Like we've talked about through so much else in this material, perhaps if you've made some mistakes, again, learn to see those as advantages, as mistakes that you're better equipped than somebody else to not make in the future. Count those mistakes you've made as among the advantages you have to build on that you're dumping on the table. Realize just how much you're dumping on that table that you have to work with. Focus on what you can work with, not on what someone else is working with.

6.2 What if I can't find the answer somewhere?

One of the other little ways that traditional institutions sometimes can steer us off track is an expectation that we can find answers outside of ourselves for any questions we might have.

Quite often, the answer we're trying to look for something that only we can answer, because it's not an external fact, it's a choice that we make and commit to for ourselves or our projects. It's a decision. In those situations, there is no way to measure through testing, feedback, or any other form what is the right thing to do, outside of picking one, deciding, then going confidently in that direction.

As an example of where we need to make a decision, rather than looking for it outside of ourselves, when I'm working with project leads on which game to build, or even more granularly at the dozens or hundreds of smaller choices to make about different kinds of characters, items, and features to include, so many of those we are never going to find it outside of us. The answers are going to be very contextual to the project. They depend on what other things we do. Any given choice could be right, depending on whether other choices we make support it and are consistent with it.

As soon as we start looking outside of what we're doing, at other things, we might find some reference, maybe do competitive analysis, and might get some broad strokes of inspiration to start from. But those decisions can't be made outside of us. We can't defer to somebody else to make it their problem, or leave it at the mercy of a survey, expecting to decide things based on charts.

When *Back to the Future* came out, time travel wasn't necessarily a hot topic at the time. It became a hot topic because of how successfully it put those ideas together. When the film *Godfather* was released, it wasn't because the mafia was at an all time peak in popularity as a topic. It was because of that work, and how it presented it, that people who saw it suddenly had an interest in it.

There's an episode of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* where Picard and Crusher are mind linked, I believe it's called *Attached*. During it, they're lost on a planet trying to decide where to go next. Picard, being the leader, says "This way," then starts going confidently. Crusher, the doctor with the mind link, so she can see what he's thinking, says, "You don't know anything I don't know, you don't have any reason to be going that direction." Sometimes that's the form that leadership takes, saying, here's a direction that we're going because we realize we need to go in a direction. We'll make the best of it as we move, but we can be certain the right answer is not going to be sitting still, waiting for more information to come to us, if no new information is on its way.

6.3 What if I don't follow through and stick with it?

The wild thing about this one, as much as a source of anxiety for a lot of people, is that more than almost any other thing about it, this one is a choice. It is an active decision. It's the one that is most in your control.

You can't control how many people will check it out, what they'll feel about it, or how many people like it. You can choose to keep showing up. You can choose to wrap it up, to release it, and to move on to the next thing.

The most important person you need to convince that you will stick to it is yourself. That comes from having follow through, typically first on smaller projects, smaller initiatives, on work that's

less original or less challenging at first, maybe even less personally of interest to you. That builds up a demonstration to yourself, creating evidence that you aren't going to leave the next thing undone. That's going to build up your trust to take on slightly bigger things, then bigger things after that, to take it up to another level and do it more seriously. Once you accept that you won't quit at what you're doing, then you'll decide that you may as well experiment and find ways to upgrade what you're doing to do it a little better.

6.4 What if I'm not an artist? (...or programmer, or a musician, or a dancer, or a writer, or speaker, or a leader?)

The thing about these kinds of roles is that it's not something that we're born with, or is true about us, in the same way as, say, our natural hair color, or our height. It's something that we do and then become.

We're a speaker because we speak. We're a writer because we write. We're a painter because we paint, just as much as by bowling you're a bowler, and by running you're a runner. You have to do it first, in order to take on that identity.

If you limit yourself by saying, but I'm not a musician, or I'm not an artist, that limits us from doing the very things that would enable us to in the future, say, "I am an artist," or, "I am a musician."

6.5 What if someone comes along and obsoletes what I'm doing by doing this other thing?

This is super common as a fear for business, and especially in areas of high tech business.

The answer here is another example of where the thing you're worried about is the answer about what to do next: obsolete yourself.

You should be the one doing the thing that you recognize as a threat to your current methodology, business model, or approach. Find a way to start building a bridge, to start pivoting in that direction, to explore the possibility of how you can supplement what you're doing with a bit of that. Start building a way to obsolete yourself before somebody else does. That's going to leave you in a better, stronger position overall. This will help keep you evolving your approaches and methods over time.

6.6 What if I won't know what to do in a new situation as well as I can in my current situation?

This one often takes the form of fear of success, as I talked about a bit in Self-Command. It's the sort of thing that many people worry about: if I had a lot of money would I know how to manage it, if I lived somewhere nicer would I somehow screw things up, if I was in a different social group would I not know how to operate in that context.

You have to trust yourself that you're going to be able to manage in that new situation adaptively and intelligently, just as well as you could in the current situation. The idea of trying to make any sort of progress in our lives is we're going to put ourselves in a situation where we have more advantages and fewer disadvantages, or at the very least, a different set of disadvantages that we choose is sometimes the best that we can do. But if you can operate in your current situation, you've got to trust yourself that you're going to figure it out when you get there.

This is hard because, necessarily, you're imagining the unknown. You're seeing yourself as someone you haven't seen yourself as before. But assuming that we're at least intending to move ourselves in the direction that we mean to go in, then all we're looking at is asking, "Can't we perform at least as well, and at least as functionally, in a better circumstance than in a tougher circumstance?"

Section 7: MONEY

7.1 Shouldn't I stick to doing what's stable and easy, that I already know pretty well?

The world is going to keep changing. What seems reliable and stable today, for reasons beyond your control, and maybe beyond anyone's control, will at some point stop being stable.

Sometimes it drops all at once, in a way that surprises everyone. Sometimes it's incremental, year by year, in a way that boils us like a frog, catching us off guard.

There have been so many times in my own career path when I took a fork in the road between something that seemed stable on the one hand, and something that seemed riskier on the other. In hindsight, I think of it as inflating the life raft before the Titanic that you're on hits an iceberg. I was with a giant AAA game company, but the entire branch I worked at wound down, into one franchise, one game, one floor, until the entire building was empty. When I left a startup, it pivoted in a direction that I strongly disagreed with, but if I hadn't left when I did it would have only become harder to have separated myself into doing work that I feel better about. When I left teaching in university to teach independently, the cost of tuition kept rising, compensation for instructors kept going down, freedom and flexibility for professors to decide their curriculum decreased, and universities faced additional challenges making that line of work, that path, harder than teaching independently.

It can be deceptive, what seems like stable or safe work. You don't necessarily want to put all your expectation on the sense that, well, if I just don't take any risks then that's going to be safe. Then you're also competing in a huge field, an ocean full of other people who are also trying to do what's safe and stable. Occasionally, you might surprise yourself at how much more robust, adaptive, flexible and easy it is to recover when you're a little more agile because you're more off on your own. You may be doing something which seemed riskier in the near term, but over the longer haul, is actually a stronger position for you to be in.

7.2 Am I going to feel guilty for taking time to do this? Am I being selfish to put energy and time into things important to me?

One of my favorite examples for this is actually from a guy who was our podcast named Baron J67. He talks about how what he does as a communications director for a YouTube channel and a website doing game reviews is speaking to something where he's putting his energy and effort as a role model for his kids, similar to what he'd like to see them do, so that they are one day

making time for what's important to them, creating a space where they can thrive and grow. Think about, what would you like to see your friends do, or see your family do?

We're happy when the people that we care about are happy. It's valuable for us to model for others in our lives what that looks like. When we fill ourselves up, we have more of ourselves to give.

Moreover, progress we make in these fields further equips and prepares us to help support or create opportunities for others, to answer their questions that they inevitably have about how to do these sorts of things themselves. Otherwise they might not have access to as direct a peer as you, someone who has put time into exploring skills that may later interest them, whether it's about podcasting, game development, writing, composing, or otherwise.

7.3 What if I don't need more success, wealth, network connections, platform or otherwise?

While it is a good thing to be reasonably content and happy with life, not giving yourself too hard of a time, in any of those areas if you can find a way to improve it that's going to help your ability to help other people. It'll give you ways to introduce others, to give other people what help that they need, to give them feedback that's more valuable. Do you want to be able to help other people be more successful in any of these aspects? Putting in the work yourself will position you to do so.

For those who heard my Self-Command material, this is a variation on the altruistic hitch, in which our care for others can be transformed into giving a little more care for ourselves. This helps when it otherwise might feel selfish, or as if our modesty prevents us from doing it.

Moving yourself into a better spot helps you move others into a better spot, too. Over the years, you'll be glad that you did it.

7.4 What if I'm realistically not going to earn enough money doing this to sustain myself compared to other things I can do with my skills, education level training, or network?

This is very real. Obviously, it's important to earn a living somehow. I'm a strong fan of keeping a day job while we maintain a side interest in balance. But you have to look for more than just the financial factor - again, not to disregard it, but it is only one of many.

There are different kinds of compensation we get from different activities we do, besides the plain cash. This is why there's people's side hustles they engage in that will never really, realistically, cover the cost of what they're doing. But they keep doing it anyway, because it fulfills them in some different way than the work that they're able to get paid to do.

Examples might be that they have more creative control over it, that they do it in a way that they feel is giving back or contributes more value than they're taking, or that it's more challenging to them. Perhaps they have more say in who they're working with, and how, or that it's a chance for them to find their voice or explore their own identity. It might be growing a following, informing future strategy, or building a brand identity. It might give you the variety or unpredictability that you crave, if maybe the day job is so safe and consistent that it doesn't.

These may or may not ever intersect with what an employer is willing to pay us on a day to day basis to fulfill roles and duties of a position that pays us best for our experience level. But it can be an important part of having a balanced life, where we're meeting our different needs, even if it's not something that's our primary career.

You see this sort of thing, too, in people who volunteer for board positions of nonprofits, or people in the late stages of their career doing some mentoring. That actual work may not ever be their primary profession, but it still feels worth it for them to do.

There are so many other dimensions to consider, besides just the financial reward.

7.5 What if I can't be the best at it, or not even particularly great at it?

There are 8 billion people. Life would be awful for everybody if the only people getting to do anything are the one in 8 billion who happened to be the very best at it.

Even if you're not the best singer, it's still worth singing. Even if you're not the best dancer, it's still worth dancing. And if you're not the best writer, reader, or walker, it's still worth writing, reading, and walking. It's a part of being human, and part of existing in the world, of expressing ourselves, understanding our growth, taking on new skills and socializing with others.

It has its own worth for you, and your enjoyment as a person. That doesn't make it worthless to do. It makes it as worthwhile to do as it is for you to be doing it. It's no less important to be creating anything you feel like creating, and taking part in activities you feel like taking part in, even if you don't necessarily feel exceptional at it, or like you're on track to be the best in the world at it - you really don't have to justify it in that way.

You might discover anyway that best is often not on a linear scale. In many different cases it's a lot of apples and oranges going on for any particular thing, where an angle, a perspective, a

take, a version, or size of it might better fit and match somebody else's interests. They wanted a version that's a little more slow paced, or a little more aggressive. They wanted the version that's a little more advanced, or a little less advanced.

Having another option out there, even if it reaches a smaller audience, might be helping to fill a role and be the best thing for somebody else who wasn't finding what they needed and wanted out of everything else they could find.

7.6 What if I don't feel comfortable charging for my work what I'd need to keep doing it?

This one's super common one to see from a lot of game developers who are trying to transition from doing it as a hobby, or a side interest, something they picked up as a curiosity, who are then trying to grow that into something that can do more substantially, profitably, and sustainably.

There's a few notes I can provide, at a high level, for thinking about how to overcome this obstacle.

One thing to recognize is that kind of by definition: if you are unable or unwilling to charge for it, what you would have to in order to keep doing it, then you won't keep doing it.

I've seen folks who tried for so long to keep giving away free material. There will come a point at which if you don't find a way to make it something that can offset other opportunity costs in your life, you just stop doing it. This is where, in the long term, it becomes a detriment to their community that they just fell off the earth, stopped speaking on the issue or sharing about the issue because other things came up in life that had to take priority.

Another thing that will inevitably wind up happening in those kinds of situations is the person will no longer be in a position to do it for themselves, so they wind up working for somebody else who was willing to charge a much higher rate on their behalf. Then they're still earning much less than they would have, because that person and other bureaucratic structures around them are absorbing a lot of that earning back into the machine that doesn't go to the person who's doing the craft.

If you want to be doing it independently, it's going to take overcoming whatever discomfort, awkwardness, or hang ups we might have about charging what the work is worth. It becomes necessary when thinking about pricing stuff that you're doing independently you must be factoring in for taxes that you may own it, factoring in for overhead of legal costs, office costs, other things that if it was just a salaried job may seem like a lot. There are other costs you have to account for, including the time between when you can find projects.

When you see people who have a higher rate per project, it may be partly because they're not doing projects constantly, back to back. What's happening is that they might have some work moving in tides, times when there's a lot to do, times with a little, and periods of uncertainty between finding the next work. That's part of making it work at that scale so it's sustainable.

It also includes building overhead for advertising, marketing, or other kinds of prospecting work.

That's all just part of finding a way to keep doing it, if it's something you want to continue to do.

At pretty much any price, you will find that there are going to be people in the world who it's going to be out of the budget for, or just not the right fit for. In that case, they won't buy it. They'll find a different provider. You do not have to provide the single source of answers for everybody. This is part of what's so great about the internet. If somebody wants something, as a higher or lower cost version, a more or less experienced version, or a different approach, they'll find it somewhere out there. You don't have to provide every single tier.

This really set me free early in my training career when I was figuring out who I wanted to help serve, and how I could best serve them. I used to try to be an answer for all kinds of different programming languages, platforms, experience levels, methods and goals. The more I honed in on that there's a certain set of situations people are in where I can try to become the world's best person to answer those questions, I started getting way next level results out of it, in contrast to when I tried to scatter myself and spread myself thin, willing to work with anybody who wanted help. That's maybe an OK way to start, because you have to figure out where your strengths are. But finding that strength is a next step towards bringing it up a level.

That's where we can start charging appropriately as a specialist - once you've helped a lot of other people with similar kinds of problems, as evidence you can help someone else with theirs.

Another good thing that also came out of charging more appropriately is that suddenly we're held accountable for results, on the hook to maintain it or improve it. When all goes well, it can create a machine which can snowball where we can take the funds earned by it to reinvest into making more people aware of it, which at the end of the day means more impact for more people.

So don't be afraid of learning how to charge for your work. There are going to be some obstacles and challenges along the way, some things to figure out. Talk to a lawyer and talk to accountants to get answers to your questions so you can move forward with certainty. But it's worth solving. It's one of those things like so many other skill areas where once you've solved it, it stays solved.

You'll be equipped with that knowledge for the rest of your future.

Section 8: RECEPTION

8.1 What if people dislike me for the way this work comes out?

Here's a strange thing about people: barring extremes that usually require a very calculated, deliberate angle of trolling for negative attention, for the most part there will be people in your life who are going to be supportive or unsupportive of you kinda no matter what you do.

The people who love you care about you and are on your side? They're going to be at your back no matter what.

If you do bad work, or rough work, they'll want to help you improve. If you do great work, they'll congratulate you.

There's going to be other people who, no matter what you do or say, are just going to have picked out that you're who they want to pick on. They're going to find or make up a reason if they don't have one, regardless of what you do.

So you might as well do stuff.

Sometimes this is easier to see on the big franchises, which are much discussed, and become our central point of shared attention for conversation culturally - such as what's Marvel doing, or what Star Wars doing? You can start to see through how a bunch of the discussion and discourse is really just people who want to find a reason to hate it, so they're going to find a reason to hate it. Other people want to find a reason to love and have fun with it, so they're going to find a reason to love and have fun with it.

At a smaller scale, the same is true about each of us, as we're navigating our creative outlets and the new skills that we're picking up.

8.2 What if people misunderstand or misconstrue what I'm doing, and why?

They will! Count on it. Somebody will.

The only way to avoid that problem is to reach no more than a handful of people, or to not do it at all.

As soon as you reach an audience of even 100 people - which is not a big audience and in internet terms - picture the one in 100 most confused, misinformed, wrong, angry, distracted-by-having-a-bad-day person you've ever encountered. Consider how they're going to vent at anything that gets in front of them.

When you reach a 200 person audience, you're going to have two of those.

When you have a 2,000 person audience, your reach is going to include 20 of those.

When your work, whether it's something creative, business, or otherwise, reaches a million people, you'll have 10,000 of those people, who are each having the one in 100 worst possible states of mind.

Now, this is not meant to deflect all feedback. By all means, do look for patterns, and learn what you can, adapt and try to improve. There will be some useful feedback to be picked out of those things. But in other cases, it's just somebody who's having a rotten time, a rotten day, and there's really no way to avoid this if you want to be out there doing things.

Make up your mind that it's going to come with the territory. You'll have to learn how to navigate that like any other kind of challenge or obstacle.

It's like the Stoics say: there are foolish people, and to expect them not to do and say some foolish things would be like expecting a fig tree not to produce figs.

Other people will pretty easily see their off the wall takes, one star reviews, and irrational hate venting pretty much exactly for what it is. They recognize that a YouTube comment should be taken with a grain of salt. They know that someone who is irrational online probably shouldn't be listened to as an authority.

At the end of the day, if you tried to please those people, you couldn't. You can't change their minds, because they wouldn't let you. They've already made up their minds and decided what they're going to see, feel, and do. Don't waste your energy trying to please them.

Work with the people who want to be worked with, and create for the audience who wants to be the audience.

I used to fight really hard to try to convince people to learn things that they didn't care to learn. Some of the time I might get through. but in the time and energy it took to get even one resisting person to maybe do it, I realized I could be helping 100, 1000, or even 10,000 people who actually wanted to be learning how to do that thing.

8.3 What if I encounter rude and unpleasant people?

This is a little different from the previous point, because it's not about reception of the work that you've done. This is not about having a broad fanbase or audience reach with people responding to the work that you put out there. Instead, it's about people responding to you, or about how you might have to raise your public profile as a part of promoting the work that you do.

You can even see this in an in-person, day to day, life lens, where you might have a random interaction at a grocery store, or any variety of settings, that might throw you off a little bit. If you're going to be on camera, on YouTube, on schedule, trying to be able to promote your work, it can be difficult to have that throw off your day, and not also throw off the work that you're doing.

This is just about framing those thoughts.

I want to caveat here as a quick note that I'm coming from a place of privilege here I want to acknowledge, in that out of different demographics and people online who have a problem being harassed for things, I am among the least targeted. This is in no way trying to address that side of issues which I can't personally speak to. This is about how, as you're interacting with strangers day to day, or maybe trying to recover from awkward daily interactions that happen out and about in the world around you, not letting that throw off the work that you do, your public presence, or the progress that you're making.

There's much more about this in *Meditations*, by Marcus Aurelius, which I've adapted as *Self-Calm*, another audiobook included in this same bundle. But drawing on a Stoic point by Marcus Aurelius in *Meditations*: the best revenge is to not be like them.

They may be bitter, in part, because somebody else was bitter to them. Don't let that spread to you, and then through you on to other people in your life. You can put a stop to it, by not letting it in.

If you're the type of person who finds it helps restore your calm to think of this from a sense of justice or karma. one way to frame it in your mind is that there's usually no worse punishment you could reasonably wish upon them than that they go through life as who they are, until they course correct. You had to deal with them only briefly, but everywhere that person goes they have to deal with being around a person like them. Be grateful that you're not like them. Now, don't antagonize them, because they may have nothing to lose, and nothing better to do than to try to cause you trouble. But don't let them derail you doing what you can do for other people who are more reasonable and receptive.

8.4 What if I don't want to ask people for feedback?

When you have the impulse, that anxiety, that you don't want to ask someone for feedback? That's your sign that you have got to ask for feedback.

There are going to be one of the few different outcomes from asking for feedback on something, assuming that they say yes and will check it out.

The first is they'll help guide your attention to the areas you can best spend your energy and effort on to make it less uncomfortable to ask the next person for feedback.

They'll help you feel much more confident, because they let you know the things that most bothered them, so you can then do something about it. You'll feel that much better about asking someone else for another round of feedback.

Another possibility is that they won't spot anything wrong with it. They may actually help calm your nerves over how you were afraid it was awful, or felt it was terrible.

Sometimes the reason why we're able to produce things that are good is because we have a high standard for our work. We look at it, and see the defects, then we keep painting on it, drawing on it or re-recording it, trying another riff on the guitar until we get the version of it that we want. That's what makes it good, that we have an eye for these things. Sometimes the first time we put it in front of somebody else we find the feedback that they give us is that actually, this is great. In that case, the only way to know that, to calm your nerves, is get that external validation by asking somebody else.

Another thing you may find from the exercise of doing this is simply who is not your audience. This one does have to be used carefully, because it's certainly not meant to be a blanket skeleton key to get you out of any kind of feedback, or anything like that. Instead, what it's supposed to be is recognizing that sometimes, you're going to hear from somebody that's just not for them, in which case, don't try to force it to be for them.

If we do too much to try to water it down to be for everybody, it might lose the things that the people who like it for what it is will love the most about it.

I will offer one other pass here in this section. What if you really don't want to ask for feedback, and you're very, very, very new to something? I like to use an example that I call a kid's first piano recital. They're playing the song, it's coming out, they're doing it, but really, there's kinda so much wrong with it, that the only feedback that's going to be helpful is to just keep on doing it, keep putting it that time, keep up the momentum and work through more errors, get better muscle memory, just getting more experience. If you're totally new to something, there may be so much wrong with the story writing, the music, or the art, that if you ask for feedback, they

won't say much, because people who could give you feedback would have too much feedback to give but they can't be your instructor, unfortunately. For now, just keep on doing it.

Out of the gate, for a lot of people I work with there's a lot of cases where on the first project or two, there's so much that they can even see is not the way they wanted it to be, by the time the game is done, they are already taking that with them into the next project. It would have been premature on those projects to go through full rounds of playtesting, because it would have told them what frankly, they already knew better than anybody, was wrong with it. It wasn't a result of the fact that they didn't want it to be good, it was because they were not yet able to execute as well in their intentions as they would like to be able to, after as they accumulate more experience.

So, if you're totally new to something, and you feel like you know what, I don't want to get feedback on this, we'll say that's okay, give yourself that space. Don't force it, or make it a whole production element, if it's just some early practice. However, feedback and testing will be among the things that can help you level up from beginner to intermediate, and certainly from intermediate to advanced.

You might even suspect you know what you're going to hear, in which case, validate that assumption. It's only going to help you spend your energy more effectively on making it better. Or, it's going to calm your nerves, that it's good the way that it is, in a way that no amount of spiraling over it yourself was ever going to get you to.

8.5 How do I know when to stop asking for feedback and testing?

As long as you keep asking for feedback and testing, you're going to keep getting feedback, and you're going to keep getting test results. It can be tempting to let that cycle run out of control, until something drags out way longer than you ever intended.

Here's an easy rule of thumb: if you can ask maybe four to seven people for feedback, and not have overlap in their indicated issues, then you're probably about as good to go as you're going to get.

Each person subjectively is going to spot different things, and have different opinions or reactions at different points in it. Your concerns are where there's overlap, to where there's a clear pattern, that it's a distraction to people.

Speaking of distractions, remember to not focus too much on their proposed solutions, or the change that they say you should make. You have a lot more context for the production trade-offs for the rationale for the underlying vision or what you're trying to do. But if what they see feels to them like it's a problem? If nothing else, it's a problem that it feels like one. Sometimes the fix is

actually how we set it up, frame it, or explain it, so that it's not perceived as a problem when they encounter it.

Like fixing software bugs, every single time you fix something, there's going to be other little threads that get opened up. This is where sometimes we see harsh critique of very big projects, but what they're not able to speak to is how far as wrong as some decisions may look to them in isolation, who knows the trade-offs of what else got fixed by those decisions, or how much worse it was.

It's worth giving it some cycles in the polish tumbler. It will make a difference. But there are rapidly diminishing returns on that feedback.

When you've got a version where the complaints are at least not pointing to the same stuff - maybe four to seven tests of people who don't spot the same complaints or issues - let it out there and move on to the next thing.

8.6 What if my first projects are kind of a mess?

Here's the thing. Your first projects are the best time to make a mess.

You have the smallest possible audience. No one else is paying attention yet. Embrace that. Enjoy that!

It's almost inappropriate to throw too much time, energy, and perfection into your first projects. That's a great place to get your beginner errors out of your system, put a bow on them, ship them, and move past it.

Think about the very first story you ever wrote for school. Should you have gone out of your way to find a paid editor, to revise that work and make it the sharpest, cleanest, best, tightest wording possible for that work?

Probably not.

It was helpful to have written a story to have gotten it behind you, to have made a thing to wince at and to grow from. Rather than worrying about if your first project is going to be a mess, be glad that it is, and use it as a time and place to get that mess out of your system.

8.7 What if my image, song, video or other contribution comes out pretty rough?

Rehearsals, drafts, editors and testing are part of the professional process.

People don't get so good at it that they no longer need those things, people get good at it because they come to accept and expect that as a part of doing things at a higher level.

We don't skip the need for it, we learn the need for it. We go into it by building in processes to catch and address the errors.

In one of my communities, we used to have live meetings in the Beverly Hills Public Library. That was near enough to Hollywood that we had a few Hollywood actors in our group who would give presentations, just updates for team game projects. One of the interesting things to me was that these were people who professionally acted in Hollywood movies alongside well-known stars. But, when they were presenting to a small room informally, in a way they hadn't rehearsed, and learned the lines for, they uhh-ed and umm-ed just as much as anybody else.

This is not a judgment against them, it's an observation that short of the professional practice that comes from rehearsals and scripted lines, the professional level just recognizes the need for those extra stages. It doesn't mean that those somehow go away, or that naturally some people don't need an extra take. It's a part of the process. Respect it as such.

8.8 What if this won't be good?

Two things about this question.

First of all, no one can know. It's impossible. We're really bad at predicting the future about what the output is going to be like when it takes the actual form we can give it, in pretty much any medium. Until you're playing the song, until you've drawn the picture, until you've made the game, or you've done the thing, no one can say.

Secondly, often it's such a subjective apples and oranges type of consideration. There's not a linear scale of terrible to great. There's almost always some audience out there who is a right match. Now, it's a matter of getting in front of the right kind of audience, or them potentially being able to find it. But it's going to be what somebody wants, no matter what its size, length, complexity, style or approach.

Build what you're going to build. It'll find its audience or it won't. You can't worry in advance about if it's going to be good or not, because you don't know, and to the right somebody anything will be, to the wrong somebody else nothing will be.

8.9 What if people don't like my voice, style, or how I look?

Every audiobook review, including for professionally produced, professionally voiced by world famous actor or actress audiobooks, have at least some reviews saying that they can't stand that person's voice.

There is no celebrity or model on Earth who you will not find some amount of comments online saying that they find that person quite unattractive.

There is no painting in a museum that appeals to absolutely everybody in the world. In fact, most of that art really doesn't even appeal to the majority of people. The same goes for best selling books, best selling films, or best selling games.

There will always be someone who it is not a match for.

By putting yourself out there and being another person who's creating, doing, and making yourself present in the world around you, it's one more opportunity for someone else who wasn't finding what they wanted in someone else's voice, someone else's style or someone else's look, who can find a match they relate to or appreciate in yours.

8.10 What if other people don't want me to succeed?

Here's the thing. Most people honestly don't care. They're so focused on themselves, their own insecurities, and their own progress, that they're kind of not paying any attention to you.

Out of the people who are paying attention to you, they fall into one of two different categories. There's people who do want to see you succeed, because they care about you. They're on your side. They have your back. They're looking forward to you thriving, and they'll be pleased about your progress.

On the other side - in case it's not obvious by process of elimination - there are people who really, you should want to prove wrong. They don't have your back. They're not really your friend. They don't wish you well, in which case, don't listen to them.

Don't live your life according to what somebody who dislikes you wants to see from you.

The people who are rooting for you are your friends. They want to see you succeed. They'll only be happier to see you in a better spot tomorrow than you are today.

Anybody who thinks otherwise, you want to disregard what they think, anyway.

8.11 What if I get told no?

Whether you're applying for a job, applying for school, trying to make a sales pitch or form a partnership, there are a lot of situations where someone else may decline when you put yourself out there.

All it means is you drove forward, enough to get a, "no." That sets you free to look in other directions. It sets you free from assuming that that's your backup plan, or that it's one of your options. That helps you move forward onto asking for another opportunity.

There are countless situations where more people apply to something than could possibly be accepted to it. People who are equally qualified, equally capable, but the timing wasn't ideal. You may be asking someone you could get a yes from a different time, but it just doesn't line up.

This is part of where, in sales work for example, you might expect to have only a one and 20 hit with a cold lead. That means if you need two yes's, you have to ask 40 people. If you need three yes's, you ask 60 people.

Because the no's that we get are in proportion to the yes's, you want to get more no's. The way to get to more yes's is to get more no's.

It's not as a sign that you shouldn't have asked. It's positive feedback that you took the action, and you did ask.

There's a Keith Olbermann quote I like about this, where he said, "The world bursts at the seams with people ready to tell you that you're not good enough. On occasion, some may be correct. But do not do their work for them. Seek any job, ask anyone out, pursue any goal. Don't take it personally, when they say no. They may not be smart enough to say yes."

Like one of the points I mention in Self-Command, when you ask for help and learn to ask for help, you're likely to find an answer, even if you don't find it from the first person that you ask. This works because you've opened yourself up to asking for help. That often leads indirectly to finding a source, even if your first one is a no, your second one is a no, your third one is a no. Each time you're asking you're getting better at the question, you're getting better at figuring out where to direct it, and you're rolling the dice again at finding your yes.

Section 9: TEAMING UP

9.1 What if it's too much for me to do all on my own?

Most things in the world, done at a high level, take a team. There's almost always a team effort.

It might not always appear that way from the name that you must associate with it, who does the related interviews, or is most widely recognized. That's more about our limited lens as an audience than how really big things get made, how they come together and you become aware of them.

So if it seems like in order to take what you're doing to the next level, it's going to take a team to do it? That might just mean that you're looking at it correctly. You are factually correct. You have outgrown what you're able to do alone.

Speaking of which, it's perfectly fine to start things as a solo effort. We just don't want to deceive ourselves into thinking that therefore, in order for us to produce something better, we have to keep doing everything by ourselves.

It becomes useful to draw upon that solo experience, the stuff we used to do alone, to better see how the pieces fit together, to better relate to, coordinate and assess the abilities of others in different domains. But, ultimately, it's going to take teaming up with others to build things that are beyond what any given individual could do.

Among game developers, I often find myself explaining that it's a bit like moving an appliance, in which you'll see the sticker on it that shows one person trying to move the refrigerator or washing machine alone with a big red circle in a slash for universal, "No, don't do it." Even if there's a strong person on earth who can pull it off, it'd be sort of a stunt. It's impressive. It's also an unnecessary amount of strain to put on their body, and could have been done way more easily, safely, reliably, predictably, by two or three people working together.

The things that we're enjoying often have, even if there's mainly one person we associated with it, behind the scenes, additional people involved at every layer and angle of it. It's important to open ourselves up, to get over our ego, thinking that we have to do it ourselves, our pride in thinking that this has to be a reflection solely of me and my choices with no compromises.

Learning to work with others opens you up to a whole new domain of different opportunities, capabilities, strengths, and networks.

9.2 What if I don't know anyone else who does it, and no one else around me has a similar interest to what I want to do?

The magic of doing things is it creates a lighthouse that draws in other people who also do that thing.

It will help other people find you, because they'll see that you are putting out your podcast, or making YouTube content. Simply by virtue of doing the thing, you make yourself visible as a person in the world who builds games, writes stories, or makes poems.

The other thing you'll start to recognize happens is that as you're really doing these things, and putting them into practice, growing and improving at it, so you increasingly have a body of work to show that proves to yourself - as much as anybody else, proves to yourself - that you're doing it, is you're going to start to trust yourself to put yourself into new situations, new social events, networking events, conferences, meetups, and other places.

Before, you would have felt like a fish out of water. Before, you wouldn't have felt like you belonged. Now you'll see that you're a person who's doing the same things that these people are doing, participating in the same practices the same field, studying the same resources, and able to have a conversation, on the basis of what you're each doing, trading notes.

It's going to happen when you start doing it.

That's going to help you put yourself in those situations, in addition to the fact that, again, it's going to help make it easier for people to find you.

I really like this point from one of my grad professors, Dr. Brian Magerko, that a lot of people, when they're working on publishing papers, stress out as researchers over, am I presenting the final conclusion, trying to say I know everything about the subject, or that these are the final answers? Never - it never really is. What it's doing is it's engaging in a dialogue. It's raising a flag, saying, "I'm thinking about these things. I'm working on related problems. Who else is interested in this?"

By giving those talks, presenting those papers, and publishing that work, it invites disagreement, which you want. It invites collaborators, which you want. If you hadn't put yourself out there, if you hadn't put the work out there, your tentative conclusions, the best that you were able to do so far, then no one else can see. Your lighthouse isn't on. You haven't done something to help people find that you share their interest.

Become the beacon to let other people know that someone around them is doing it.

9.3 What if I can't find someone who thinks enough like me to work with them?

The trick here is that usually, you really want to work with someone who thinks differently than you do. It's going to go way better if you've got two or three or more people together, who have a very different lens and approach than if it's people who are on the exact same page.

You don't want redundancy, exactly the same thinking from a second or third person. The old saying is right, 10 clowns don't make a circus. You need somebody else to have a different angle on distribution, on marketing, process, why and how they're doing it.

Rather than seeing people around you as doing a weaker version of what you're doing, identify what they're doing well that you might be doing a weaker version of, but have maybe been consciously or unconsciously ignoring. By working together as a team, you'll have fewer weaknesses between you, fewer blind spots being overlooked, able to draw on more than just a single experience and background, but a broader experience and background. Ultimately, you'll be able to deliver something that's far better for far more people.

9.4 What if other people that I'm working with make mistakes?

They're wondering the same thing about you.

Realistically, you're going to make some mistakes, and they're going to make some mistakes. Everybody is imperfect. People make mistakes.

If you can't work with people who are imperfect, you can't work with any people.

The challenge is to find a way to set up processes, layers of feedback, circles of filtering between you and the outside world, so that you can help each other cover for one another's mistakes, catch each other's mistakes, and correct each other's mistakes.

That's how a team is constructed - not from a set of people who are flawless superheroes, but from a set of real people who make real errors and real oversights, structured in a process and a way that they'll catch each other. That way you'll address the biggest flaws before they reach the outside world.

9.5 What if I encounter problems with my partners or teammates?

There's a lot of folks who, when they're in a relationship and there's a problem in life, their tendency is to put that problem on the other person. They think that the problem is because there's someone else there. Or, if they're in a job and their life has a problem, they blame the job. They say the problem is here, because there's a job.

Life has problems. Things are going to come up. The difference is whether or not we're navigating it alone. The difference is whether or not we have somebody else who's with us against that problem.

Now, sometimes the problems are different, with or without teammates we might make some trade-offs about sharing a vision, or adapting direction to build on somebody else's strengths, and not just our own considerations.

But more often than not, more people means more capability, more ability to spot issues, more network, and more strength to draw upon.

Having an artist on your project tell you that it doesn't look the way it needs to look isn't a problem that the artists created. It's a problem that the artists help you spot.

It's kind of like if you have a partner in a relationship who says to you that you're being kind of a jerk in a situation, they didn't make you a jerk in that situation. They helped you detect it, so you can do something about it.

Business, projects, creativity and learning are going to have challenges. Don't mistake that those challenges happen because you are working with others.

In most interesting problem spaces, it's you as a set of people against these abstract issues, obstacles, systematic complexities, these external difficulties.

It's not as if you attack each other that's going to solve any of the weaknesses or result in a better outcome.

That you have those teammates or that partner will help you solve the problems that would have arisen anyway, or maybe been there but not noticed by you.

Section 10: DOING IT

10.1 What if I'm stalling out or not seeming to make progress?

This is especially about when it happens on a day's scale. There were certain objectives you had for the day, that you were hoping to get done by a certain time, but you just aren't moving the needle forward on them. It's already a weird day.

Look for high value tasks that don't normally fit into your routine. Are there emails you haven't responded to that are important, bills to pay looming over you, other things that are logistical or bureaucratic dragging behind on your to-do lists, because though they are important, at no point are they finding a place in your schedule as imminent or urgent?

That can be a great way to still feel like the day was a win, having knocked out a thing or two that may not have been time consuming, but were being put off for reasons other than the time they take. Instead of having had a day where you meant to get a couple hours on a project but you didn't, turn it into one where at least you responded to that email you've been putting off, took care of that phone call you've been avoiding making, or opened that envelope that you've been ignoring on your desk.

There have been days where I meant to do a certain amount of things for a certain amount of hours, but didn't quite get them to a level I really hoped that I could. Then, in a sort of micro pivot near the end, found a way to knock out 2, 3, maybe 4 small bureaucratic, logistical, necessary, unfun tasks that had been dragging behind me.

It's another way to make the day feel like it was worthwhile.

There are days where you're flowing with it, going with it, stuff is happening and things are moving forward. On those days, it's hard to tell if you're going the right direction, to think about where you're headed. The easiest time to reconsider where you're coming from and where you're going is when you're not in constant motion. It's a great time to reflect. That makes it easier to reassess, should I be releasing this sooner? Is it on track? Have I been hiding from myself some trouble that's under the hood? That doesn't mean you can't or shouldn't do it, but means maybe you should rethink how you're doing it.

Now the only other side to this is that once you do have some thoughts about whether you should pivot to be taking a different direction, the next step is to explore that direction, if only to find out whether or not you're right or wrong about it. That can be a revitalized source of energy, recognizing that maybe what you originally planned to get to, you're not feeling that. If so, that's a clue for you. There's something deep inside your gut that's giving you a sign, that it wasn't really heading towards the right place after all. Having spotted a new target - maybe that target

is closer, where you decide it's going to be better off released as the version a month from now instead of five months from now like you had planned, or two years from now like you had planned - just to put a bow on it and get it behind you.

Sometimes that's the answer.

Having that clarity, having reassessed your decision of a good direction to try out next, can help revitalize your energy and effort so you're no longer stalling out in idle.

10.2 What if I keep procrastinating or putting it off?

Keeping in mind that our focus here is often on the things that we do in our side time, our personal interests, topics we learn on our own, new skills we're in the process of picking up - nine out of ten times, when someone approaches me about what they perceive as procrastination, it's actually a different problem in disguise.

What's almost always going on as they haven't really given themselves a near-term deadline to make it a priority.

In a lot of other situations, we get used to somebody else putting the deadline on us: school teachers, bosses in the workplace, our spouse. When it's you, on your own, doing your thing, you still have to give yourself those deadlines.

The way to think about this is that procrastination really is putting off something that has a deadline.

Which is to say: if you haven't yet decided on a deadline, you aren't even really procrastinating, because you haven't really committed to doing that task.

This isn't just a twist of semantics. This has practical implications on the way to solve it, because it means that your next step forward isn't to somehow change that you were being lazy, because you weren't, it's to paint a clear target by giving yourself the deadline. Decide what that is.

Sometimes people counter that they don't know how long it's going to take, or can't put a deadline on the whole thing. That's perfectly fine. There are a couple ways to still move past that step.

The first is give yourself a deadline to come up with the bigger estimated deadline. Set an estimation period. "Within the next two weeks, or within the next week, that is when I'm going to have decided whether I want this to be a three month or a five month scale project."

The other thing you can do is form a clear deadline for the next step or current stage. “We’re going to leave pre-production in two months.” It might even take the form of a feasibility study, as in, “We’re going to spend the next three months figuring out whether or not to move forward on this multi-year project, investigating everything we can to clarify that we’re going in the right direction if we do.”

But if you don’t put a deadline on it then everything else that’s going on that does have some sort of deadline is going to get in front of it in line.

The only way to give it a spot in that line is to pick a closer deadline, a milestone or a definition that may not even be the final project. What are you going to have that you can show a week from now? I do find those weekly increments tend to work really well for us in HomeTeam. But, obviously, scale this to proportion for the time you have for it and the nature of the project.

Additionally, when I say to give yourself a deadline, it has to be outside of yourself.

It could be on a calendar, on a whiteboard, whatever system you prefer. It just can’t be only in your head. If it’s in your head then it’s going to keep sliding forward, relative, sometime later, or three weeks from now. You won’t even notice when months pass, and it’s somehow still three weeks from now.

That can go on indefinitely, until we start to shy away from the shame of how long it’s been, dragging out, until we don’t want to think about doing the math for how long we kept saying three weeks to ourselves. This feeds back into feeling like procrastination, because again, we’re held up on that we still haven’t ever given ourselves a deadline, externally.

Maybe think about it this way: the reason the Self-Command method with the whiteboard works, in case it’s not clear, is directly tied to this point about the fact that you’re giving yourself a near term deadline. That means you’re actually committing to a task, so suddenly, it is possible to procrastinate on it. Until you’ve given yourself a task, and a time to do it by, deciding on the version that you can get done by when, there’s nothing yet to procrastinate on because you haven’t really started the task.

The Self-Command method combines this with another point in Self-Command as the “aim closer” method where we figure out, no matter whether the main objective is months from now, years, weeks, or days from now, zeroing in on what’s the derivative, point in that curve, slope, or finest increment you can do as the very next action to take. That’s what moves you in the right direction.

You aren’t lazy, and you aren’t incapable. Like so many other people, you were probably just trying to address the wrong problem.

Give yourself a deadline, and let yourself get to it.

10.3 What if it just needs a little bit more time?

This one is especially a problem if we find ourselves doing it repeatedly. Something that was meant to take only two months, or be given a season of the year, starts expanding. Now, it's taking a year or two.

One downside that happens is we get into a pressure spiral as an additional factor. We're rapidly seeing diminishing returns, since what happened early on was so foundationally off the mark that more iteration on top isn't going to revise or fix that. But we start building up more and more pressure, until now, the outcome, in order to feel like we didn't waste all that time, has to justify the fact that we put five months into it, or two years into it. That pressure makes it harder and harder to win that race.

It's often worthwhile to cut your losses, put a bow on it, and get it behind you. Move on to the next thing, rather than letting this one take just a little bit longer, and then a little bit longer.

Make up your mind about the amount of time you want to give yourself, then respect that deadline. Adapting and converging as you reach that release date, in the long term, is what is going to serve you best.

This way you're not just oblivious to the growing opportunity cost of having a thing which drags out for years with nothing to show for it, as the risk of it never getting completed or released at all goes up and up over time.

10.4 What if I'm feeling lethargic, and low energy?

I've got a couple things to say about this challenge. It's a nearly universal one.

First, let's acknowledge that there's absolutely a physiological dimension to if you're not feeling tops. Sometimes it might largely be a matter of whether you're resting enough, as obvious as these sounds, and are you eating enough? Are you eating the right things? Is the air where you're trying to work bad? Could it help to circulate it, to open a window or get a fan?

Those little things may sound like nothing, and they don't seem like a logical, rational reason why our thoughts wouldn't be connecting, why we wouldn't be doing the things we mean to do. But these can be very real obstacles to us. They're worth doing something about.

It's perfectly logical that if an automobile is out of tune, then it's not going to operate. Our bodies are, in a certain element, mechanical or chemical in a way that if they aren't getting what they need, in the way they need it, that is going to be a huge issue.

At the very least, it's worth first ruling out by doing whatever we can to address these things before we also worry about the other layers of why am I not feeling as much enthusiasm or energy as I wish I was.

Another part of this is to recognize that this thing which we're referring to energy, or enthusiasm, is different from time. There are certain kinds of tasks we can do which, when we see ourselves moving forward on them - perhaps because we have more control over them, or they're expressive of our intentions, we find ourselves growing and challenged by it - there's things we do that add to our enthusiasm and add to our energy. Those help us better draw upon it for the rest of the day. There are things we can do that, even though they add to our schedule, help us do more, get more done, and find more energy.

This is the sort of thing where even a small, modest amount of moving around, a walk down the block, or a short jog - it doesn't have to be intensive exercise - anything like that you're able to do can often lead in the rest of the day to finding ways to get more done, thinking a little more clearly, and able to get more oomph into the rest of what you do.

This is part of why I'm such a huge advocate for ongoing, lifelong learning and side projects, the sort of things that help us fill up on that energy in a way that feeds back into other things that drain our battery. There are things to fill them up, and things that seem to drain them.

It's worth figuring out for yourself: what are the things you can do that fill yours up?

That is where the rest of these techniques combine to make sure we're actually making progress on those learning those skills, applying the skills, overcoming the hesitation. Otherwise, often what's happening is we pull our punches, holding back our energy out of fear that we're not going to see it through, feeling worried that we're going to make a promise to ourselves then we're going to break it.

Why would we bother to do something that isn't going to matter anyway? Why put any energy and effort towards that?

The only way to combat that is to build up a track record of doing things you mean to do, accumulating hard evidence to yourself that you have finished projects.

That's also why it's so important to start with the small stuff, to get some wins under your belt. Things you can look at and say, well, if I did that, then I can handle something a little bigger next time.

10.5 What if I don't feel like I'm getting anything done, and time is slipping through my fingers?

A side effect of the fact that we cast free from our attention what we've done once we finish it is we don't see that we've been putting in the time and effort, even if we have.

It's invisible.

You could exercise for a long time before you start visibly seeing any sort of changes, or feeling any changes. You might make improvements to your diet, study habits, practice or learning, making progress in courses or your reading, long before there is any sort of external validation or payoff, in any final results or outcome.

What I find helps me for this is what I call an "Intention Log" - as in, a log of what you intended to do. It's very easy. The most basic way to do it pairs naturally with Self-Command.

We use Self-Command to direct our attention to the task we're doing right now, then when we're done with it, we erase it right off the whiteboard. Here's where that intention log comes into play. For the intention log, I go to a local drugstore and pick up a weekly planner for the year. I like the kind where I open it up with each pair of pages, left and right, as a full seven day week, Monday to Sunday. When I flip the page, I see the next week. As I erase something from the whiteboard, because I did what I intended to do, I write that in my intention log.

Some days, there might be only a few things. Some days, there might be a dozen or two. It forms a trail of the things that I intended to do, that I did.

What's nice about this is when we want to figure out where did my week go, where did my day go, what have I been doing, and has anything been happening? Here we've stacked up objective evidence, proof to ourselves that, yeah, I have been doing things that I intended to do.

I did make progress on my reading. I did make progress on my project. I did make progress on the thing that I care about getting better at. It might be gradual. It might be slow. It might not have outside results yet, and might not be recognized by others yet. But I find for me, that helps to keep me going longer without external validation.

When you do something you intended to do, you write it down, you're marking it off at the same time. So again, it's not a calendar. It's not using it as a planner. It's not planning out your future. Once you erase it from your whiteboard, write it in the planner on that date.

What this does is it can save you from a destructive feedback loop of not feeling like you're doing things, not feeling like you're making progress, not seeing that you're putting conscious effort into the things you mean to be doing. That would otherwise lead to discouraging you with a vicious cycle, because why put energy into it, if a task just vanishes underneath me. This leaves a trail of what the tasks were that you targeted.

It can be as much or as little detail as you're comfortable with. If it's more intense, and too complicated, you won't use it. It's like the Self-Command method, where I mention the best

camera is the one that you actually have with you. The best method is going to be the one that's simple enough, easy enough, basic enough, and not time consuming, so that you will actually do it.

Think of it as a broad answer to where is my time, energy, or money going.

One thing that happens is you might have a day that comes up where there's a lot of things you have to attend to, you got to do the dishes, you got to do some of the chores, got a vacuum, got to run some errands, taking care of stuff that just has to happen. That's tying up a bunch of your time and energy, and that's time energy you're not spending towards your other projects, other intentions, or other learning efforts.

With an intention log, even if you didn't use the whiteboard to do those things - maybe you have some other system in place, habits, routines or schedule that you keep doing those - you can still note it as where your time and energy went that day. This can help you be a little more sympathetic and understanding of yourself on days where if you only fit in one or two small things, or if you had to write off the whole day as one where you didn't make any progress on the stuff that you wanted to.

This way, you won't feel like you did nothing that day. That can be really unfair to ourselves, when it's by habit that we do take care of by routine or necessity, we don't give ourselves enough credit. You start to feel like am I lazy, because they did nothing? No, actually, you probably did a lot. It's a nice way to give yourself credit for where that time energy went.

I've been doing this for over two years, every single day logging the stuff that I put on my Self-Command board into my intention log. I find it helps me tremendously.

I don't necessarily go back and review it that often, but the ability to flip between it to see how the kinds of tasks, maybe the direction of my tasks has changed and shifted over time, already is a helpful sign to me that my energy is going in a direction I intend for it to go.

Now, I may still correct, once I figure out if that's getting to me the results that I wanted, at the pace that I want, or if there's a different approach I think I should be taking.

You might also experiment with this. I've tried a few different things. One idea you might try on your own is different colored pins or other kinds of mechanisms, such as two different columns, which could be for work versus personal things, tasks done for maintenance versus making progress, or ones that are in new territories and skills versus things you're already good at. Whatever you want to focus on, this makes it easy to delineate so we can tell at a high level by skimming and skipping through it what proportion, or ratio, is going towards one direction or another.

I'll also suggest that when you're writing something in there, just like when you put tasks on a whiteboard, quantify it. Don't just want to say more code, more art, more reading, more progress in the video course, or worked on my podcast.

You should be able to tell if there's a day where you got two to three times as much progress on it. You should be able to tell from your intention log which day that was.

You might indicate the number of pages, the number of features, which assets, or how many hours, if nothing else. Whatever unit you can measure, but something more tangible than just "I did more of that."

Again, it's very easy to do. It doesn't take any money at all, just enough to go buy yourself a paper planner, one weekly planner for the whole year, but it's a different way to use it. It's not quite planning. It's retroactive. It's a "done list," or an "I did list" I suppose, giving you proof, an evidence trail, to convince yourself that you are doing things, that you're doing things you mean to do.

At any time, you can look back on it, and make active, informed choices about if you'd rather use your energy in different directions.

Are you deceiving yourself that you thought you were doing one thing, but really, you're not putting any time towards it? That's the other side of what can happen. You may actually, once you give yourself evidence, a log to look back on, see that a week or two has passed, and you've put no time towards your music, code, writing, audiobook, or the thing that you wanted to do.

This way you can see if you haven't put any time towards it. Only when we can visibly see that can we course correct it. It can feel like one thing is happening in your head, but it's not. The trail helps us not hide from that.

You've got to be able to see it to fix it.

Either it's going to give you credit for doing the right things, or it's going to help you course correct if you're not.

Or, here's one other way you might see and use it, as I was just discussing the intention log with my training clients the other day. It is possible that it's showing us that we're doing what we mean to be doing. That can encourage us that we do have control over how we're using our time, and we are, in fact, doing things we intend to do. Or, it may show you that you're not doing things you intend to do. So we can't deceive ourselves. But, there's also a third category of what it helps us figure out:

What if I'm doing the things that I mean to be doing, but I'm not seeing the results that I intend to see from it? Is that guidance that I want to steer differently? Is that a sign that the answer is not

simply doing more of what I've been doing, or doing what I've been doing longer, but I need to change up, somehow, my approach more fundamentally.

It clarifies is the problem is that I haven't been doing what I mean to do, or is the problem is that what I have been meaning to do is different than what I need to be doing?

That can open us up next to sending our intentions towards exploration, trying something different, putting a foot in another approach.

It equips us to reflect, with the correct information, am I not getting the results that I want because I'm not doing the right things, or because the things that I've been doing aren't right?

That's the intention log. It pairs really well with Self-Command. Get yourself a planner, and start doing it.

ENDING

The closing question that I want to leave you with is a question that, if you're not asking yourself, I'd like you to start asking yourself, maybe even instead of, or as a general counter, to these other questions and doubts that arise.

That question is: what if I never give myself the chance to start?

Realistically, the time is going to pass. We're going to be older. We're going to reach the next year, the next five years, or next 10 years. Looking back, either we've given ourselves a chance to try it on, to try it out, to take a few steps in that direction to see if it was a fit for us, to learn what about our approach might you need to tweak? Or else we didn't.

I've seen so much more harm happen from endless second guessing than from not second guessing enough.

The most universal counter we can have to these questions is to raise our own question, saying, "What if I don't? What if I don't at least do it imperfectly, by instead choosing to not do it at all?"

How much worse off I'm going to feel, or be, or even for other people in my life? Like I mentioned earlier, if we don't find ways to give back to ourselves the things that are important to us, we have less of ourselves to give. That makes it harder for us to be a model to others in our lives, our families, and our friend groups. We should be doing the kinds of things that we would be happy to see them doing, like how you want to see them giving themselves a chance, and giving themselves a shot.

It can often be a point of frustration in school or work environments, from various institutional limits around us, that no one else will give us the chance.

In many cases, we have to begin by giving ourselves that chance.

Other people can't give you what you won't give yourself.

Other people can't give you what you won't allow yourself to have yet.

When you give yourself a chance, you're creating space for someone else to give you a chance, too.

What if you never give yourself the chance to start?

I hope you will.

Thank you for following along, and thanks for reading this.

If you want to share stories of how you're applying this, I love to hear from people using the Self-Command methodology in this kind of material. Whether or not it's related to game development, even though that's most of the training that I do with HomeTeam GameDev - which you can find out more about by the way at HomeTeamGameDev.com (you know I have to give it that plug!) if you want our support materials and training for game development, that's where to find all that.

Even if what you're doing is unrelated to game development I would love to hear if this is how you got into pottery, gardening, writing short stories, writing poetry, dancing or something else important to you. I'd love to hear that that's helping impact people's lives. Sometimes those examples are really useful for me, since it lets me bring those back up for somebody else who is wondering, can I apply this to X, Y or Z, it helps to be able to cite that yes, I have been contacted people who it's been working for, applying it that way to their exercise routines, to get themselves to cook, or do other things.

Again, thank you one last time for listening.

This is Chris DeLeon here. I wish you all the best in your creative goals, and I hope that you'll begin by giving yourself that chance.