

Praise for *Creating the Impossible*

'As creatively encouraging as The Artist's Way – truly helpful for anyone who wants to dream big and live life to the full!'

SHAMA HYDER, CEO, Zen Marketing

'When Michael first shared the principles behind creating the impossible with me, I was rather skeptical. They seemed too simple and too good to be true. However, since that time, I have become even happier in myself and more successful. I recommend you try it as well.'

PAUL MCKENNA, D. Phil., #1 international best-selling author and television personality

'This book was written for anyone who wants to cut through the noise of their daily lives to get to the heart of what matters to us all, living a fulfilling life. Nothing less. The process Michael lays out makes self-realization a step-by-step attainable goal.'

SOPHIE CHICHE, founder and CEO of Shape House

'Thoughtful, spontaneous, inspired, lofty, down to earth, and with the clarity and good humor to make it highly usable.'

MIKE DOOLEY, NY Times best-selling author of *Infinite Possibilities*

'If you're ready to tap into the infinite power that is within you and truly see what is POSSIBLE, this is the book for you. In a fun and practical way Michael will be your coach and guide as you take on the impossible. Take a leap of trust today and prepare to be amazed at the results.'

IYANLA VANZANT, #1 NY Times best-selling author and television personality

'A gifted and inspired writer, Michael Neill takes you on a highly motivational journey that stimulates the creative process from within. Thought provoking and powerful principles are contained on every page of this book, and by aligning yourself with them you can overcome obstacles and manifest your dreams on the path to a more fulfilling life.'

**ANITA MOORJANI, NY Times best-selling author of
*Dying to Be Me and What If This Is Heaven?***

'Michael Neill's Creating the Impossible liberates us from limitations and ignites the fire of creativity that yearns to find free expression in, as, and through us. Whatever your dream, this book will be your trustworthy guide for cultivating the creative courage to bring it into manifestation.'

MICHAEL BERNARD BECKWITH, author of *Spiritual Liberation and Life Visioning*

'I have always thought that success happens when one's inner drive is bigger than the person doing the driving. There are always obstacles along the way that need to be overcome, and unless there is a real passion it's just too easy to quit. And this is what I love about this book. It's all about finding that inner drive and spinning it into forward motion. Michael Neill has a highly infectious and inspiring way of laying out how you can reach your "impossible" goal using practical strategies. I can't think of a more inspiring and useful book to get your wheels spinning forward and achieving your limitless goals.'

CHRIS STANDRING, #1 billboard chart-topping jazz-recording artist

'After a career of working with highly creative people, I found Michael Neill's approach to be very insightful. Michael stays away from the buzz words and easy bromides that I anticipated and instead delivers a new and easy-to-comprehend method of attacking the dreaded blank page of the creative process. I flagged more than a few pages for myself to review again.'

**MICHAEL WOLF, award-winning animation producer of
*The Simpsons, Family Guy, and King of the Hill***

'Michael Neill is an indisputable genius, and Creating the Impossible is a thoughtful yet practical guide to creating the life you desire. Use this book to explore new ideas and philosophies and then follow the 90-day plan to bring your dreams into reality.'

AJIT NAWALKHA, CEO, Evercoach and Co-founder, Mindvalley

'We have seen Michael Neill continually build, create, and re-imagine his life and his dreams, while also helping thousands of people to do the same. He's naturally lived through all the days outlined in this book himself, and there is no better person to write a book about how that same potential of the mind lies within all of us. We are continually dumbfounded by how fast, fun, and possible the game of creation is when you understand what Michael is pointing to in these pages, and this book will show you how true that really is.'

**EIRIK GRUNDE OLSEN and MARA GLEASON OLSEN,
co-founders of the One Solution Global Initiative**

'Impossible is just a thought, and Michael Neill's latest book is a beautiful brainstorm of possibilities for all of us who want to create an artful life. Very highly recommended!'

STEVE CHANDLER, best-selling author of *Time Warrior* and *101 Ways to Motivate Yourself*

'Michael has a charming gift that lets you easily understand and personally experience both the "putting it into action" and "then a miracle happens" parts of your creative process. A wonderful read!'

**DR. THOMAS GARTENMANN, Managing Partner,
aergon inside-out leadership transformation, Zurich, Munich**

'Michael Neill does it yet again! His 90-day program is a super-easy, straightforward, no-nonsense guide to get you taking action on your biggest goals with ease. The way he weaves simplicity into breaking down your fears to seize hold on your greatest achievements is organized, brilliant, and relatable. A must for any game-changer, entrepreneur, or change agent!'

DR. NEETA BHOUSHAN, best-selling author and executive coach

CREATING — THE — IMPOSSIBLE

A 90-DAY PROGRAM TO GET YOUR DREAMS
OUT OF YOUR HEAD AND INTO THE WORLD

MICHAEL NEILL



HAY HOUSE

Carlsbad, California • New York City • London
Sydney • Johannesburg • Vancouver • New Delhi

First published and distributed in the United Kingdom by:

Hay House UK Ltd, Astley House, 33 Notting Hill Gate, London W11 3JQ
Tel: +44 (0)20 3675 2450; Fax: +44 (0)20 3675 2451; www.hayhouse.co.uk

Published and distributed in the United States of America by:

Hay House Inc., PO Box 5100, Carlsbad, CA 92018-5100
Tel: (1) 760 431 7695 or (800) 654 5126; Fax: (1) 760 431 6948
or (800) 650 5115; www.hayhouse.com

Published and distributed in Australia by:

Hay House Australia Ltd, 18/36 Ralph St, Alexandria NSW 2015
Tel: (61) 2 9669 4299; Fax: (61) 2 9669 4144; www.hayhouse.com.au

Published and distributed in India by:

Hay House Publishers India, Muskaan Complex, Plot No.3, B-2,
Vasant Kunj, New Delhi 110 070
Tel: (91) 11 4176 1620; Fax: (91) 11 4176 1630; www.hayhouse.co.in

Distributed in Canada by:

Raincoast Books, 2440 Viking Way, Richmond, B.C. V6V 1N2
Tel: (1) 604 448 7100; Fax: (1) 604 270 7161; www.raincoast.com

Text © Michael Neill, 2018

The moral rights of the author have been asserted.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced by any mechanical, photographic or electronic process, or in the form of a phonographic recording; nor may it be stored in a retrieval system, transmitted or otherwise be copied for public or private use, other than for 'fair use' as brief quotations embodied in articles and reviews, without prior written permission of the publisher.

The information given in this book should not be treated as a substitute for professional medical advice; always consult a medical practitioner. Any use of information in this book is at the reader's discretion and risk. Neither the author nor the publisher can be held responsible for any loss, claim or damage arising out of the use, or misuse, of the suggestions made, the failure to take medical advice or for any material on third-party websites.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: 978-1-78180-649-4

Interior images: 1, 49 Randy Stuart; all other images Michael Neill

To Michael, aged 17.

Here's the book I wish we could have read back then...

All men dream: but not equally. Those who dream by night in the dusty recesses of their mind wake in the day to find that it was vanity. But the dreamers of the day are dangerous men, for they may act their dream with open eyes, to make it possible.

T.E. LAWRENCE, aka LAWRENCE OF ARABIA



Contents

Introduction: What's Your Impossible Dream? xv

PART I: MAKING THE INVISIBLE VISIBLE

Chapter 1. The Source of Creativity	3
Chapter 2. The Constant Variable	11
Chapter 3. The Ultimate Resource	21
Chapter 4. The Secrets of Effortless Productivity	29
Chapter 5. Creating the Future for Fun and Profit	39

PART II: MAKING THE IMPOSSIBLE POSSIBLE

Where the Rubber Meets the Road 51

Week 1. Choosing Your Impossible Project 57

Day 1. Pipe Dreams and Possibilities	59
Day 2. Goals vs Miracles	61
Day 3. Flirt, Date, Engage, Commit	63
Day 4. Ends vs Means	65
Day 5. Five Guidelines	67
Day 6. Booking Your Sailing to Bombay	69
Day 7. Rest, Review, Recharge, and Renew	71

Week 2. Let the Games Begin! 73

Day 8. The Five Phases of Creation	75
Day 9. The Nose that Means 'Yes'	76

Day 10. Speaking the Impossible	77
Day 11. The Possibility Game	79
Day 12. Why Not?	81
Day 13. Someday is Just a Thought	83
Day 14. Rest, Review, Recharge, and Renew	86
Week 3. Your Inner GPS	89
Day 15. An Introduction to Inner Knowing	91
Day 16. Programming Your Inner GPS	93
Day 17. Beyond the Word	96
Day 18. Back from the Future	98
Day 19. There's No Such Thing as a Decision	99
Day 20. 'Don't Be a Moron'	102
Day 21. Rest, Review, Recharge, and Renew	104
Week 4. Learning to Fail	107
Day 22. Trial and Success	108
Day 23. Thinking about Thinking about Failure	110
Day 24. How to Win the Mental Game	113
Day 25. Three Questions	116
Day 26. Do the Thing	117
Day 27. Infinite Possibilities	119
Day 28. Rest, Review, Recharge, and Renew	122
Week 5. Creating Momentum	125
Day 29. The Flywheel of Creation	127
Day 30. The Momentum Formula	129
Day 31. Taking Massive Action	131
Day 32. An Overwhelming Bit of Advice	133
Day 33. The Big Ask	135
Day 34. The Tortoise and the Hare	137
Day 35. Rest, Review, Recharge, and Renew	140

Week 6. A Question of Control	143
Day 36. 51 Percent	145
Day 37. Snakes, Ladders, and Success	147
Day 38. Getting in over Your Head	149
Day 39. Innate Wisdom	151
Day 40. God Winks	154
Day 41. Let Go and Let...	156
Day 42. Rest, Review, Recharge, and Renew	158
Week 7. Measuring Progress	161
Day 43. KPI vs UPI	163
Day 44. Why Optimism and Pessimism Get in the Way of Measurement	165
Day 45. UPI No.1: Are You Inspired?	167
Day 46. UPI No.2: Are You Engaged?	169
Day 47. UPI No.3: Are You Taking Things a Little Bit Too Seriously?	171
Day 48. Making It Real	174
Day 49. Rest, Review, Recharge, and Renew	176
Week 8. Creating in a World of Thought	179
Day 50. Why We Do What We Do (and Don't Do What We Don't)	180
Day 51. Like a Rat in a Maze	183
Day 52. Bending Time	185
Day 53. The Value of Money	188
Day 54. A Hybrid Model for Effortless Productivity	190
Day 55. Calling Forth the Creative Force	193
Day 56. Rest, Review, Recharge, and Renew	196
Week 9. Getting Unstuck	199
Day 57. The Four Quadrants of Creation	200
Day 58. The Problem with Problem-solving	203
Day 59. Have You Given Up Yet?	205

Day 60. How Much Time Do You Spend in the Unknown?	207
Day 61. The Invisible Power of Insight	209
Day 62. Disempowering Yourself	211
Day 63. Rest, Review, Recharge, and Renew	213
Week 10. Becoming Discouragement-proof	215
Day 64. The Hangover of Discouragement	216
Day 65. No Pressure	218
Day 66. Where Confidence Comes From	220
Day 67. Press On	222
Day 68. What to Do When You Don't Know What to Do	224
Day 69. You Can Do Hard	226
Day 70. Rest, Review, Recharge, and Renew	229
Week 11. The Home Stretch	231
Day 71. What Season Is It?	233
Day 72. Three Paths to Success	235
Day 73. The Art of Sprinting	237
Day 74. Expanding the Game	239
Day 75. Riding the Wave	241
Day 76. The Goldilocks Principle	243
Day 77. Rest, Review, Recharge, and Renew	245
Week 12. The Eleventh Hour	247
Day 78. The Finish-Line Phenomenon	248
Day 79. Against All Odds	250
Day 80. A Formula for Miracles	252
Day 81. Who Cares What You're Afraid Of?	254
Day 82. The Results Accelerator	255
Day 83. Going All In	257
Day 84. Rest, Review, Recharge, and Renew	259

Week 13. Your Life as a Creator	261
Day 85. Falling in Love with Nothing	262
Day 86. Enjoying Pretty Much Anything	263
Day 87. My Favorite Day	265
Day 88. Living from the Inside Out	266
Day 89. Four Questions	268
Day 90. Commencement	270
<i>Epilogue: Some Final Thoughts</i>	273
<i>Appendix: The 'Creating the Impossible' Seven-Day Online Jumpstart</i>	277
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	279
<i>Permissions</i>	282
<i>About the Author</i>	283



Introduction

What's Your Impossible Dream?

What's the craziest, most outlandishly wonderful thing you can imagine doing over the year ahead? Is it starting a new business? Paying off your debts? Traveling the world? Do you want to write a book, sell your screenplay, or show your art in a gallery? Maybe you want to knock off one of your perpetual New Year's resolutions and learn Italian, run a marathon, or finally fit into that dress you've been keeping in your closet. Or do you long for something even more ambitious – to become a leader in your field, meet and marry your one true love, add a couple of zeros to your income, and make a significant difference in the world?

If these dreams sound ridiculous, or even impossible, good. In fact, that's kind of the point...

Over the past seven years, thousands of people have joined me for an online adventure I call 'Creating the Impossible.' I encourage participants to choose something they want to create that's far beyond their current sense of what's possible. By the time the program is complete, they've often met or exceeded their own expectations of how much can be created in a limited amount of time. They've created new jobs, new relationships, and new income. They've lost weight, started companies, invented products, left bad situations, broken habits, gotten married, and moved on with their lives in ways they hadn't thought possible. More importantly, they've unleashed something fundamental inside themselves and learned to live their lives with an ever-expanding sense of possibility.

How have they done it? They've come to understand a simple truth about the mind that we'll explore together throughout this book – what

I call ‘the inside-out understanding’ – and woken up to a deeper part of themselves – their innate health, creativity, and resilience.

For the past 40 years or so, people have been using this knowledge to create results that seemed impossible and foolhardy to even contemplate:

- A couple met, fell in love, and now travel the world as the leaders of a non-profit organization, sharing what they see as the one solution to all global problems (*pp.83–84*).
- A project team from a software company took a year off and started a clothing line (*pp.193–95*).
- An aerospace company cut the production time on an 18-month military project in half without increasing the budget or giving their employees heart attacks along the way (*pp.205–206*).
- A biotech company found an extra US\$200 million in earnings during a three-day exploration of how the mind worked (*pp.209–210*).

Now it’s your turn!

In the first part of this book, ‘Making the Invisible Visible,’ I’ll guide you through the creative process and introduce you to the principles behind the inside-out understanding. You’ll gain a new appreciation for how the mind works that will make it easier than ever for you to navigate the highs and lows of daily life while creating inspired and inspiring results in the world. I’ll illustrate the secrets of effortless (and exponential) productivity and share the formula for creating that I’ve taught to nearly all my corporate and individual clients over the years – a simple two-step process that makes creating pretty much anything a straightforward proposition.

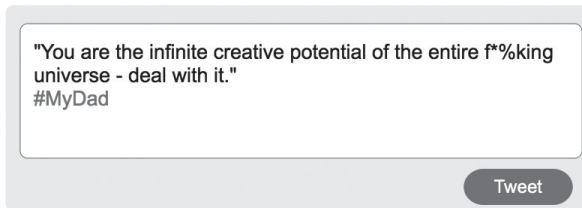
Then in the second part, ‘Making the Impossible Possible,’ I’ll coach you through a 90-day program that will help you get your own impossible dreams out of your head and into the world. The only things you’ll need to bring to the table are something you’d love to create and a willingness to change your mind once and for all about what’s truly possible in your world.

How to Get the Most Out of This Book

I've been working with high performers for over 25 years. One of my more memorable teaching experiences came a few years back when I was facilitating a group of coaches in New York City and someone asked a question about 'the limits of human creativity.'

After letting the conversation run for a bit, I jumped in and pointed out that while the creative output of any individual would inherently be limited, the source and fundamental principles behind that creativity and the source of our own creative power were unlimited.

I got on a bit of a roll, as I am sometimes wont to do, and before I stepped back off my soapbox I completed my rant with a line that my then 16-year-old daughter immortalized by tweeting it out from the back of the room:



The premise behind this book is the same as the one I shared on that day:

There is an innate creative energy in all of us. It's the animating spirit that separates the quick from the dead – the life-force that expands our lungs, makes our heart beat, and takes care of every one of our biological functions. If we let it, it will bring fresh new ideas to mind whenever we need them, enabling us to solve any problem and move forward in any creative endeavor.

Our relationship with this energy is the basis of what we call 'creativity.' And since this energy is a part of us and we are a part of it, we are all inherently creative.

So, while this is a book about how things are created, it's also a book about how we can find our role in their creation and embrace that role more fully.

Here are a few pointers to help you get the most out of yourself and this book as you read on:

1. Read for insight, not information

I once met a guy who moved from Los Angeles to New York City after the big Northridge earthquake in 1994 destroyed the apartment building in which he was living. Short on cash but determined to make a fresh start as far away from 'earthquake country' as he could get, he moved into a tiny apartment in the Bronx.

His first night in the new building, he woke up at 5 a.m. to feel the floor underneath his bed shaking. Horrified that he had somehow managed to be a part of the first recorded earthquake in New York history, he sat down at his kitchen table to catch his breath and consider his options.

Then at 5:30 a.m. the floor started to shake again. Obviously it was an aftershock from the original quake. Another came at 5:45 a.m. And another at 6 a.m.

The fourth time it happened, it dawned on the man that what he was feeling wasn't an earthquake. It was the subway running underneath the apartment building.

Although the apartment kept on shaking, after having that realization, he never worried about it again.

In the same way, what impacts us most isn't *information* (like knowing there are no earthquakes in New York City), it's *insight* – the realization of something that's always been true, regardless of what we happen to believe.

So my suggestion is that as best you can, read through each chapter in the book the way you might read a thriller or some light beach reading. Enjoy it, savor it even, but don't think you need to take notes or remember everything word for word.

2. Look for principles, not strategies

Most books on creativity, goal-setting, productivity, and performance are packed with ‘how to’ strategies designed to be followed step by step. Will following those steps take you where you want to go? Unfortunately, that’s the exception, not the rule. True creativity is an individual and in the moment process, and there are no guarantees when it comes to results.

However, there are iron-clad principles that we can rely on no matter what. These invisible forces are at work in the world whether we know about them or not. They are as practical as electricity, as powerful as gravity, and as mysterious as magnetism. They make sense of everything we do (or don’t do) with our life and time.

Which is why when it comes to creating, instead of looking for *strategies*, I encourage you first to seek to understand the *principles* of creation – not how to do it, but how it actually works. Then you’ll know what to do whatever the situation. And as your insight into the principles behind creation deepens, you’ll find the game of creating gets simpler and more enjoyable to play.

How do I do it?	How does it work?
strategies	principles
engineering	physics
variable	constant
personal	universal
prescriptive	descriptive
useful ways of thinking about things	true whether we believe it or not

3. Be an explorer, not a researcher

In talking with thousands of people about these principles over the past number of years, I’ve noticed a very distinct difference between people who come to them as though they’re studying for an exam and those who are listening to be impacted by what they hear. And what I’ve realized is

that it's what you actually see for yourself that matters, not what you can repeat when asked.

I think of this as the difference between 'researching' and 'exploring.' When we 'research,' we're collecting data samples, making comparisons, and drawing conclusions. When we're genuinely exploring, we come to the conversation with an open mind, ready and willing to throw ourselves into the unknown and see whatever is there for us to see. Instead of listening for 'the right answer,' we look to see what's true.

When it comes to creating the impossible, there's no final exam – there's just your dreams and your life. And there are only three ways we can fail to bring our dreams to life, no matter how impossible they may seem:

- We don't start because we think that it's futile, pointless, too late, and we're not the right person to do it anyway, and those thoughts seem real and true to us.
- We stop because our head is filled with thoughts telling us that we've left it too late, we're not having fun, it's too hard, and it's not going to happen anyway.
- We run out of time because we made up a time-frame that was too short for the project at hand or because we were handed a time-frame and, for whatever reason, things just didn't happen in that time.

In other words, we *think* our way in and out of action all day long. But the wonderful thing about our thoughts is that they're just thoughts – no more solid than clouds and no more powerful than the power we give them.

So, no matter what you find yourself thinking as we explore your creative potential together, the best advice I can give you is simply this:

Don't believe everything you think.

Are you ready to begin?



PART I
MAKING THE
INVISIBLE VISIBLE

'What is essential is invisible to the eye.'

ANTOINE DE SAINT-EXUPÉRY



Chapter 1

The Source of Creativity

'Writing is an exploration. You start from nothing and learn as you go... It's like driving a car at night. You never see further than your headlights, but you can make the whole trip that way.'

E.L. DOCTOROW

A project team sits around a small table in a conference room. At first it seems as though they are getting somewhere – the brainstorming session is animated and the people are enthusiastic. But as time goes on, the fun seems forced and the ideas stop flowing. The room grows quieter, the ideas less frequent.

After a couple of minutes of relative quiet, someone shares a completely new idea, seemingly disconnected from all the previous ones.

It sparks a response, and then another, and within the hour the team has a plan of action for the week ahead.

Where did the new idea come from?



The woman has been trying to lose weight for as long as she can remember, even back when she was objectively thin. The voice in her head is relentless as she sits in the park and picks at yet another lettuce leaf, conveniently packaged in a plastic container that she wishes contained pretty much any other kind of food in the world.

She is oblivious to the world around her until she hears a dog barking nearby. She looks up and notices that she is surrounded by grass and trees and animals and beauty. She smiles for the first time in a while and it occurs to her that she's been eating lettuce to punish herself for something mean a 'friend' said about her weight when she was a teenager.

For the first time in a long time, she feels free of the need to give form to her self-hate in the shape of a lettuce leaf.

One month later, she's startled to see that she's lost 12 pounds without dieting and, more importantly, without suffering.

Where did the realization come from?



A writer sits in front of his computer, his cursor flashing on the blank page. His hands begin to type. Words appear on the screen without any conscious thought on his part, as if they've somehow traveled through his fingers onto the page.

Where did the words come from?

For thousands of years, people have been trying to understand the source of creativity – the spark of life that brings ideas to mind and allows us to launch those ideas into the world. In ancient Greece, that creative force was personified as the nine muses, daughters of the Greek god Zeus and his lover Mnemosyne, who was herself the personification of memory. Early Christian teachings, on the other hand, suggested that only God himself could create. That form of creation was called *ex nihilo* – creating ‘from nothing.’

And this is at the heart of every creative endeavor. Whatever we call it and what or whomever we attribute it to, there is one fundamental truth behind creation:

Everything comes from nothing.

‘Nothing,’ in this sense, is an almost imperceptible abbreviation of the space of ‘no thing’ – a way of describing the formless creative energy of the universe before any ‘thing’ has been created with it. It’s the as yet unformed lump of clay, the play dough of possibility out of which everything will be made before it is unmade again and goes back into its container to stay fresh for next time. It exists in stark contrast to ‘the little nothing’ of our own thoughts, filled with the content of our own already formed hopes, fears, judgments, and recriminations.

What that means is that any time we want to create something truly new and fresh in the world, we must go beyond the noise of our own mind and into the quiet of the fertile void out of which all things come into being. We need to find the silence beneath the notes, the page beneath the writing, and the space into which our thoughts appear and dissipate.

That space is closer than we think, and larger than our little brain (well, my little brain) can imagine. It’s a Big Nothing. We won’t find anything when we get there – that’s just the nature of nothing – but it is a space of pure potential, an unplowed field so fertile that we need only drop the seed of an idea into it and it will spring to life and begin to grow almost immediately.

We can’t see it, but we can get a feel for it. We can touch it by letting it touch us, letting it gently cocoon us in a blanket of life and possibility. It is whispering inspiration into our ear even now.

And while staring into the fertile void can be almost hypnotic, at a certain point we wake up from its depths and feel the impulse to create.

Understanding the Creative Process

How do you get from feeling the creative spark to actually holding something in your hands or seeing it in your life?

Well, if the Big Nothing were a pick-up bar where you ogled potential partners, mucking about with a creative idea would be how you began to flirt with the actual process of bringing something new into the world.

So, if you were drawing, you might start doodling. If you were writing a screenplay, you might begin imagining scenes in your mind. If you were

writing a song, you might just start making some noise. If your project were business related, you might start sketching out ideas and daydreaming about people you could enroll in the game.

This is the jumping-off point for the creative process. Just being in motion is enough to make things happen. It's like pushing a stalled car downhill to get the engine started – sometimes we just have to take action in order for our creative engine to catch.

When we're mucking about like this, there's no sense that we're going to use or even keep anything that we do, but we might. We might not. We aren't stuck with it – we're free to take it or leave it. And the more freedom we give ourselves to muck about, the more fun the mucking about is, and the more it tends to lead to inspired action.

And at a certain point, we just kind of know what we're doing, and then we buckle down and do the work. We've hung out at the bar, we've spent time flirting, and now we're going to go on some dates and see what happens. If we're writing, we just need to write. If we're running code, we just need to run code. If we're making calls, we just need to make calls.

This is 'the bit in the middle' – the bit between getting an idea for a great new song and winning a Grammy, between seeing someone we fancy and having grandchildren, and between embarking on any new endeavor and enjoying the fruits of our labors.

This bit in the middle will take some time. It may go on for hours or days or weeks or months or even years, depending on the size and scope of the project. And it may not always be easy. Victor Hugo, the 19th-century author of *Les Misérables* and *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, struggled so hard to get words out of his head and onto the page that in order to motivate himself, he instructed his servant to lock him naked inside the bathroom each morning with nothing but a candle, quill, ink, and paper. When he had 'darkened the page' sufficiently to pass three pages of writing underneath the bathroom door, his servant would let him out and help him to dress and begin the day.

This is the time when numerous would-be creators give up, assuming that if famous bands can write famous songs in less than an hour, taking more than a week to write the next great novel or more than a year to see

a business idea prove successful must mean that they're not really cut out for this kind of thing or they're on the wrong track. All it really means, though, is that they've reached the 'just get on with it' part of the process.

Admittedly, this is in some ways the least sexy part of creating. It's Thomas Edison's 99 percent perspiration that follows the 1 percent inspiration. It's Elvis Presley's TCOB – 'Taking care of business, just as fast as I can.' It's the Nike stage, where you 'just do it.'

If we're not expecting it, we can lose heart. It's a lot grittier and less seemingly magical than other stages. But if you understand that it's just part of the process, then it can become a very rewarding part of the process. For some people, it's the most satisfying part, as it's the most tangible. Everybody can see that you're actually up to something, including you.

How you approach this is up to you. Some people wake up at 2 a.m. on holiday with an idea for a new business and start outlining a five-year plan. Others leave everything until the last minute so they can have the thrill of scrambling to meet a deadline. But whether fast or slow, disciplined or eclectic, inspired by love and passion or fueled by drugs, alcohol, or the need to pay the rent, everyone I've ever met with a high creative output has figured out somewhere along the line that the best way to do good work is to do lots of it. And if you really want to create, at some point you're going to have to do what creators do – show up each day to your keyboard, easel, workbench, or boardroom and put in the hours.

And then at a certain point, doing the work transitions seamlessly into a full-blown experience of creative flow, like a beautiful dance where it's difficult to know who's leading and who's following. We find ourselves in the zone and then step out of our office or studio, and our partners and kids say, 'Where have you been? You missed lunch.' And we think, *Is that the time? I had no idea.*

The flow phase of the creative process is filled with actual miracles and the joy of watching something new come into the world that didn't exist before. And riding the wave of creative flow is a pleasure unlike nearly any other I have known in my 50 years on the planet.

In this state, creating seems effortless. Ideas come to us and through us. Books write themselves, paintings paint themselves, products sell

themselves. The hardest part of the process is keeping up and not getting in the way.

But at a certain point we find we are approaching the finish line, that point where we need to let our creation stand on its own two feet, leave home without us and go out into the world. We may still want to run after it to protect and defend it, and yet we know it will either stand or fall by itself.

By way of example, my wife and I love to watch cooking competition shows like *The Great British Bake Off*. There's always that great bit when they do the final countdown: 'Ten, nine, eight...' and everyone is rushing to put the last little bits on their cake and then '...three, two, one, step away!' And they have to step away from their cake, or all their work up to that point will have been in vain.

And that's the final part of the creative process. You step away from your cake, either because someone has told you to or you've decided to, and you ... are ... done.

How do you know your creation is complete? When you let it go. When you mail it to an agent, post it online, or ship it to your customers. When you lift the lid off the silver platter and say, 'Ta daa!'

In some formal systems of project management they talk about this phase as 'meeting your conditions of satisfaction.' It's a pre-determined point at which a documented list of every expectation required to meet 'success' in a project has been met and signed off on by every stakeholder.

While that can be useful when there are multiple people involved in a creation, it's always seemed a bit more complicated to me than it needs to be. I would say that a simpler rule of thumb is:

You're done when you say that you're done.

Putting It All Together

I began writing what is now the *Caffeine for the Soul* blog when I moved to America at the start of the new millennium. Over 1,000 blog posts later,

I've realized the reason I so love that format as an outlet for the creative energy is that I get to experience the whole of the creative process from start to finish every time I write.

I begin each week with a blank Word document and I muck about until a creative spark catches my imagination – a title, a story, a metaphor, or a snippet of a conversation I've had with a client or friend. At some point a theme emerges and I begin to darken the page, piling word upon word, idea upon idea, paragraph upon paragraph. Sometimes I love the process and get lost in the flow; other times it feels like a chore from start to finish. But by the time I'm done, something exists in the world that didn't exist when I began. It's about as primordial an experience as you can have with a laptop and a good cup of coffee.

Now that may sound a bit grand when all you're creating is a blog post, or a dinner, or a birthday greeting for a friend, but the truth is, creating something from nothing is positively biblical in its implications. In the beginning, there was a word, or a recipe, or a piece of card stock and some glitter. Then you bring something new into the world and either see that it is good and name it to share it with others or destroy it in a flood of self-recrimination and self-loathing. Regardless, when your thought storm passes, you go back to the drawing board and begin again.

Here's a simple experiment that will help you get a feel for the universal creative process at a deeper level:



Before you move on to the next chapter, take some time to create something from nothing – to bring something into the world that doesn't exist right now, except perhaps in its constituent parts. It can be as basic as a paper airplane, as personal as a poem, or as delicious as a three-course meal.

The only requirement is that right now it doesn't exist in the world, and when you're done, it will.



Some Final Thoughts...

As you begin to notice that the phases of the creative journey are always the same, from nothing to something, impulse to action, project to product, you come to see the only real obstacles to creating are how easy it is not to begin and how easy it is not to finish. So in the next chapter, we'll be exploring the constant variable that either holds us back or launches us forward in any creative endeavor.

First, here are a few key points from this chapter for you to reflect on:

- Everything comes from nothing. Therefore the blank page and the creative spark are the birthplace of every creative endeavor.
- When in doubt, begin.
- Putting in the hours and doing the work are the unsung heroes of the creative process.
- You haven't actually created anything until it stands on its own two feet in the world – up to then you've just been busy.
- You're done when you say that you're done.
- The creative process will always involve a journey from nothing to something by way of mucking about, doing the work, riding the flow, and declaring completion.



Enjoyed the excerpt? Keep reading by ordering your copy from one of these great booksellers...



Want more support? Join Michael for the interactive online version at www.michaelneill.org/cti!