



PROLIFIC

A Deep Dive Into Creativity
& Productivity

Transcription



READ FIRST

The following is a near verbatim transcript of the entire PROLIFIC audio program by Frank Viola with a few extra points added. Because it's been transcribed, the punctuation is not perfect and it may contain typos. And since it's a transcript, it reads just as it was spoken. All of the books and tools mentioned in this transcription appear on the [Resource Page](#) with links on where best to obtain them.

Permission is NOT granted to share this document with anyone else, distribute it, or copy it.
However, you may print it out for your own private use.

Copyright © 2016 Frank Viola

01: INTRODUCTION

Hey friends, welcome to the Prolific Audio Program.

I am really excited that you've joined us and I'm looking forward to sharing the content with you. Let me introduce the program by telling you why I created it. I didn't create it for my own amusement because it's been very difficult putting all of this together.

I didn't create it simply to motivate or inspire you, although I do believe that motivation and inspiration is something you're going to receive from the program. I created it because I want to help fellow artists, creators, authors, writers, speakers, musicians, entrepreneurs, ministers, etc. by passing on the strategies, techniques, and insights that have helped me in my own work.

This program was provoked by three main questions that I have received from readers repeatedly over the years.

- How do you produce so much content in a short space of time?

If you're not familiar with my work, since 2008 I have published over 20 books, almost half of them with recognized publishers and the other half self-published electronic books. I started a blog in 2008 that has generated massive amounts of traffic. I've written over 900 blog posts and have even been able to monetize the blog through affiliates and advertisers. On top of that, I've released over 100 podcast episodes, have spoken all over the world, and managed to stay on top of email (which could be argued is the most difficult task of all).

The other questions I've been asked are...

- How do you write your books? What is your exact process?
- How do you come up with the creative and innovative ideas that mark your books, blog, podcast, and spoken messages?

In this program, I plan to answer all of those questions. To be perfectly candid, I hate it when authors and creators talk about their accomplishments. Therefore, what you just heard was simply for the purpose of showing you that I'm living proof of what I'm going to be teaching in this program. It's not armchair philosophy. It's not bloodless theory. These are things that I've built into my own life and they have succeeded. So we'll now put those achievements to rest.

In terms of where I have come up with the various ideas and strategies that I will be presenting, I have sifted through hundreds of books, articles, blog posts, and audios from various leaders in the productivity and creativity space. And I have extracted all of the lessons that I felt I could put into place, discarding the things that didn't work. I retained, tweaked, modified, and adjusted the things that did work and fit my own personality and wiring. I've also developed a number of strategies and hacks from scratch. That doesn't mean that other people haven't come to the same conclusions. Perhaps they have, but I'm not aware of it.

So this program is built on everything I have learned from others and through my own experimentation that has taken root in my life and produced results. It's also based on a lot of failures and mistakes.

Let me confess to you that by nature I am not a disciplined person. I have friends who are incredibly disciplined, and I covet that ability. I say this because I have built certain disciplines into my life, even though I'm not a disciplined person. For those of you who are not disciplined by nature either, this should give you hope. Because if I can do it, if I can build these practices into my life, there's hope that you can as well.

Let me give you an overview of the different things we'll be covering in this program.

- The foundation is going to be the issue of energy.

One of the staples and roots of being creative and productive is the level of energy that you have. If you don't have energy, you're not going to create much and you're not going to be very productive. Some people will tell you about the benefits of taking a nap in the afternoon. Lots of entrepreneurs and creators do this. I rarely take naps. One of the main reasons is because I have so much energy it's not a need for me. In this program, I will share with you how I've maximized my energy levels.

- I'm going to talk to you about an eating plan that has worked for me tremendously, and it has motivated me to exercise on a regular basis.

Just so you know, I've tried many different eating plans and diets. And none of them have worked for me until last year when I found a particular diet plan. I've been on it since then, and it's been one of the most life-changing adjustments I've ever made. Keep in mind that I'm not a disciplined person. In fact, when it comes to eating, I'm not a cook either. So if this worked for me, it will undoubtedly work for you.

I'll also talk about...

- Exercise.
- Rest.
- Proper nutrition and other things that relate to giving you energy. Note that the more energetic you are, the more productive you're going to be.
- I'm going to talk about your work space, which is profoundly important for both productivity and creativity.
- I'm going to uncork my goal-setting process and why it's hugely and fundamentally important for my own productivity.
- I'll lay out all of my productivity hacks, followed by my creative process.
- I'll also share a good bit on how I write my books, articles, and blog posts.

I'll give you the secret sauce behind how I have become so prolific in a short period of time. I'm even going to answer the oft-repeated question: "I have a book inside me. I want to write this book. I have a vision for what it's going to look like, but I can't seem to get it out of me. I can't seem to begin. I don't know how to get started. Can you help?"

I believe I have the solution to this problem, and I'm excited to share it with you.

- I'm going to share all my tools and apps that I use that have been indispensable to my productivity.

There is a [Resource Page](#) that has all the resources I will mention in this program along with others that I don't mention. (You were given the password to access the Resource Page and audios when you purchased this program. It's in the license PDF that you downloaded.)

The best way to use this program is to listen to the audios first, then read this transcript afterward.

By the way, if you have [The Buzz Seminar Master Course](#), the resources in this program are different from those mentioned in that course.

- Finally, there's a Q&A section where you can ask questions and we can dialogue about this program.

One further thing. Because productivity, creativity, and writing are all intertwined, I will be repeating certain strategies, principles, and insights. The reason for the repetition is to put some of the new sessions into their proper context, connecting them back to principles that I've shared previously.

But also, it is to engrain some of the key methods and discoveries I'll share into your thinking. One of the great findings about our brains is that we learn through repetition. So if I repeat something, it's deliberate and intentional. And as you will see, each session will build upon previous sessions.

That's my introduction. Now let's get started.

02: INCREATING YOUR ENERGY

In this session of the program, we're going to talk about the matter of energy. Energy is directly tied to your productivity and creativity. So I'm going to talk about how to boost your energy levels. One of the principal ways has to do with...

- What you put into your body
- How often you eat, and
- What you eat

I have tried many different eating plans, diets, and food regimens over the years and nothing has ever stuck. I have gone on countless diets only to get off of them. I have lost weight on many of them, but I gained it all back rather quickly.

That was until I found the **Fast Metabolism Diet**. There's a link to this book on the [Resource Page](#) so you can obtain your own copy. I have been on this diet (it's really an eating plan) for many months and not only have I lost 17 pounds, but I've built muscle. Not only that, but my energy levels have been through the roof.

Again, I'm not a cook. And I am someone who eats rather quickly. I also love food. But on a day-to-day basis, eating is simply to supply the energy I need to be productive and creative.

Now I'll give you a quick overview of this eating plan. Unlike other diets, you don't buy the food from a certain company. You can buy the food at any grocery store.

- The first two days, Monday and Tuesday, you eat certain foods and you eat five times a day.

Breakfast

Snack

Lunch

Snack

Dinner

Monday and Tuesday are also your cardio days, whether it's walking, running, doing an elliptical or some other kind of cardiovascular exercise. You only have to do this exercise one day, two if you want.

- On Wednesday and Thursday, you eat different kinds of food. Again, you eat five times a day. These are your strength training days. You can do one or two days of strength training.
- On Friday, Saturday and Sunday, you have another kind of eating plan, and on those days you want to do some type of stretching exercise for one or two days.

Then you go back to the weekly cycle starting with Monday and Tuesday; Wednesday and Thursday; and Friday, Saturday and Sunday – each set of days you eat five times a day. And you eat certain kinds of foods. The book explains all of it to you. As I said previously, as a result of this eating plan, my energy levels are astounding.

- Now if you're someone who needs a nap, a 20-minute power nap can be helpful.

The only times I need a nap is if I've stayed up late for some unusual reason. But some people do well with napping. If you do, experts say to nap no more than 20 minutes.

- Another thing that boosts your energy, believe it or not, is music.

Music engages your sympathetic nervous system. I have music playing during virtually all of my work day. I use [Pandora](#) (the free online music station). I have certain music stations that I've created and those stations are playing in the background constantly while I work.

- Another thing that boosts your energy is proper breathing.

Most of us are very shallow breathers. This causes fatigue and physical stress because of the lack of oxygen it brings to our cells. If you experience stressful moments, a good technique is to stop and breathe deeply slowly. Hold it for a few seconds and then breathe deeply out slowly. Do that six times. That's a great strategy for de-stressing.

Things that have sugar in them will deplete your energy. For this reason, I rarely eat sugar. When I do, it's when I'm not working. But again, it's a rare thing for me to have dessert.

- Vitamin B is essential to your energy.

I have a drink that I take every morning that I call the **Brown Dragon**. The drink is called Supreme Fulvic, and it's a high octane vitamin and mineral liquid. I have a link to it on the [Resource Page](#). It doesn't taste great, hence the name "brown dragon." But I slay it every morning.

- Another thing that will increase your energy is drinking the right amount of water.

Water increases your metabolism and flushes out your body's wastes. According to the Fast Metabolism Diet, you're supposed to drink half your body weight in water every day. That's what I do. Spring water is the best water to drink, but filtered water is okay as well. On the [Resource Page](#) you'll see the mug I use for my daily water intake. I use a 32 oz. Bubba mug, and from it, I sip water throughout the day.

I also enjoy Perrier sparkling mineral water. I look for the sales on that, and when they go on sale, I'll buy a bunch of 25 oz. bottles to keep on hand. Where I live, Walmart has them for \$1.50 each.

I sometimes will drink at least one of those a day. So between the water I drink from the Bubba mug throughout the day and the Perrier sparkling water, I usually drink half my body weight in water every day. This is excellent for you in every way. Consequently, I recommend you do it also.

Regarding coffee, when you first go on the Fast Metabolism Diet, there is a time period where you won't drink any caffeine. Once you're through that period, drinking caffeine in moderation isn't a problem.

For me personally, I will drink coffee two to three times a week. And I only have one cup generally. I don't drink coffee for energy. The only exception to that is if I have to stay up late for some unusual reason. Then I will drink coffee to keep me awake, but during the daytime and in the mornings, I don't drink coffee for energy. I do, however, drink it for focus.

I have a specific recipe for my coffee. The special tonic that I have with my coffee is as follows. I use a special liquid jar that has a screw cap on it. You can see the exact one I use on the [Resource Page](#).

I put one tablespoonful of coconut oil into the jar. I add another tablespoonful of butter from grass fed cows in it (also known as Irish butter). I have a coffee machine. And I love red organic coffee. It's a Peruvian organic medium roast coffee. I am not a coffee connoisseur. In fact, I don't like the taste of coffee, but the red organic coffee to me is phenomenal.

That's what I use for this morning tonic. The coffee drips into the jar via my coffee machine. The jar has the butter and coconut oil in it. I then put the cap on the jar. It's super hot, but the jar is insulated so I can touch it without a problem. I shake the jar up. I don't need a blender to do it; I just use the insulated liquid jar and shake it fast.

It turns it into a creamy delicious beverage. I will drink a cup of this, probably two to three times a week, especially if I'm doing heavy writing. And it gives me incredible focus. It's food for the brain.

The Fast Metabolism Diet is just that. It's designed to reset, restore, and recalibrate your metabolism. And in my experience, having been on it for a long time, it's done just that for me.

- Another thing that will boost your energy is high energy foods.

Avoid the high glycemic carbohydrates, which include:

- Sugar
- White potatoes
- White rice
- White flour
- White bread

Those are foods you want to be sure to stay away from. You will find all of this in the Fast Metabolism Diet as well. The diet provides you with a list of high energy foods. But you want to avoid the high glycemic carbohydrates.

- You want to also avoid energy depleting people.

This is not always possible. Especially if you have family members who are emotionally draining. But there are people who are black holes of energy. In other words, they're toxic and drains on your energy.

If you're friends with such people on Facebook, you would do well to defriend them. I've seen more people burn up time and energy dealing with toxic people. So I encourage you to do an inventory on the folks who are draining you. And if at all possible, step back from your exposure to them.

Speaking of toxic people, Oscar Wilde said, *'Some cause happiness wherever they go; others, whenever they go.'*

Robert Sawyer made the statement, *'Learning to ignore things is one of the great paths to inner peace.'*

Henry David Thoreau said, *'A man is rich in proportion to the number of things he can afford to let alone.'*

All true statements when it comes to people who deplete your energy.

- Another thing that will zap energy is a lack of sunlight.

There is something known as **SAD** (seasonal affective disorder). Thankfully, there's a remedy for it. You get vitamin D from the sun. And if you're vitamin D is depleted, you'll have problems with energy and other things. But there is a remedy for it. You can get a blue light, which mimics the benefits you reap from being exposed to the sun during the winter. I have a link to the blue light on the [Resource Page](#).

- Another thing that will boost your energy is adequate amounts of sleep.

Remember, energy is directly tied to your productivity and creativity.

Studies show that 97.5% of the population needs seven to nine hours of sleep. Elite performers and athletes need more. They need at least 8.6 hours. Some of them sleep up to 10 hours or more every night. If you're doing strength training, you definitely need at least eight hours. Sleep is how your body rebuilds, recharges, and rejuvenates.

I have a friend who says that sleep is a design defect. Meaning, why did God allow us to sleep one-third of our lives away? Well, this isn't a theological program so we'll leave that question where it is, but just like you have to recharge a battery for it to work, your body and your brain need sleep to recharge. I have found that if I get eight hours of sleep, my productivity and creative output operate at peak levels.

On the other hand, I have functioned on very little sleep. Undoubtedly, you have too. And when that happens to me, my IQ begins dropping every hour until it's lower than a carrot. The lack of sleep and its effect on IQ is based on scientific research.

Without proper rest you're not going to have the focus nor the ability to handle stress. You will lack the wherewithal to cope with challenges. In fact, people gain unnecessary weight when they don't sleep enough. So if you want more energy, you have to invest in sleep, at least eight hours for the average person.

- Exercise is related to energy as well.

In the book, *The Fast Metabolism Diet*, the author specifies exercising at least three times a week: one strength training day, one cardio day, and one stretching day. I have found that this is sufficient to lose weight and build muscle if coupled with the eating program she provides.

- Another thing that's related to your energy levels is to determine whether or not you're an introvert or an extrovert.

Many people think that extroverts are the life of the party and have no proclivities toward walking up to strangers and becoming their friend. That's the caricature of an extrovert, but that's not what an extrovert is. An extrovert is a person who derives energy by being with other people. And it could be just a few people. An introvert derives energy by being by themselves.

Based on those descriptions, you probably know whether or not you're an extrovert or an introvert. I'm an extrovert. I derive energy by being with people. That doesn't mean I want to be with people all the time. But oftentimes, I will leave my study where I normally work and head to a populated place, be it a restaurant or a coffee shop just to be around people. I will also take breaks and have phone conversations with friends. Sometimes email supplies this kind of energy. But as an extrovert, I derive energy from people.

- Another thing that increases your energy is staying inspired.

I believe there are things you can build into your life that will keep you inspired. I'll talk about inspiration in a future session.

- One of the key things regarding how to boost your energy is to take breaks during your workday.

We'll talk more about this in the productivity piece, but I stay energized, not by working from 7:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. straight. I take many little breaks. And those breaks keep my energy up. They also help my focus and productivity.

So in short, managing your energy is the key to peak performance. I have also found that high performance and productivity is also aided by various routines or rituals that keep your energy levels high. We'll talk about those in the coming sessions.

The most fundamental source of energy is physical, and we've focused on that in this session. But I believe it's also spiritual. I'm a person of faith so I derive energy in my connection with God.

You also have the emotional component. Again, you can be depleted of all your energy reserves by being around the wrong people. Negativity will burn out your bulb quickly.

- Another thing you want to do that's related to the diet piece of this, which is profoundly important, is to have breakfast every morning.

Again, I refer you to *The Fast Metabolism Diet* where you eat a different kind of breakfast in the various phases that are part of the diet. One kind of breakfast Monday and Tuesday. Another kind Wednesday and Thursday. And still another kind Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. But you should have breakfast 30 minutes after waking. This is critical for your energy.

Change is the key to growth. And when we're talking about this area of productivity and creative output, energy is king.

Thomas Edison said, *'If we did the things we are capable of doing, we would literally astound ourselves.'*

So my action plan for you in this session is to make a list of all the points I've mentioned which will boost and optimize your energy. Then make a plan for putting them into practice.

I would begin by purchasing the book, *The Fast Metabolism Diet*. I photo copied the chapters of the book that had the three-phase eating plan with all the foods listed, and then I highlighted the foods that I like and/or that are easy to prepare. That list is in my study and I look it every morning and follow it concerning what I put in my body each day.

That concludes this session. I look forward to you joining me in the next.

03: DESIGNING A LIFE GPS

In this session, we want to talk about what I call your life GPS (I credit Darren Hardy for the metaphor). In order to be productive and creative and increase your productivity and creativity, you have to step back and get a bird's eye view of your life.

I'm going to walk you through a process wherein you can create your own life GPS. This GPS will direct your goals. It will direct your creativity. And it will direct your productivity.

I'll begin this session by quoting Peter Drucker who said, *'There is nothing so useless as doing efficiently that which should not be done at all.'*

If you're not being productive about the things that really matter in your life, the things that are really working toward the big goals for your life, and the reason why you're on this planet to begin with, then all of your productive effort and output isn't worth much.

This is where we have to begin. One person said, *'Life begins at the end of your comfort zone.'* As we go through the upcoming sessions, including this one, I'll be asking you to do things that I have done myself which are outside the comfort zone of the average person. But they will move you way ahead in the area of productivity and creative output.

Steven Pressfield said, *'Most of us have two lives. The lives we live and the lives we're capable of living.'*

What we're going to focus on in this session is the life that you're supposed to live and that you're capable of living. The GPS for your life that you're going to create is the vision that will govern your planning, your goal setting, and the direction in which all of your artistic output is going to move.

As someone once said, 'a vision without a plan is a pipe dream.' So first we have to write the vision down, and then we're going to move into the plan.

The great baseball figure Yogi Berra famously said, *'If you don't know where you are going, you'll end up someplace else.'*

So you want to create your own personal life GPS. And that life GPS will embody the vision for your life with respect to your work, your art, and what you end up creating. It will contain your contribution to the world. The life GPS will help you to become an active participant in your life, deliberately and intentionally shaping your future. It will help you to live life on purpose rather than on autopilot.

Consequently, you want to begin with the end in mind.

Now there are basically nine areas of your life when you look at it as a whole, and I'll go through those nine areas with you very quickly. They are:

1. **Family**
2. **Friendship**
3. **Business (career)**
4. **Service (ministry)**

5. **Hobbies**
6. **Physical life (health, exercise, diet)**
7. **Mental life (education and learning)**
8. **Spiritual life**
9. **Financial life (personal finances)**

Several things are important about this list. One is that you can only concentrate fully on three or four of these areas at a time. So in life, you're going to be juggling these areas with respect to focus and attention.

The other thing is that you want to begin with the end in view and look at how you want your life to become at the very end in all of these areas.

This program is focused on your life's work, so we're going to put our emphasis on that and talk about designing a vision for your life's work, that is, creating a life GPS.

Mark Twain said, *'Let us endeavor so to live that when we come to die, even the undertaker will be sorry.'*

It's important to reflect on your life as a whole and every facet of it, but also, specifically on your life's work, which is going to have tentacles that are going to reach all the other areas. Your life's work is going to be related in some way to these nine aspects of your entire life. One of the things that I do that many other people do as well is that I practice what I call an off-site quarterly.

Every quarter in a given year I go off site, usually to an inexpensive hotel. Sometimes I'll spend an entire day at a restaurant or another public place and reflect on all nine areas of my life, which includes my life's work. I basically take the temperature in those areas and focus on where I am now, where I want to go, and what I need to change to make that happen.

Now if you can't afford an inexpensive hotel than I recommend going somewhere public like a quiet diner wherein you can spend the day. Or a public library or park. Just somewhere where you can get away and be undistracted. Have a pen and paper in hand or a computer (if that's your preference) and begin writing out those nine areas of your life and bullet point what you would like to see in those nine areas.

I'm not going to get off into those nine areas, because again, those are beyond the scope of this program. But I do want to focus on how to design a vision for your life's work.

So what you want to do is create a series of bullet points beginning with the word "to" which describe your purpose where your work is concerned. You are focusing on articulating your unique contribution. In this session and in the next, I'm going to give you specific ways to identify your calling and contribution. But let me first give you the practical aspect of how to write it all out.

To give you a template, I'll explain what mine looks like. I've written all these out in long hand on a yellow legal notepad.

The Purpose of My Work

1. To reveal and expound the eternal purpose of God to a new generation in the 21st century.
2. To explain the New Testament story to a new generation.
3. To expound all of Paul's letters in light of the eternal purpose of God in the New Testament story.
4. To bring Christian people into the deeper journey, which has these facets.
 - a. Living by the indwelling life of Christ.
 - b. Living out Matthew 7:12.
 - c. Living for God's eternal purpose.
 - d. Caring for the poor and the oppressed.

That gives me my life GPS with respect to my work. It's a compass that concisely explains what my life's work is all about. My goals are going to come out of this list. My core values are going to come out of it also.

I then take this list and I isolate it into a mission statement, which is something I believe would be helpful for you to do as well.

By the way, I'm giving you personal illustrations so that you can use them to craft your own life GPS. You'll want to begin with the different aspects of your particular contribution beginning with the word "to." Then you'll turn it into a short sentence which answers the question, "What is the purpose of my work?"

That short sentence will be your mission statement based on your GPS. Here's what mine looks like.

My Mission Statement

My mission is to help serious followers of Jesus know their Lord more deeply so they can experience real transformation and make a lasting impact.

There are various facets to your mission statement. Many experts have taught this, but here's a quick sketch. You begin with a statement of what you do. Often, it will begin with the words, "I help," "I facilitate," or "I encourage."

The next part of the statement is your target audience.

- Who are you helping?
- Who are you facilitating?
- Who are you aiding?

The last part of the sentence is the benefit that you're bringing to them.

For example, someone's mission statement is, *I connect entrepreneurs to leverage their experience.*

Another person's is: *I provide memorable experiences for people who are in ministry.*

Another person's is: *I help nurses and pharmacists to withstand fatigue from standing up for long hours.*

So look at your own life GPS and create a mission statement out of it. The mission statement isolates, clarifies, and delineates your life GPS into a short sentence both for your own clarity and for explaining it to someone else.

The next thing you want to do in your life GPS assignment is to list the various platforms that carry your message.

This is what my list looks like; they're all bullet pointed.

Platforms Which Carry My Message

- My blog
- My email update list
- My podcast
- My courses
- My membership network
- My books
- My Facebook page
- My Twitter page
- My live events

Yours may differ, of course, but that gives you an idea. This list answers the question, "How are you getting this work that you do out into the public or out to the target audience you're serving?"

The final piece of my life GPS is long range goals.

These are the things I want to see happen concerning my work before I penetrate the veil and leave this life. It's not necessarily a bucket list of things I want to do in this life, so much as things that relate to my work. I won't share with you what my long range goals are. I only have four of them as it pertains to my work. You should think about and then write out your long range goals.

So to recap:

The first aspect of my life GPS is a description of my life's vision as it concerns my work, and that's a bulleted list. Each item begins with the word "to."

Then I have my mission statement which summarizes the vision.

Then I have a listing of the various platforms which carry and distribute the message that I hold, getting it out to those who need it.

Finally, I have my long range goals.

I recommend that you do the same, and create your own life GPS.

The next session will help you with this exercise, so you want to read the next chapter then come back to do the exercise.

I would also encourage you to do your first off-site quarterly, and get your calendar out to make a list of the four times you'll retool your GPS.

I also recommend reviewing your life GPS once a month. When you do the off-site quarterly, you're not just reviewing it, you're retooling it. You're doing a deep dive into every aspect of the GPS because you'll find that you'll want to tweak it, edit it, or add nuance to it as time goes on.

You even might remove certain parts and replace them with other parts.

So the off-site quarterly is a retooling, as well as a reflection on the nine areas of your life that we just talked about. And that's what you want to do every quarter. But every month, it's good to simply review your life GPS.

One man said, *'No matter how carefully you plan your goals, they will never be more than pipe dreams unless you pursue them with gusto.'*

Another man said, *'Planning is bringing the future into the present so that you can do something about it now.'*

By writing out your life GPS as I've described, you are dreaming. You are envisioning. You are getting in touch with your heart, "for out of the heart flow the issues of life," says Proverbs.

You want to get away because you don't want to be distracted. You don't want to be derailed. In fact, when you do this off-site retreat, wherever it may be, you'll want to turn your phone off. Let your family members know that you'll be out of pocket during this time. Of course, if you're married, you'll want to consult your spouse as to when the best time would be to do this.

My friend, Phil Cooke, wrote a great book on this topic called *One Big Thing: Discovering What You Were Born to Do*.

He has a quote in the beginning by William Shedd which says, *'A ship is safe in harbor, but that's not what ships are for.'*

Phil guides you through the process of discovering your "one big thing." I'm going to do you a favor here and read to you the points that he made in the book that I found personally helpful and have highlighted. You can consider this the Cliffs Notes version. (I'll interject my own thoughts throughout.) The next session will delve deeper into finding your one big thing, or personal calling in life.

Phil asked the question, 'What could you be the best in the world at doing?'

Plenty of people want to change the world, but not enough want to change themselves. *'Don't ask yourself what the world needs, ask yourself what makes you come alive and go do that, because what the world needs is people who have come alive.'* Howard Thurman said that.

Step back and look at all you're doing.

- What are you doing well and not so well?
- What excites you and what doesn't?
- What reflects your genuine calling, expertise and brand, and what doesn't?
- What will actually take you into the future?
- What could you potentially be the best at in your field?

Are you going to continue trying a little of this and a little of that, being unremarkable at a lot of things, getting lost in the clutter, or are you going to find out what your one big thing is, let go of everything else and pursue that with all your passion?

George Washington Carver said, *'When you can do the common things in an uncommon way you'll command the attention of the world.'*

No matter how life-changing your message, without an audience that message doesn't matter. Lose the audience and it really doesn't matter how great your story is. In a cluttered and distracted world, it doesn't matter how great your idea is, because if no one's listening you've failed. It doesn't matter if your idea can change the world, if the world isn't paying attention. The best way to get noticed is to be incredible at one thing, to be remarkable at one big thing.

The most important thing you can possibly accomplish with your life is a legacy of influence. Discovering your one thing will make you passionate and people respond to passion. Passion is one of the most contagious emotions on the planet and people will line up to follow it, especially when the passionate person has credibility. People follow visionaries, especially those who know what in the world they're talking about. Movements happen because of the vision and passion of people with the credibility to inspire loyalty. Plenty of people talked about civil rights in the 60s, but only a handful of African American leaders could persuasively express their vision and strategy, plus endure arrest and jail.

As you develop your one big thing, the possibilities for making a significant impact will begin to open up. As you gain expertise and credibility in an area you're extraordinarily passionate about, you'll immediately begin to influence the people around you. It's tough not to notice a raging fire.

We often forget the years, or sometimes decades, that artists spent in the trenches of education, work and life experience learning the principles that allowed them to speak at an influential national level. The world isn't looking for a copy of an existing writer, musician, politician, CEO or leader. They're looking for someone new, innovative and original. God gave you a unique DNA, so your job is to discover how your unique gifts and talents can differentiate you from everyone else.

You can tell a better story and the key to finding that story is discovering what makes you unique and different. What could it be that makes you different? Perhaps it's your unique communication style, your writing ability, your personality or an expertise in an unusual area.

Stephen Covey made this statement, *'Personal leadership is the process of keeping your vision and values before you and aligning your life to be congruent with them.'*

(This gets back to your personal life GPS.)

Dorothy Parker says, *'I hate writing. I love having written.'* I can sure relate to that. And I'll talk more about that in the writing section of this program.

Start today considering what comes easy in your life. As I mentioned before it's not that it's without effort or pain, but it's so natural that you do it better than most people without even thinking. For most people in most cases, the one thing is an ability, a skill, a God given capacity to handle something other people find challenging – something bigger than a single job that could apply to many fields such as the uncanny ability to sense when others are hurting, the knack for motivating people in difficult circumstances or the talent for leadership. Don't guess and don't make a snap judgment. Take your time and really think about the possibilities.

Too many dreams are ended because someone listened to the wrong person. One of the greatest tests to find out whether people truly love what they do is whether or not they would do it without being paid. Your one big thing is the ultimate expression of your individual gifts, passions and purpose.

One person said, *'If only.'*

Those must be the two saddest words in the world.

What really drives you?

What's the subject that you're so passionate about that you could potentially be one of the best in the world on that issue?

By discovering your passion or obsession, or your one big thing, it will become a filter that everything else passes through. Even if you're not making a penny or don't have a desk, office or business card, become that person. Own the dream and stop being embarrassed that you don't conform to your friend's or co-worker's expectations.

I've discovered that in many cases the thing that you hate the most could be the problem you were born to fix. In other words, what do you hate? What drives you nuts? I believe the key to your destiny can be found in the answer to those questions.

Groucho Marx said, *'We should learn from the mistakes of others. We don't have time to make them all ourselves.'*

So here are four questions to review.

- What comes easy for you?
- What do you love?
- What drives you crazy?
- What do you want to leave behind?

Using that matrix you should start zoning in on what that elusive one big thing is in your life.

Maya Angelou said, *'There is no agony like bearing an untold story inside you.'*

Babe Ruth said, *'You just can't beat the person who never gives up.'*

Winston Churchill made the comment, *'You have enemies? Good. That means you've stood up for something, sometime in your life.'*

Sam Horn said, *'It's hard to stay on purpose if we don't know what our purpose is.'*

Carve out time alone to focus on your dream. Whatever time works for you, be intentional about solitude and getting work done without distractions. Stop doing what other people think is urgent and start focusing on what matters to you.

Martin Luther King, Jr. said, *"The soft-minded man always fears change. He feels security in the status quo and he has an almost morbid fear of the new. For him, the greatest pain is the pain of a new idea."*

Jim Collins said, *"You can't manufacture passion or motivate people to feel passionate. You can only discover what ignites your passion and the passions of those around you."*

Another person said, *"When your life is over, the world will ask you only one question: 'did you do what you were supposed to do?'"*

Vision is what you want to accomplish; strategy is how to get there.

So it begins with your life vision or your personal GPS, as I've said.

Phil concludes the book with a quote by Apple, which comes from their "Think Different" commercial from 1997.

Here's to the crazy ones, the misfits, the rebels, the troublemakers, the round pegs in the square holes, the ones who see things differently. They're not fond of rules and they have no respect for the status quo. You can quote them, disagree with them, glorify or vilify them. About the only thing you can't do is ignore them, because they change things. They push the human race forward, and while some may see them as the crazy ones, we see genius. Because the people who are crazy enough to think they can change the world are the ones who do.

Join the ranks of the very few who have accepted the risk, calculated the peril and leaped off the ledge.

So by creating your life GPS, which is based on a discovery of your calling (or your one big thing), you're mapping your future.

As we continue to talk about productivity and I give you strategies and tactics, you'll want to work smart not just hard. Your GPS will serve as a filter to determine what opportunities you take, what opportunities you decline, and where you put your focus and energy into.

What you're doing is you're putting on paper your passions, writing down what strikes fire in you and excites you. These things have to be compelling to you, else they're not really going to hold.

Once you have your GPS written, whether it's on your computer, tablet (and print it out), or in longhand, you will then go over it and read it to your spouse (if married) or a close friend, or maybe both. Because it's wet cement now and you want to get their input to either confirm or adjust some of the things you've written down.

You may end up fine tuning it and sharpening it. Because again, it's going to serve as your focus, your compass, and as a filter for everything you end up doing, accepting, or declining. It will serve as your guideline, if you please.

Once you have it to the way you want it, and you've spoken to your spouse and/or close friend, you'll want to put it somewhere visible. You can frame it and put it in your office or study. Or you can put it in a visible folder for ready access. But I wouldn't just put it in a desk and forget about it because then it's going to lose its power and its purpose.

You want to revisit it every month. You may end up tweaking it as you look at it or. For me personally, I try to look at it every month. Then I go over it in detail every quarter during my off-site quarterly.

That concludes this session.

In the next session we're going to drill down deeper and discuss how to discover your calling as you design your life GPS. And I'm going to present to you some indicators that will help you identify what your calling really is.

04: DISCOVERING YOUR CALLING

Let's delve deeper into this matter of discerning or discovering your calling. This is critical for your life vision and your goals as it pertains to creativity and productivity. But when the pressure becomes grueling, when you have failures, setbacks, and challenges, you've got to dig deep and reconnect with your calling. If you're making an impact, you're going to get criticized and even attacked. So being clear on your calling is huge as it pertains to persevering, maintaining momentum, and moving forward.

Now there are different kinds of callings. There is the calling in a biblical sense, which we aren't going to discuss in this program. By "calling," I am speaking about your vocation, the unique reason why you were put on this planet. I'm speaking about your "one big thing," as Phil Cooke would put it. Your calling is what keeps you moving forward during the difficult things. It's what you're called to be and do. It's your destiny, as it were. It's what you were made to uniquely accomplish. A calling is something that you can respond to by either accepting or rejecting.

Mark Twain said, *'The two most important days of your life are the day you were born and the day you find out why.'*

Let me demystify the matter for you and talk about some of the ingredients that go into how to discover and locate your calling. When someone asks the question, "How do I find my calling?," I think the answer to that is multi-pronged. Essentially you find your calling at the intersection of four ingredients. They are:

1. Your passion

- What is it that lights you up?
- What is it that makes you come alive?
- What is it that you have a passion for that resonates deeply within you?

2. Your talent

- What are you gifted at?
- What comes easy to you?

Sometimes you have to get the feedback of other people on this because many people take for granted what they're gifted at. They don't realize that most people can't do what they can do in certain areas. Our gifting and talent tends to be hidden from us.

3. What do you see wrong in the world that needs to be fixed?

Your calling intersects with not only your passion and talent, but also, your view of the world as it concerns what's wrong and what needs to be corrected.

4. What would you do if no one paid you, yet you could earn income from?

This is what separates your vocation from your hobby. A hobby is something you do simply for fun. You do not monetize it. There's no income stream associated with it. Your vocation, on the

other hand, is how you make your living. So your calling is that which you would do without getting paid for yet you can make money doing it.

So think of discovering your calling as a four-legged stool. That stool needs those four legs to sustain the weight that's placed upon it. So you find your calling in the intersection of your passion, your talent, what you see wrong in the world, and what you would do if no one paid you yet you could earn income from it if you desired.

Let's go a little further in discovering your calling. Three points.

1. This applies if you're a person of faith. There is an inward knowing or internal witness of God's call.

This is something you can't get away from. It's an inward knowing that remains. It may be clarified. It may be expanded. It may be refocused as time goes on and you live your life, but the general thrust of a divine call remains.

2. There is the witness of others who know you. Testimonials from people who are in your life, who observe you, who know your work, and confirm the calling that you have within your own heart.
3. There is the unique need that it serves.

I believe that every vocation will meet a real need in the world in a unique way. One author said it this way, *'The place God calls you is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet.'*

In other words, it's where passion and a felt need in the world collide.

Even though you may be clear on your calling, and it may come into sharper focus and refined as time goes on, you will experience times of discouragement, frustration, and exhaustion while fulfilling it. Calling and work, therefore, go hand in hand. For me, my calling makes me come alive, but the work part of it sometimes brings discouragement and weariness.

When we get to the creativity part of this program, we'll talk about recharge and rest as necessary elements in fulfilling your calling and being more productive and more creative.

Let me give you an exercise that will help you find out where the world's need and your joy collide. It will help you find out what your passion is and help isolate your true calling.

Here it is. Think about your five favorite movies. Without giving too much thought to the exercise, think of five favorite movies that come to mind and write them down. Once you do that, give some thought to this question, "What are some common threads or themes that are woven into each movie?"

When I did this exercise myself, here were my five favorite movies.

- The Notebook
- The Cutting Edge (1992 version)
- The Zero Effect

- Mr. Deeds
- Bed of Roses

The common theme in all those films is that you have a man winning a woman's heart by his resolve, his persistence, his integrity and his patience.

What's interesting about this is that when you take that common thread and look at it closely, it's one of the centerpieces of God's eternal purpose which is the thrust of my work. That is, a man lays down his life to rescue a woman and win her heart by his resolve, his integrity, his patience and his self-sacrifice.

That is one of the threads of the biblical story as it relates to God's eternal purpose reflecting on Christ (the man) and the church (the woman).

Yours, of course, will be different. But you can do this exercise which will give you some insight. I believe that God has uniquely gifted and wired each of us to do something specific above everything else and to identify our passion, our calling, and our one big thing. This is the foundation for productivity and creativity.

From time to time you'll want to revisit your calling, especially when you feel like quitting. Which *will* happen from time to time. So you'll want to revisit your calling. You want to refresh yourself with it. You'll want to rediscover it. You'll want to reconnect with it.

But it begins with getting clear on what it is and writing it out. Something else. When it comes to your calling there has to be a confidence applied to it.

One famous athlete said, '*You miss 100% of the shots you don't take.*'

Part of accepting your calling is to step out and begin fulfilling it, believing that it can be done. This is a basic truth. To do anything well you must first believe that you're supposed to do it and that you *can* do it.

This sets in motion a way to find out how to do it, a way to discover how to do it. But it begins with that discovery of your calling and vocation. Believing that you can fulfill your calling paves the way for creative solutions. It paves the way for productive thinking.

So if you have faith in your calling, you'll start to think creatively, constructively, and productively concerning how to fulfill it. Your mind and heart will begin to process opportunities, ideas, and solutions that concern that calling.

If you're a person of faith as I am, a lot of prayer will go into this as well. And faith mixed with prayer will pave the way for you to begin to see real results in your life as it concerns your calling.

Your calling also gives you boundaries. I'm a great Clint Eastwood fan, and I like his older movies, particularly the *Dirty Harry* films. In one of those films, Dirty Harry makes this memorable statement, 'A man's got to know his limitations.'

People get into trouble when they move outside their calling and take on things that they're not proficient at doing and that they're not gifted at. This happens in all spheres of life. When it

happens in business it's called **The Peter Principle**. This principle says that you can never rise above the level of your own competence.

It also applies in the Christian world where ministry is concerned. For example, when people who are not gifted to teach move into that area, they cause all kinds of problems. It's the same way with the other spiritual gifts.

One of the things that I've found to be a great asset in my own calling, as well as in my productivity and creativity, is to be part of what's called a mastermind group. A mastermind group is a small group of people who have similar interests. They could be businessmen and business women, entrepreneurs, community leaders, ministers, authors, etc. There's some common element that binds them together, even though the group is very diverse.

The mastermind group comes together regularly to do the following:

- To present ideas that they're learning that are working in their own lives or businesses or ministries,
- To educate one another,
- To challenge and sharpen one another
- To share their struggles and challenges,
- To ask for advice, and
- To have brainstorming sessions

Proverbs talks about iron sharpening iron. Mastermind groups are a great venue for that.

They allow you to become receptive to new ideas. Everyone in the group welcomes new ideas, and everyone in the group is honest enough with each other to share if they feel an idea will not work or why it's not a good idea.

There's also an experimental spirit to break up fixed routines, exposing yourself to new things by way of experiment. Also, the group helps everyone to be progressive and not regressive, to ward off ideas like, "That's the way we did it where I used to work." Or "That's the way I did it in the past, so we ought to do it that way here."

Many of us are caught in routines that don't work or we're caught in traditions that yield very little results. Consequently, to be progressive in our thinking, to move forward and not backwards, is important for growth.

Mastermind groups very often will cost a fee, but it's well worth the value. We're living now in the connection economy where connection with other people is more valuable than stuff. Many people who've been part of mastermind groups, myself included, would much rather spend several thousand dollars in forming life-changing connections with people than in buying material things.

I've spoken about mastermind groups in the past elsewhere, so we'll leave it there. I just want you to have an idea of what they are and how they operate. Presently, [I facilitate two mastermind groups both with a very specific focus.](#)

05: EFFECTIVE GOAL SETTING

In this session, we're going to begin talking about the goal setting process and how to design your goals. This is going to be the first of several sessions on this subject, so before you put pen to paper and begin to design your goals for the year, you'll want to listen to each session on this topic.

Setting goals is hugely important. Why? Because if you want to be productive and increase your creative output, I know of no better way than to begin with the proper way to set goals.

Henry David Thoreau said, *'It's not enough to be busy, so are the ants. The question is, what are we busy about?'*

Benjamin Franklin said, *'If we take care of the minutes, the years will take care of themselves.'*

You want to begin with that big vision for your life, which serves as your life GPS.

There are three kinds of people in the world.

- Those who make things happen.
- Those who watch things happen.
- Those who wonder what happened.

So when we talk about goals, we're talking about making things happen in a very deliberate, intentional, and focused way.

Let me give you my goal setting process. I look at my life GPS, and out of it I develop 10 goals for the year. I write them all down. It's important to write them down because if you don't write them down, you won't be focused on them and they will become ineffective.

For myself, I write them down in long hand. You may be someone who's more comfortable typing them on a computer or a device. But write them down in some fashion and then save them.

Research shows that you have more than a 40% chance of achieving your goals simply by the act of writing them out. I know in my own life that writing them down has been profoundly helpful. By doing so, you're planting a flag in the ground which is going to set your year up.

I recommend 10 goals. If you can't come up with 10, I would do at least seven, but no more than 10 because it will distract you from your focus. I also recommend that you make your goals reflect the nine different aspects of your life.

For example, you may have two goals that relate to relationships and family. You may have three goals that relate to ministry or business. You may have one or two goals relating to your spiritual life. You may have two goals relating to health, etc.

I would diversify them based on your life GPS. The reason you don't want to have more than 10 goals for a year is because you cannot keep all of those pins in the air. It's impossible to juggle all of it. So 10 would be the max and seven is a good number as well.

The next thing is to make your goals **SMART**. I don't know who came up with this, but I've read it in many different books and heard it numerous times. SMART goals are as follows. SMART is an acronym.

Specific – your goals have to be specific in order to be effective. Goals should clearly define what you're going to do, precisely.

Measurable – there has to be a way to measure whether or not you're fulfilling the goal, working toward it, making progress on it or failing at it.

Achievable – this simply means that you're capable of achieving them. You don't want to make a goal that's so easy to achieve that there's nothing compelling about it. You might as well not write it down at all then.

Norman Vincent Peal once said, '*Shoot for the moon. Even if you miss, you'll land among the stars.*'

A goal has to be challenging. It has to be compelling enough to keep you focused on it and to provoke desire in your heart to strive toward fulfilling it. But it can't be unrealistic or impossible. It has to be achievable. I would make each goal big, and then reassess each one to see if they are too big. If so, reduce them by a little. But make sure they are achievable.

Relevant – relevant means that you choose the goals that matter and that fit into your life GPS. A relevant goal answers these questions.

- Does this goal seem worthwhile?
- Is it the right time for it?
- Does it match my life GPS and my calling?

If you're a person of faith, a relevant goal will bring God glory.

Time bound – write down the day you wish to see each goal fulfilled. Give each one a deadline. This has tremendous motivational power.

For example, one of your goals may have to do with the size of your waist. A SMART goal would look something like this: "By December 31, I will have a _____ (37", 35", 30") waist."

Or, "By December 31, my new book will have hit this bestseller list _____ (name of bestseller list)

So you want to make them SMART: specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time bound. That's hugely important. The deadlines create not only motivation, but urgency. Deadlines help you put a priority on the goals, because you know the deadlines will be coming.

The next thing I would say about this is that you have to keep your goals visible. It's completely ineffective if you set your goals, write them out, save them, and then you file the sheet away and never look at it again. I try to look at my goals every day to keep me focused on what I'm striving toward. I'm talking about my yearly goals, not my life GPS.

I've picked up a number of ideas from various people that have worked well for me. I know some people frame them and put them in their office or study so they see them constantly.

I know some people put them on the inside door of their medicine cabinet. I know some people create screen savers out of them, so every time their computer is on, they see the goals in the screen saver.

I try to review my goals on a daily basis (typically) so I have them in numerous places. If you lose visibility, if you lose sight of them, you can forget about fulfilling them. The chances go way down.

As someone wisely said, *'The faintest pencil is better than the sharpest memory.'*

Your goals cannot be so simple and so easy that they're within your comfort zone because you're not going to stay with them. You'll end up walking out on them. There has to be a compelling element to the goal so that you want to follow through with it. Goals play very much into how you're going to map out every day of your workweek, which we'll talk about in our productivity section.

They give you a focus on what you need to do to move the ball of your life further down the field and eventually win the game. Remember this when you set goals. Your past does not determine your future.

Maybe you have failed at a goal in the past and you're reluctant to write it down. You need to avoid that kind of thinking like quicksand. Just because you haven't met a goal in the past doesn't mean you should give up on it. So write it down. But again, make it SMART – specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time bound. And again, make the goal compelling and challenging. If, on the one hand, you make it so easy and safe, it's not worth writing down in the first place. And if you make it so outlandish and out of reach, you'll only get discouraged.

Set the goals big, but not unrealistic.

I can't stress enough that your goals have to be specific. You can't just say, "I'm going to exercise this year." If your goal is to exercise, how often are you going to exercise and where are you going to exercise?

For example, a good goal would be, "I'm going to exercise three times a week - Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at XY Gym (or in my garage or whatever it may be)." If the goal is not specific enough, you have less than a 40% chance of succeeding at it. But if you narrow it down to a specific, studies show that you have a 90% chance of fulfilling it.

The other reason for writing it down relates to the issue of clarity. This is why you want to write your life GPS down on digital or actual paper. When you write, you get clear on what you're writing about. The act of writing gives you a destination, and it motivates you to take action. You can think of your goals like mile markers on a highway. You get to look forward to them. And you can see what's behind.

Another thing I would add that's very important is this. Some people write this element down and some don't. I personally don't, but I have it firmly planted in my mind. It has to do with the motivation behind the goal. Why are you setting this goal in the first place?

It's also important that you make sure the goals you write down are your goals and not someone else's. For example, someone (perhaps a family member) wants you to perform a certain way according to their own values, but it's not your values. So you're only trying to meet the goal to impress another person or to appease them. That's *not* enough of a motivator to keep you focused on that goal.

Make sure the goals come out of your own desire, your own heart, and your own values. Get in touch with what motivates you. Get in touch with the intention behind the goal. Then look at the consequences.

- If you don't fulfill this goal, what are the negative consequences?
- If you do fulfill this goal, what are the positive consequences?
- What do you lose if you don't fulfill the goal?
- What do you win if you do fulfill the goal?

If this is something that's not part of your consciousness already, and it may not be, write the consequences down as you're listing your goals. Write down what you gain and what you lose by fulfilling the goal or failing at it. Because this will help you during times of plateau. When it comes to setting goals in life, you invariably will hit a plateau on some of them.

In fact, I want to talk to you about what to do when you hit a plateau. We'll do that in the next session.

06: HOW TO ACHIEVE YOUR GOALS

In this session, we're going to talk more about goals. And I want to pull back the camera a little bit and discuss the power of thinking bigger than we normally would think about our goals. Often I meet people who are essentially imprisoned into thinking very narrowly and small with respect to what they can do.

An exercise that I give people, and that I practice myself, is to pick a word for the year. Every year, I select a word that will constitute the theme that I'm going to focus on for the year. That theme comes out of my life GPS, but it gives me a specific focus for the year.

Last year my word was **Simplify**, and much of what I did, the decisions I made, the opportunities I said *no* to, the opportunities I said *yes* to, was all focused on simplifying my life and my work.

This year my word is **Impact**. So this year, I'm making decisions through a grid and a filter that asks this question: "What is the broadest possible impact I can have?" This question provokes me to say *no* to certain opportunities and *yes* to others.

I think the reason why people think too narrowly and too small is due to self-protection. There is a fear of risk in many hearts. We don't want to move out of our comfort zones. But the key to growth is the willingness to be stretched, and this involves thinking bigger.

If we're going to be impactful in our productivity and creativity, then we have to learn how to think larger than our comfort zones will allow. We have to face the fear of protecting ourselves head on. There's no question that the more productive you are, the more impact you have, the more creative output you produce, the more you will draw fire and invite criticism from detractors.

I will talk to you about the three different kinds of criticism and how to respond to them in a future session.

But I want you to think about small thinking, narrow thinking, comfort-zone thinking as a restriction and a boundary that will prevent you from accomplishing what you're called to accomplish.

Recognize that the possibilities for your life and work far outweigh what you already imagine. If you give yourself permission to think bigger, larger, and more impactful than the grooves in your brain are already wired to think, that is the first step for moving out of your comfort zone into some exciting and adventurous areas of making a greater impact.

One way to do this, for me at least, is dreaming. I'm not talking about REM sleep or deep sleep. I'm talking about imagining. Dreaming is a wonderful exercise, and it can narrowly isolate your passion and calling and thing things that you're meant to do and can do. So I allow time periodically in my life to dream.

One of the things I do, and encourage others to do, beyond coming up with a theme for the year is to write out my ideal year. What would I like to see happen this year? I do that at the end of every year. So near the end of this year, I will do two things as I look forward to next year:

1. I contemplate a word that will mark the theme of that year as I've already mentioned.

2. I write out my ideal year.

What would I like to see happen next year in every area of my life? This then becomes the ingredients by which I create a recipe called my yearly goals, which we discussed in our last session.

I think you can do the same thing in your own life. Write out your ideal year. Use bullet points for all the things you would like to see happen in a year. Out of that bulleted list, create seven to 10 goals.

All of these exercises that I've talked about up to this point will give you clarity and focus. It will give you a blueprint upon which build, a treadmill on which to run. So imagine the possibilities and write them out. That's the first step to seeing your goals come to pass.

Of course, for a person of faith, your ideal year also becomes your prayer request list. But regardless of whether you're a person of faith or not, your ideal year will give you a map, a blueprint by which to set your goals for the year.

Now I want to talk briefly about what to do when you hit a plateau. And you *will* hit a plateau in your efforts to achieve your goals. You will hit a plateau regarding your health, your business, your ministry, your spiritual growth, your mental growth, weight loss, relationships, etc. **You will hit a plateau.** Some call this the **messy middle**, and there are basically three reactions that people have when they hit a plateau.

1. Throw in the towel, quit, give up.

These are people who didn't expect the plateau, and when they hit it, they lost heart. The people who give up when they hit a plateau are manifested to be dabblers. They really did not dig in with serious commitment.

2. Use force, push through, muscle through. Apply intensity to the plateau and try to barrel ahead anyway.

These people also didn't expect the plateau. Depending on the kind of force they apply to the plateau, they will push through or they will conclude it's not worth the effort and end up having the first reaction where they give up.

3. Change the strategy.

People who react this way have expected the plateau. And that's one of the reasons why I'm sharing this ahead of time, because I'm letting you know you're going to hit a plateau. But they are ready to change the strategy to meet their goal if nothing else is working. So I would encourage you...

- a. To not give up when you hit a plateau.
- b. Don't muscle through it.
- c. Change the strategy. Create a plan B to reach the goal.

If you don't have a plan B, then come up with one. This will invite your creative powers to come to your aid through reflection, prayer, and contemplating the situation. And when you change the strategy for achieving the goal, there's an excellent chance you'll reach it.

Now let's go back to the issue of motivation.

One man said, *'We are kept from our goal, not by obstacles, but by a clear path to a lesser goal.'*

That's incredibly true. This is the issue of being side tracked. It's the issue of chasing things that don't align with your life vision, your personal GPS, and your calling. The fact of the matter is, the power of the question *why*, the motivation behind your goals, is what will get you through the grueling, the laborious, the mundane, the plateaus and the obstacles that come your way.

The *hows* will be ineffective if the *whys* aren't powerful enough, so give time to the question of motivation. The motivation behind each goal that you set.

One of the reasons why people don't make progress in their lives and why they're not productive (or as productive as they can be) is because their goals are not clearly defined.

Michelangelo said, *'The greater danger for most of us, is not that our aim is too high and we miss it, but that it's too low and we hit it.'*

Keep that in mind as you set your goals. The truth is, if your written goals are not from your own heart and your inner ambitions, your creative spirit will not work with you in achieving them. You will end up sabotaging the success of your own goals. Your heart, mind, and spirit will not align with you in fulfilling the goals and the end will be frustration.

So to review, we've talked about three action plans as it relates to productivity and creativity.

1. We talked about writing out your life GPS, the vision for your life which involves your calling, your passion and your core values. This is the big picture.

Some people talk about writing out a 10-year plan. I don't espouse that or practice it. I try to look at the very end and look at my whole life as a big picture. I ask these questions:

- What is the big vision of my life?
 - What's the GPS that's going to set the direction, the compass, and the course for everything else?
2. We talked about writing out your ideal year, all the things you would like to see come to pass in the upcoming year.
 3. We talked about writing out a theme for the year, and
 4. We talked about writing out your goals for the year, which spring out of your ideal year that you've written down, as well as your life GPS that you took time to create.

I write my goals in several places. I use yellow legal pads, not the long legal pads, but the 8 ½ x 11" yellow pads. I write out my goals in those pads. Then I type them on my computer in a Word document.

I then tear out the yellow page and put it in a manila folder marked with the present year. In that manila folder I have my life GPS also written out on a yellow legal sheet of paper. That folder also contains my written goals for the year. I put the goals in various places in my home.

I have it near the other materials I go through during my morning routine, so I review the goals as I go through that routine.

Some people use electronic apps for this and on the [Resource Page](#) I list many of the electronic apps for you to look at. I also tell you about my filing system which is near my computer where I work.

Let me state something that I want you to remember, *'Where there is no struggle, there is no progress.'*

The best things in life, the most important things in life, come with struggle, fighting resistance and challenge. They also come out of deliberately and intentionally forcing your way out of your comfort zone. Keep that in mind as we move forward in this program.

Again, you want to make sure your goals are *your own* goals and not those which belong to someone else. You don't want to chase a goal that belongs to another person just to please them, appease them, or meet their expectations.

Those kinds of goals aren't going to get you through the messy middle and the plateaus. What will get you through those times is to reconnect with the motivation behind the goals. As I said previously, some people write down the losses and the gains for achieving or not achieving a certain goal in columns, so they have it for when they get discouraged and hit a plateau. This helps them reconnect emotionally with the intention behind the goal in order to avoid living with regret.

I think that's great.

But writing the goals down and staying connected with them by making them visible is a source of enormous encouragement. In effect, when you put together your daily routine (which we'll discuss later) it's essentially a daily action plan to accomplish your goals and the vision for your life.

Setting a timeline on the goal is powerful. You're putting a deadline on it, a tangible point in time by which the goal will be met. This transforms the goal from a nebulous dream to a practical action plan which gives you motivation and focus.

You don't want to create a goal that is delusional and beyond your belief system. I also advise against telling other people what your goals are.

Some people do this in order to be accountable, but what ends up happening is that psychologically when a person let's others know about their goals, they get the feeling that they've accomplished the goal just because they articulated it.

I personally don't let anyone know my goals except for my wife. Your mileage may vary, of course, but you may want to think about just sharing them with one or two people who can give you encouragement and ask about your progress.

William Thomson wisely said, *'What doesn't get measured doesn't get managed.'*

That, in fact, is true. If there's no way to measure your goal, it's probably not going to happen. If a goal is not challenging and it's not compelling, it will not energize or inspire you to try to achieve it.

A challenging goal is going to engage your creativity, your persistence, and your resourcefulness. A goal that's uninspiring is going to flame out quickly and will just be another fleeting dream that you wrote down.

But there is tremendous power in committing your goals to writing and making them SMART. How do you know if you're succeeding at a goal? If you're just going to say, "I want to lose weight." Or, "I want to be healthy," there's really no way to measure that, test it, or keep track of your progress.

A lot of people live their lives reactively rather than deliberately. And the reason they don't make progress in their goals and end up sabotaging their own efforts is because they're really content with the way things are.

They're content to live in the status quo. They're content with their level of productivity and creativity, even though they can increase it profoundly. They're not willing to risk moving out of their comfort zones to effect great change. Because you purchased this program, I believe you *don't* fit this description. Hopefully, these words will inspire you to take some risks and do some things differently.

So your goals are basically taking your life GPS and ideal year and breaking them down into actionable steps that you can accomplish for the year.

One of the things I would also add about the power of goal setting the way I've described is to give yourself a reward of some kind when you meet each goal. For me, I really enjoy going out to dinner with my wife to a nice restaurant. There are a few that we frequent periodically when we have something to celebrate.

So going out to eat at a fine restaurant is one of things we do when I meet a goal. Your mileage may vary, but build into the goal an external reward for when you achieve it. This will help keep you focused on the goal as well.

Now I'd like to close with nine actions you must take to reach your biggest goals. This is something Rick Warren had given in a teaching on how to accomplish a powerful and focused life. I think he did a good job with it so I'm going to share it with you very briefly. Warren says, *'You need a goal, a dream, a vision; without a dream you drift.'*

Here are the steps to focus your life and reach your biggest goals according to Warren:

- 1. Determine your present position.**

Where are you now: financially, health-wise, spiritually, in ministry, in relationships, etc.?

- 2. Describe exactly what you want.**

Here are the questions he says to ask yourself.

- Whom do I want to be?
- What do I want to do?
- What do I want to have?
- Why do I want it?

He points out that the answers to these questions need to be concise and compelling.

3. Find a promise from God.

Of course, he's speaking to spiritual people, people of faith, so he talks about the power of receiving God's promises in His Word.

4. Ask God for help.

I have rephrased this to say, "Ask God to be my help." Again, this point is for those who believe.

5. Identify the barriers.

There's power in writing your goals out. I can't stress it enough. There are things that the act of writing does to your mind and your heart that can't be replaced in any other way. Warren says to identify the barriers to these big goals. I recommend writing those out also. This will minimize them and make them less intimidating.

6. Create a step-by-step plan.

A plan has steps, deadlines, and a schedule.

7. Be patient and persistent.

There's wisdom in these words. Patience on the one hand and persistence on the other. You need both for effective goal setting.

8. Enlist a team for support.

This could be a spouse, a close friend, or more.

9. Pay the price.

There's always a price tag to fulfilling a dream, a desire or a goal. There's a cost for reaching every goal you set out to accomplish. Great goals require great sacrifice of time, money, energy, reputation, etc. As you set goals and count the cost, you should ask three big questions.

- What will it cost me?
- What am I willing to give?
- Is the cause worth the cost?

I think there's a lot of wisdom there, so we'll leave this session on that note.

07: CREATING AN IDEAL WORK SPACE

In this session, I want to talk about creating a work station. But first, let me say a word in review.

When we speak about your life GPS, we're actually beginning with the end in mind.

A fourth-century Greek mathematician said, *'Let us start with what is being sought and assume that we already found it.'*

In that context he was talking about working backwards, starting with the end in view, the grand purpose, and then working back to the present day. That, in effect, is what your written GPS for your life does for you. It gives you the vision which reaches into the future and brings it into the present.

The philosopher Seneca said, *'We should never work either for useless goals or impossible ones.'* I agree with these words wholeheartedly.

Let's explore how to build and design an ideal work station.

Your work space is the location in which you do most or all of your work. And there are a couple of features that you'll want to have in place to make it the most productive space possible.

1. It has to be a place where there are little to no distractions.

Some people rent a space outside of their home for this very reason. I've been fortunate enough to purchase a home that has a work space that's mostly removed from the other parts of the house so I can close it off from distractions.

2. It's important to put up decorations that you find to be inspiring.

In my primary work station, which I call **my writing studio** (you can see photos of it later in this chapter), I have two plaques on the wall to the left of my desk that contain inspirational statements to artists, creators, and innovators from Seth Godin.

I also have another work station that I call **the cave**, which is where I do my reading, relaxing, and recharging. It's also where I have my morning spiritual routine.

I also have several collages that are framed behind glass of my favorite baseball player and his greatest day in baseball history along with two music artists that inspire me because of their sheer productivity and creativity.

By the way, it took me many years to find a home in which to purchase that actually had two work stations where I can do my work. I did not always have that.

In one of my past homes, I converted a garage into a large work station. In another house, I converted a guest bedroom into a work station. In still another house, I converted a Florida room (sun room) into a work station.

So you'll have to use some ingenuity and creativity to design your own work station in the present season in which you live. It's also important to set boundaries. And we'll talk more about the act of setting boundaries so that you can work undistracted in a future session.

By looking at the photos of my work station, you may get some ideas for creating your own work space.

You may want to employ candles while you're working (I sometimes do this). Peppermint is great for energy. You can usually pick up peppermint candles at any candle store, as well as other stores during Christmas time.

There are other scents you may like that are conducive for working such as lavender, jasmine, etc. You'll want to make sure the lighting is sufficient. I use bulbs that employ white daylight lighting. I prefer those to the bulbs that give off a yellowish tint.

Sometimes if you get tired of the work station and you want a break, you can pick up your laptop and head off to a restaurant, a public library, or somewhere else that's relatively quiet.

With restaurants or diners, if they're not well attended, they are usually fairly quiet. If not, I insert a set of earbuds into my iPhone which has white noise. Or I will listen to Pandora using the earbuds.

Speaking of music, when I work at home, I always have music running in the background. Very often that gives me inspiration. I use Pandora radio station. If I'm doing any kind of heavy writing, I will either listen to the Sarah McLachlan radio station or the Susie Suh station. Those particular tunes, for me personally, provide great background music for creative work. If I'm doing lighter work, I'll play more upbeat music.

Someone once turned the word *music* into an acronym.

Music
Unlocks
Self-expression
Intelligence
Creativity

For me, music has a way of putting me in the zone, placing me in the groove, leading me to my sweet spot in creativity and productivity. Background music does this also.

Sometimes when I'm super focused, I won't have any sound at all. But in general, I have music playing while I work.

Another thing I'll mention is this. I highly advise you to get a stand up work desk, either that or create a stand up desk out of your present desk. I have two computers that I use in my writing studio. But the one I use the most is sitting on a traditional desk. And I have converted it into a stand up desk. I also use a special mat for it. I use the stand up desk for health reasons.

I've written an article entitled *Sitting is the New Smoking* which is on the [Resource Page](#). Research has revealed that sitting down for long periods of time is actually killing people. Stand is not only healthy, but it aids in weight loss. Hemingway stood while he wrote, by the way. I'm

sure he did so without knowing the health benefits. He would type on his typewriter while standing.

If you begin to stand while you work, you need to ease into it because your back is going to give you problems if you try to do it for long periods of time all at once. You have to work your way toward it. I learned that rather quickly early on. So I started to ease into it. I'm at the point now where I do around 95% of my work standing up. On days where I work for unusually long hours, I'll sit down for some of the time. Standing up for more than 5 or 6 hours can be harsh on your shoulders and back.

If you go to the [Resource Page](#), you will see all the things I've purchased to create a stand up desk out of my traditional desk.

So your work space needs to be a location in which you feel comfortable, that is free of distraction, that contains things that inspire you (be it collages, posters, plaques, background music or candles), and it should be a place where your goals are visible.

Another thing I have in my work station is a white board in which I have written the word for the year so I can see it continuously. The white board also contains some of the main things I need to get done for the month.

Once those tasks for the month are accomplished, I erase them and write in the new tasks for the next month. That helps me keep focused on what I'm supposed to do for a given month.

So again, look at the photos below to see all the different elements that I use for my work station and come up with your own ideas that suit you best.

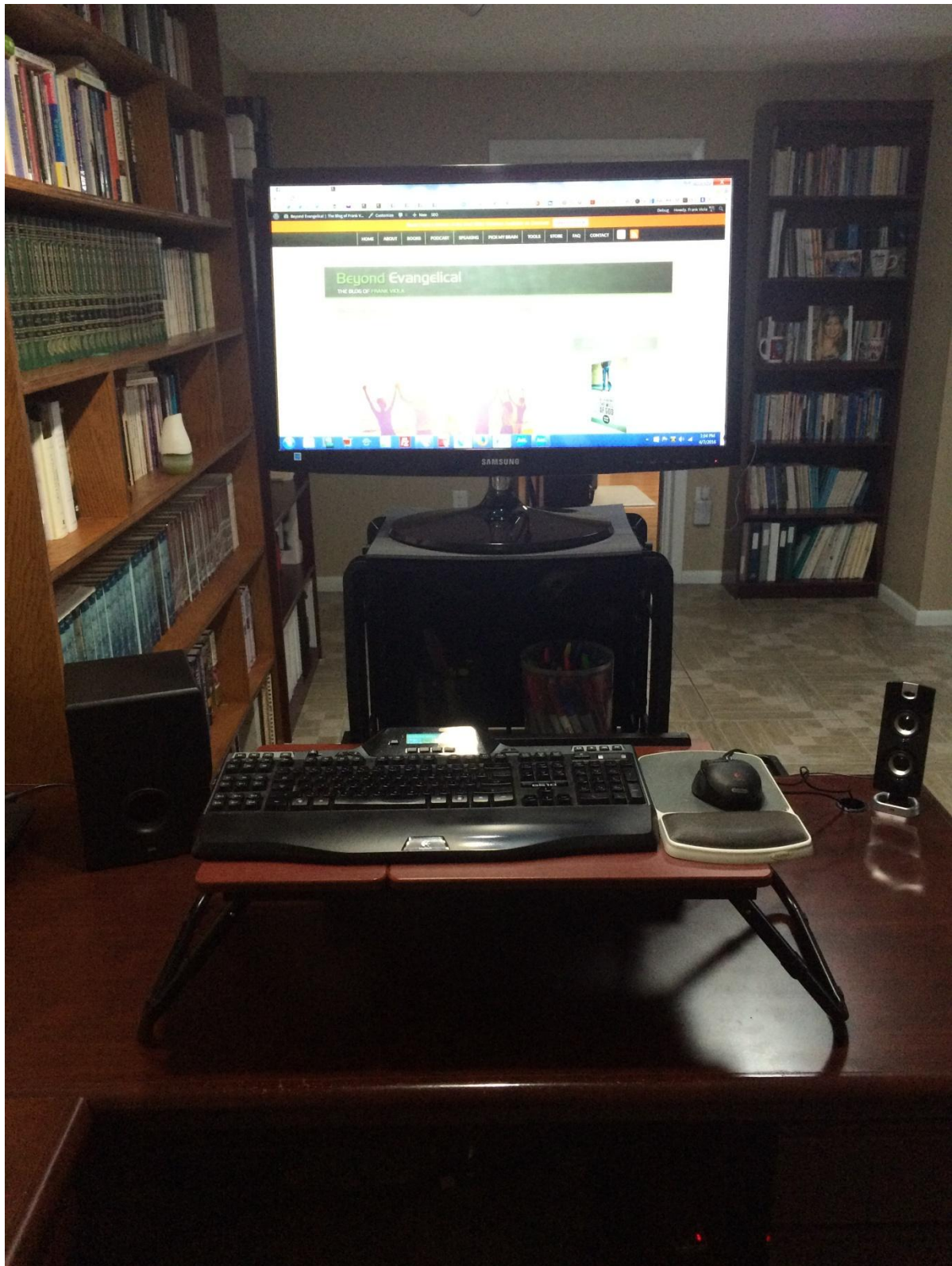
A suggestion if you have a noisy home. Simply plug in your headphones and listen to the Pandora radio station through the headphones. I do this if my home happens to be untypically noisy. I can't hear anything else with the music coming through my headphones. It blocks out all external noise. That's just a little tip for if you have a situation where it's noisy where your work station is located.

In the next session, we'll talk about designing an ideal week and a morning routine. Here are some images of my work station.

Photos appear below.



The Cave



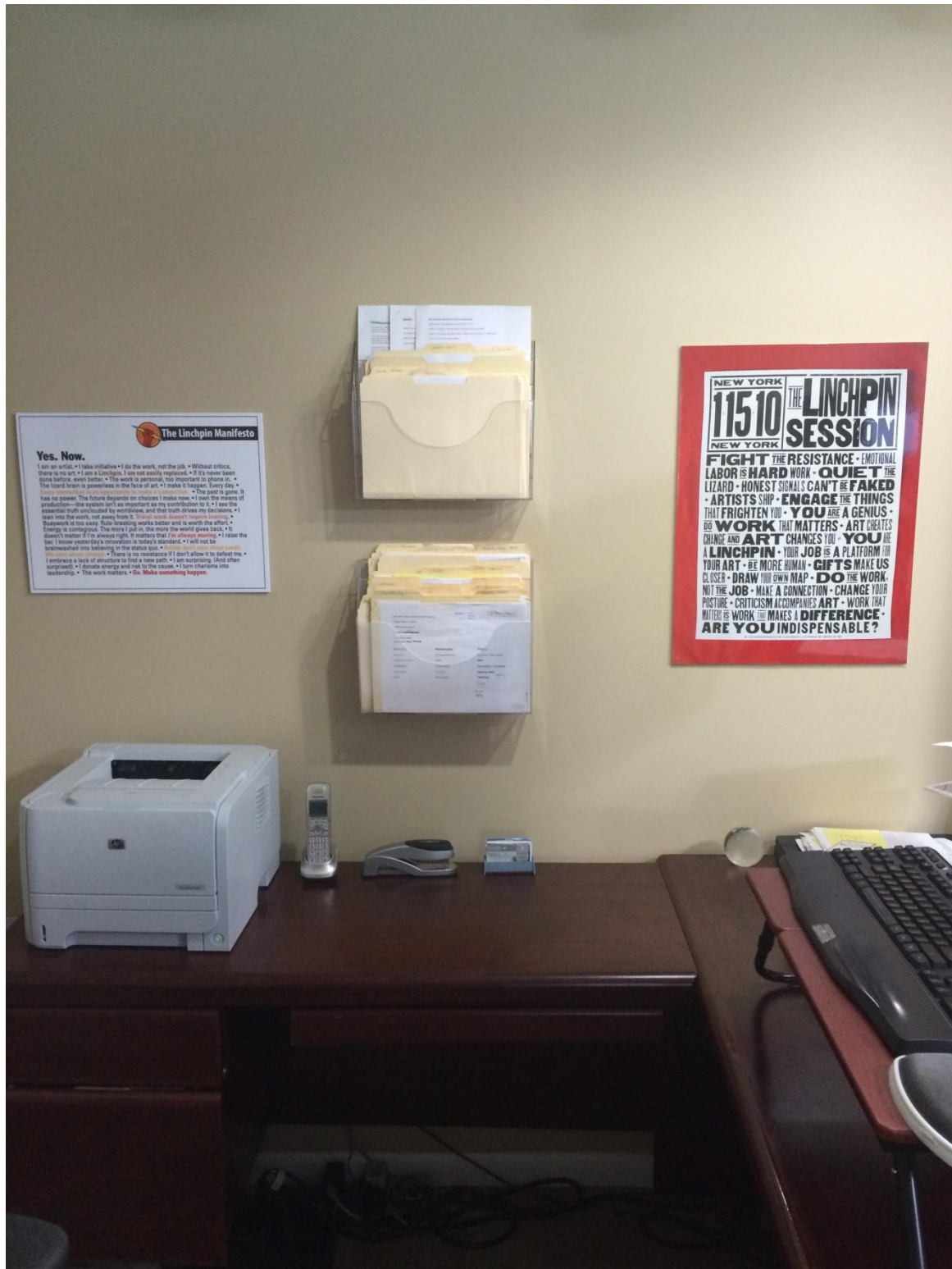
Writing Studio: Stand Up Desktop 1



Daily Planner: Task List



Writing Studio: Wall 1



Writing Studio: Wall 2



Writing Studio: Walls 1 & 2

08: DESIGNING AN IDEAL WORK WEEK

In this session, I want to talk to you about how to design your ideal work week. I'll begin by sharing my own ideal week.

Someone once said, '*A vacation is an escape from life.*' I hope that when you finish this program, you will be able to set up a life from which you don't have to escape.

We've already discussed how to boost your energy and create an ideal work station.

Getting back to goals, your energy multiplies and advances when you set desired goals and you resolve to work toward achieving them. Your goals produce or create new energy. The task of accomplishing a goal produces new energy and even creativity. Goals, in effect, cure boredom. There's great power in goals when you surrender yourself to your heart's desires as it concerns your calling.

Your calling produces energy and enthusiasm needed to accomplish your life vision. Your life vision, your GPS, is going to help you to start marching toward the goals that you will set out to accomplish. The GPS will give you clarity on what those goals are supposed to be. And there's a set of questions that you should commit to asking yourself whenever every new opportunity or idea presents itself.

- Will this idea or opportunity help take me where I want to go?
- Will it help me fulfill my calling and my life's vision?
- Is it on the compass of my life GPS?

If the answer is *no*, then you should back off of it. If the answer is *yes*, you ought to accept it and press on.

Your Ideal Week

I have found it to be hugely effective if I break up my week into themes. In other words, I categorize each day of the work week based on a theme.

So each day in my work week has a specific theme. What that does for me is it breaks routine fatigue. I should start by saying that my ideal week, the blueprint that I've created, is best described as "tight but loose."

I have never been a person who's been able to regiment every hour of my work day. Consequently, my ideal week is loose. However, I do focus on certain projects on certain days. So my ideal week is tight.

Now here's what my ideal week looks like. Your mileage may vary, but this will give you a track to run on. You can implement it and/or tweak it to meet your own needs.

- On Mondays I work on two things primarily.
 1. Creating my next blog post.
 2. Creating my next unfiltered update.

I don't write the entire article in one sitting. I write a draft or pieces of it, and as I get into my writing method in this program, you'll discover that I'm a plodder. I do a little bit at a time and then I rewrite, I add, I edit and so on. That's what my Monday routine consists of.

Now in my present blog routine and unfiltered update routine, I write one blog post a month and one unfiltered update a month. So I'm producing free content to my email list twice a month (bi-weekly).

- Tuesdays is dedicated to writing books.

I generally have two books going at the same time. One will be a book for my publisher with a deadline on it, while another will be a self-published electronic book that I'm creating also with a deadline on it.

So Tuesdays I work on both books. Tuesdays is also for reading. Hence, once I finish my task list for that day, which will include the main thing for Tuesdays (book writing) among other things I need to do, I will do some reading for my projects.

- Wednesday is preparation for [The Deeper Christian Life Network](#) that I facilitate.

I publish new content each week, whether it's audio or written work, so Wednesday's is the time that I prepare those. That usually takes a good while.

- Also on Wednesday I do some reading, but again the primary thing I focus on is preparation for *The Deeper Christian Life Network*.
- On Thursdays, if there's anything left over from the day before, concerning preparation for *The Deeper Christian Life Network*, I finish that. And then I go into book mode. I work on my books again.
- Friday is a day for organizing, cleaning up my email inbox, cleaning up and organizing my desktop on my computer. And if I'm taking any courses, that's the day where I go through course material.
- Saturdays are basically open for time with family, friends, and social activities. But also, when I'm not doing those things, I dedicate any free time to reading.

I'm not a fiction reader. Everything I read is non-fiction. Even if I'm reading something for pleasure, like maybe the biography of a baseball player I admire or a book about one of the music artists that I appreciate. That's all tied to my work as a creative. So anything I read is directly or indirectly tied to my calling and my profession.

- Sundays are dedicated for resting and family. And I will do some reading then also, if time permits. The only other thing I do on Sundays is I journal.

I only journal once a week. It's not a detailed journal. I simply go over some of the high points of the week, including the good, the bad, the challenges and the struggles. I type them into my journal. Anything that stands out that I feel at some point in the future I will want to go back and review is what I put in the journal.

- In the late afternoon or evening on Sundays I plan for the week to come.

I look at the things I need to get done for that week, and I start writing them in my task list for Monday.

You can see that each day has a specific theme with specific tasks I focus on. However, there are many other things I do on each of those days and that's where my daily task list comes in. The task list has been the key secret to my productivity.

I normally don't work on the weekends, aside from reading, if that counts as work. But if I'm behind on a project or a deadline, then I will utilize my weekends for catching up. Thankfully, that's not typical.

So you can take this as a template, an example, and by it create your own ideal week. I would advise putting it together thematically as I do.

If you really want to get detailed and put beginning and ending times for each task you have for each day of the week, feel free to do that. But that has never worked for me.

This "tight but loose" schedule has worked beautifully for me. But then again, your mileage may vary. All of us are wired differently. Experiment to see what works. The important thing is that you write it down and make it visible.

I have my ideal work week visibly in an clear organizer that I'll tell you about a little later in the program. It's to the left of my computer where I work. I have committed my ideal week to memory as there's not a lot to it. So I basically know what to do each day of the week. Nevertheless, I still have it in a visible place.

Give it a try. Create your own ideal week and tweak it as you go along. It will take you awhile to get it perfect.

In the next session, I'll talk to you about my morning work routine, which includes my daily task list.

09: DESIGNING AN EFFECTIVE MORNING ROUTINE

Aristotle said, *'We are what we do repeatedly. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit.'*

Another person said, *'If you're not in control of your time, you're not in control of your results.'*

I have found that the key to successful, intentional, and deliberate time use is to block out strategic time periods where you work without interruption. As the quote goes, *'You will never change your life until you change something you do daily.'*

You have to identify the small hinges that swing the big doors. And for me, it all begins with having a morning routine.

I've already gone through my ideal week and how I schedule each day of the week according to a theme. Now I want to zoom in and talk about my work day.

According to recent studies, 55% of the U.S. population consider themselves to be morning people, 15% say they're afternoon people, and 20% say they're evening people. According to much of the research, people who work in the mornings tend to be more productive than those who do their work in the evenings. Of course, that's not set in concrete, and it doesn't apply to every individual, but there are certainly benefits for doing your work in the morning.

I have designed a morning routine that's worked for me for a long time that I want to share with you. You may want to use it. You may want to adjust it. You may want to take parts of it and apply it to your own life. You may want to tweak it. Or you may want to abandon what I do and start from scratch to create your own morning routine.

I want to say in opening that you already have a morning routine. You just may not have thought about it. When you get out of bed, that's a routine. When you brush your teeth, that's a routine. When you open the refrigerator and grab something to eat or drink in the morning, that's a routine. When you put on your clothes, that's a routine.

So you already have a morning routine. Routines are inescapable. We all have them. But what I want to talk about in this session is how to effectively design your morning routine so that you can be the most productive and the most creative.

Now here's what my morning routine looks like. The first part of it is a spiritual time that usually lasts anywhere from 45 minutes to an hour. I've talked about what I do exactly during that time in [The Deeper Christian Life Network](#).

This program is about work, your art, and about being productive and creative, so I'm not going to go through the spiritual part of my routine here. But as a person of faith, I do have a spiritual routine that I seek to observe in the morning. It's more elaborate during weekdays than it is on weekends. Nevertheless, there are parts of it that I seek to practice every day.

The secret to having a morning routine is to begin the night before. There are two things that I do the night before that sets me up for having a productive morning.

- I go to bed on time.

This is huge. In order to have a productive morning, you have to go to bed at a reasonable hour. You can't burn the candle on both ends. So for me, it's anywhere between 9:30 and 10:30 on a typical night. On days that I exercise, I lay out my exercise clothes so I can retrieve them quickly in the morning. This also motivates me to exercise, I've found.

- In the afternoons or evenings, I plan out the following day.

This consists of the things I'm going to do the next day, beginning in the morning.

- I create an action or task list.

I write my list in long hand. Some people might want to do it electronically. I do have apps for that on the [Resource Page](#), but I use a daily planner that's spiral bound.

The one I'm using right this year is made by Plan Ahead. The important thing about it is that it's a daily planner, which means that every day of the year has a single page dedicated to it, including the weekends. **(See Chapter 7 for a photo of this planner.)**

I have found it difficult to find these planners online, so I go to Walmart every fall and look for the daily planner for the following year. Again, I'm looking for planners that have a single page dedicated to each day, including a single page for Saturday and a single page for Sunday.

A lot of the planners will have two pages that will fill the entire week or something close to that. That's not acceptable for my particular schedule. For the last three or four years, Walmart has had the specific kind of planner I'm talking about. It's usually made by a different company each year. But I highly recommend that you find a planner that has one page dedicated to each day. Again, you can see a photo of mine in the previous chapter.

What I do the night before is I write down an action list. I don't put it in any kind of order because that takes too much thought. I simply write down what I need to do the following day. So my action (task) list usually is going to be anywhere between five and 10 action items. These are the tasks that I would like to accomplish the next day.

- After I write down all my tasks for the next day, I number them according to priority.

So if I have a list of 10 items, the fifth one may be the top priority, so I'll write a number one (1) to the left of it and draw a circle around the number. Maybe the third item might be number two in priority, so I'll write a number two (2) to the left of it, circle it, and on and on.

Example:

April 26

- (4) Drive to Staples to buy copy paper.
- (1) Work on the book with Thomas Nelson.
- (2) Do 3 sets of pushups (30 reps each).
- (7) Fill the Buffer queue for May.

(3) Call editor.

(6) Edit bonus chapter.

(5) Prepare message for July conference.

So after my morning spiritual routine and I eat breakfast, I begin to do my work. I begin with the highest priority numbered items to the lowest priority numbered items. When I finish accomplishing a task, I write a line through it.

Very often, I will complete the entire task list. Sometimes, however, I will not. So those items that were left unfinished will go to the next page for the next day. And I may have more tasks to add to the list. Then I number each task according to priority.

This has been an incredibly effective method for me, and it is the bulk of my morning routine. There's also great satisfaction and added motivation when I write a line through each completed task.

I eat at certain periods of time throughout the day according to The Fast Metabolism Diet. As I've stated before, I have printed out each phase of the diet with all of the foods earmarked that I can eat during that phase. You're supposed to eat every three hours so I keep track of that also. I actually set my iPhone alarm to alert me when I'm supposed to eat each of those five times during the day.

I also pencil in exercise to the action list. I like to do my exercise in the early part of the morning rather than in the later part. For me, I usually get finished with my workday anywhere between 1:00 p.m. and 3:00 p.m.

Typically, I start my morning spiritual routine between 6:00 and 7:00 a.m., sometimes a little later depending. I'm usually ready to go to work between 8:00 and 8:30 a.m. Then I will work until 1:00, 2:00, or 3:00 p.m.

After that, I move into reading or something else. I also take breaks throughout my work time. I may work for a solid hour intensely, utterly focused on a project. Then I will go into the kitchen and grab a snack or fill my water mug. So I will take periodic breaks and this helps my mental clarity and focus. I'm not someone who will work three to four hours at a time without any breaks.

I work in small blocks of time in which I'm extremely focused and don't have distractions. Then I take short breaks. Sometimes those breaks will simply be to check email for a time or to go on social media and interact there. I don't spend a lot of time doing that, but I see it as a break from writing or working on various projects.

Getting back to my morning routine, that's essentially what I do. And I faithfully follow this task list every weekday. Without the daily planner and writing down my action list of five to 10 items, I wouldn't have a compass for my day. I would be lost and wouldn't be as productive as I am.

Now some people say they're not morning people. They weren't born that way. When I was in my 20s, I felt the same way, I was more of a night owl, but I've learned to cherish the quiet hours in the morning. I've also learned that your willpower is the strongest it's going to be in the

mornings. Eventually, as the day goes on and you exert your willpower, you'll have less of it to use.

If you are a night person and you want to become a morning person, you can do that. That won't be suitable for everyone. If you have small children who get up at 5:00 or 6:00 a.m. it may not work for you. Or if you're up super late because of a job that you have, it's not going to work for you. But you can, in fact, recalibrate your sleep patterns.

The person who lives 90 years will have slept approximately 30 years. One-third of our life is sleep. I have a friend who says that sleep is a design defect, something the Creator overlooked. I don't believe that, but it's interesting to ponder because we do equate sleep with being unproductive.

Sleep is your recharge. And there are a lot of important and necessary things that happen to your mind, body and spirit during sleep. But if you want to rise early, you'll have to begin going to bed earlier, and you may not be able to do that cold turkey.

For example, if you're going to bed at 12:00 a.m. or 1:00 a.m., starting to go to bed at 10:00 a.m. may not work for you. So you'll want to progressively dial it back to 12:30 a.m., then 12:00 a.m. and maybe even in 15 minute increments until your body adjusts to the new pattern.

But as I said in the energy section, sleeping is indispensable to productivity and creativity. You may even need to use an alarm clock. I've gotten to the place where my body automatically sets itself as to when I awake. But if you're going to recalibrate your sleep patterns, using an alarm is a good idea. And you may even want to put the alarm off somewhere where you can't easily hit the snooze button, but you actually have to physically get out of bed to turn it off.

This would be part of your training as you recalibrate your sleep rhythms. Something else you should do is turn on all the lights once you awake. This will help you to rise from the dead, so to speak. Some people use coffee to wake themselves up. I have no contention about that, you simply want to do it in moderation. And if you start The Fast Metabolism Diet, the author advises no caffeine for 28 days, which I did myself. This is effective in weight loss and speeding up your metabolism.

Of course, many experts have pointed out the health benefits of coffee when used in moderation. But it takes approximately 66 days to form a habit. Some people say six weeks; others say 21 days. It just depends on what habit you're trying to change. So to be safe, anywhere from 21 to 66 days and you will have formed a new habit.

If you're really having trouble with waking up early and you're married, elicit the help of your spouse to come alongside and help you reset your sleep schedule.

You may fail at it at first and even occasionally later on. We all do. Not every single day is stellar in my own life. Some days are more productive than others. But in general, I'm highly productive. But it's because I've trained myself to be that way. Yet there are times when things come up and I'm not productive on a given day.

I may sleep in late. It's rare, but sometimes I do that. So if you fail, don't beat yourself up or come under condemnation. Pick yourself up, dust yourself off, and reset the next day. That's the beauty of mornings. You get to reset. This is true in all aspects of life.

I think the morning gives you a jump start on the day. There's something really rewarding when you look at your clock, it's 11:00 a.m. and, you've basically finished your entire action list. So now you can do some other things for the rest of the day, whether it's run errands, do some reading, engage in one of your hobbies, or just rest and relax or have time to think and plan.

If you have trouble sleeping, you could do research on this. There's a lot of information online about this problem. Many experts say, and my own doctor has pointed this out, that ideally you want to turn off all screens. All electronic digital screens should be turned off an hour before you sleep because it stimulates the brain chemistry and makes it more difficult for you to sleep.

I think this is true for some people, perhaps many, but not for everyone. For me personally, I will watch a television show, whether it's a news program, a TV series, or a movie, before retiring to sleep. For me, this helps me unwind and decompress. For others, it will stimulate them and they'll have a hard time going to sleep. So experiment and see what works and doesn't work.

When we get into the creativity sessions, I'll talk about certain things that actually fuel my creativity. One of which is art of any kind, which includes TV programs, drama, comedy, action, thrillers, news programs, etc. Art begets art. Creativity begets creativity.

Benjamin Franklin said, *'Early to bed and early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise.'*

Franklin was a proponent of early rising. And for most people, the early mornings are peaceful. You have a measure of quiet that's not afforded to you later in the day.

I will also stress that a key to productivity, and this is also stressed in The Fast Metabolism Diet, is to have breakfast 30 minutes after you awake. For me, I drink the **Brown Dragon** within 30 minutes of waking up. I wait 30 minutes after so the minerals can absorb. Then I have breakfast. Having breakfast is essential to your health, to your productivity, and to your creativity.

But again, for many people, the morning holds less distractions than other parts of the day. You may even want to create a reward for yourself if you can wake up at your ideal time for a solid week. Create your own incentive. But again, I would take these things gradually as you build them into your life. The most enjoyable and long lasting changes that occur in our daily habits come gradually.

10: MY PRODUCTIVITY HACKS – PART I

Proverbs 4:26 says, *'Give careful thought to the paths for your feet and be steadfast in all your ways.'*

I think goal-setting is a spiritual discipline and an act of stewardship. As a responsible person, you want to make the most of what you've been given. Time is a limited resources. It's not renewable. Therefore, you want to use your time in the smartest ways possible.

Planning, therefore, is something you want to get used to doing. As we said before, the motivation behind your goals is profoundly important. It will get you through times of apathy, frustration, lethargy, and discouragement.

Experts say that 50% of your brain is dedicated to vision. So it's important to make your goals visible, to remind and anchor yourself into those goals and stimulate motivation to achieve them.

Let me talk a little about **willpower** and **why power** as it relates to your goals.

Willpower is like a muscle. It has limited bandwidth for a given day. Then it becomes weak and tired. You can strengthen willpower just like you can strengthen any muscle by using it more. Willpower, in effect, is the strongest in the mornings, but as time goes on throughout the day, your willpower becomes weaker and weaker to the point of depletion.

The nice thing is that willpower recovers the next day, That is, if you get adequate rest and sleep. The more you exercise your willpower the more it will grow as it concerns fulfilling your tasks.

There's also something called **why power**. When you begin to hit a plateau in your goals, as we talked about previously, what will sustain and get you through is to remember the motivation behind the goal: *the why*.

Why am I doing this?

What is the benefit?

If I achieve the goal, what do I gain?

What is the consequence?

What do I lose if I don't fulfill the goal?

So the **why power** is the incentive behind the willpower. And it's important to reconnect with it during times of plateau and discouragement.

One person said, *'Whether you are a success or failure in life has little to do with your circumstances. It has much more to do with your choices.'*

Your goals give you a grid by which to make wise choices in life. While we plan for the future, we actually act in the day. So to be truly effective, your daily activity must align with your long-term vision and your life GPS.

The more you can create routine throughout your weeks and even your days, the more effective your execution will be.

Scheduling routine tasks every day in order to move the needle further toward reaching your goals gives you control of your life. As many people have observed, *"If you don't control your schedule, someone else will control it for you."*

Abraham Lincoln wisely said, *'The best thing about the future is that it comes one day at a time.'*

The linchpin of productivity and creativity begins with a daily routine.

This has been a game-changer in my own life throughout the years. It's the secret to how I've gotten so much done in a short space of time.

Most people are running so fast they're missing life. They don't know how to live in the moment. They are physically in one place, but mentally they're in another. But you are the most effective when you're both mentally and physically in one place. When you're in the sweet spot, so to speak, when you're fully *present* in the zone and focused on the tasks at hand.

Again, I'm not going to blow bubbles and give you abstract theories. I'm going to talk to you about the things that have actually worked in my own life and which I practice every single week.

Having said that, I want to introduce you to an idea. It is what some have called **the compound effect**. Others have called it the **cumulative effect**. It's the profound power of incremental change.

This effect disposes of frustration and discouragement because you're making very small steps over a period of time that add up to dramatic change and drastic impact.

There is a proverb that says, *'The journey of a thousand miles begins with one small step.'*

Another person said, *'You will never change your life until you change something you do daily.'*

That is as powerful as it is true. Those little steps over time, even seemingly insignificant steps completed consistently, will create immeasurable difference. It's also the key to developing awesome habits. There is great power in accumulating in small changes every day. This is the compound-cumulative-incremental effect.

I'm someone who does strength training twice a week in my home. When I began this kind of exercise I could only do 10 push-ups. I worked up to 15, then 20, 25, then 30 and on. But the increase happened over a period of time. I only added a few more push-ups each time I worked out. It was the power of incremental change. Runners do this to get more and more distance.

This principle operates in every area of life. There is also a principle known as **the law of diminishing intent** which says, *'The longer you wait to do something you should do now, the greater the odds that you will never actually do it.'*

So in the sessions to come, I'm going to implore you to begin taking those small steps and begin putting the strategies into practice. Over time, you will begin creating habits of consistently.

66 days may seem like a long time, but you will turn your head and 66 days will have passed. And you will find your groove as you begin to implement what doctors call **the minimum effective dose**, which in the context of the medical world is the lowest dose of a drug to produce significant change.

Let's say, for example, a certain vitamin will give you a certain benefit at 10 mg. Suppose that you take 100 mg. That's way above the minimum effective dose, so you're wasting the vitamin because all you need is 10 mg.

It's the same way in life as it concerns habits. So I strive for the minimum effective dose in every area to get the results I want. Hence, I don't have to work more than is necessary to produce the kind of impact that I desire to see.

Habit creation is a skill like any other skill. You can develop it.

We'll get into it in the upcoming sessions.

11: MY PRODUCTIVITY HACKS – PART II

Another key to productivity is to prevent yourself from being distracted when you have your short bursts of focus and you have blocked out time to accomplish your daily tasks.

Consequently, when I'm in a writing mode, the only thing I'll have running on my computer will be background music (via Pandora). A long time ago I decided to turn off texting from my phone. So I don't get texts. That has brought so much freedom into my life. I prefer email and phone. And the only people who have my phone number are family members, very close friends, publishers and co-workers. So my phone number is guarded. And that's something you may also want to consider doing if you're constantly being interrupted by phone or text.

But here's the thing. If that is a problem, just turn the phone off during the times when you are in work mode. Shut down the Facebook window, the Twitter feed, etc. There are apps that actually help you with self-control and work in undistracted periods of time. I have a bunch of them on the [Resource Page](#). They basically shut everything else off your computer so you can concentrate on the tasks at hand. This can help you to become astoundingly productive in working without distraction.

A friend of mine puts a little clapper light on his door. Whenever that light is on that means "do not open the door unless the house is burning down." When the light is on, he's in work mode. So if you work from home and you have a space where you're being productive, you need to have some kind of boundary. If not, it's hard to be free from distractions and work unhindered.

There's a passage in Nehemiah 6:3 where the writer says, *'I am doing a great work so that I cannot come down. Why should the work cease while I leave it and go down to you?'*

Historically, Nehemiah built the entire wall around Jerusalem in 52 days. And one of the reasons behind his productivity was that he worked free of distraction. We lose our productive focus and creative energy every time we're redirected to put our attention on something other than our work. This is why spurts of undistracted focus are hugely important. So set boundaries so that you can work without distraction.

All told, my most productive hours are from 7:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. That's when I'm in the zone. That's the sweet spot for me. That's where I get the most work done. After 2:00 and 3:00 p.m., my energy starts to ebb. Not so much where I feel I need to take a nap. But my mind and focus need to give attention to something entirely different other than my work.

Here's something else that will help you with your productivity. Identify the major things that are on your plate...

- Projects you have in mind
- Goals you have set for yourself

In this light, I encourage you to conduct an audit of your activities and time for a week. I'll talk about that in a little while.

I have cut out so many things out of my schedule because they did not meet the criteria of having the highest payoff and the highest impact. So they weren't worth the time.

Time is an unrenowable resource so sometimes you have to cut certain things out and add other things to replace them. If not, you'll be spread too thin. In my own life, for example, I used to sell my own books. I did that for years. I had people help me. We would take orders online. The books would be stored in my garage. The people I hired to help would come to my house and cart the books to post office. It was a long process and something we had to be on top of every day.

After looking at the bottom line, measuring the profit per book versus the time that was involved in processing the orders electronically, having someone come take them to the post office, the postage, the bubble mailers, etc. we realized that it wasn't worth the best use of our time. It wasn't the best use of my time. So several years ago, we simply took our book page and redirected all the links to Amazon and other bookstores. People can still buy the books, but they can get them from other bookstores. This was a wise decision because it freed up a lot of time for more productive projects.

- Another thing I cut back on was traveling and speaking.

I used to travel and speak once or twice a month. And I cut that way back because after looking at the big picture concerning the highest value and highest impact of my time, I realized that I can reach a lot more people online through my podcast, my membership site, and other venues than I can speaking at live events.

Preparing for a live event is a huge deal. Especially if you have to fly to the event. So I'm very selective on where I go now. I still see the value of live events, and I still do them. But I dialed them way back. Consequently, it's something that's far more rare in my life and something that I'm very selective about.

- The podcast is another thing I stopped.

I still have [my podcast online](#). There are 125 episodes that are free to anyone who wishes to listen to them. However, I stopped putting out the podcast because it wasn't the best use of my time. In short, I couldn't afford to put it out. It was too much time, energy, and money. I've since replaced it with a highly-focused, highly-motivated, and highly-committed membership network. The impact of which has been far greater than the podcast because the participants of the network are fully invested and fully committed to the content.

Conduct an Activity Audit

So one exercise I would encourage you to do is write down all the things you're involved in that take your time on a weekly basis.

- What are the things you're creating?
- What are the things you're working on?
- What are the things you're involved in?

Track everything you do for a solid week. From morning until evening.

Write down how much time each task takes.

Then take a good close look at each task and examine the benefit it's having on others, the benefit it's having on you, and the cost in both time and dollars. Then assess whether or not it should be cut. Remember, when you cut something out of your work schedule or your life, you have more time to redirect to something else. And that's exactly what I've done in my own work.

I have redirected the time and energy that I was using on some of things that weren't so effective, and I put them into the highest level activities, both in impact and payoff.

Let's talk about email, which a huge time vampire for most people. If you're someone who has a business or a ministry and you get inundated with emails, there are two things you can do that I have found to be very effective.

- You can hire a VA (virtual assistant) to help respond to the general questions and requests that you receive.

VA's today aren't very expensive, and they free you up to spend time doing other things. Of course, there will always be emails that you will definitely want to answer yourself or that you must answer yourself. But many of the emails you get (in my experience and in the experience of many of my friends, anyway) can be answered by a VA.

The other thing that's absolutely wonderful that I recently discovered works with Gmail. I'm not sure about Yahoo or Hotmail or AOL, I don't think those other services have this feature.

- It's a feature in Gmail called **canned responses**.

It is a Godsend! You can basically setup templates to answer questions that you frequently receive from people. So instead of having to type the same answer over and over again, you simply create a canned response. And there's an easy way to insert it into your email response. It only takes seconds to respond to someone with a canned response.

The way I learned how to use it is by going on YouTube where I looked up "Gmail canned responses." There were several videos that show you how to set it up and use it. So I recommend you do that. I didn't put a link to any of those videos on the [Resource Page](#) simply because YouTube is constantly changing. So a video may appear there today and disappear tomorrow. But you can search for the tutorials yourself on YouTube.

One of the things I hate about Gmail on the other hand, and this is just to make you aware of the problem, is that they have something called a *Promotions* folder. And it appears in both on the desktop edition and the mobile edition. But it's hard to find.

Many valuable emails, even emails that you subscribe to including time-sensitive emails, end up going in people's Promotions folder and they never see those emails. Or when they do see them, they miss the time-sensitive deadlines.

If you want to find the Promotions folder, you can even delete it so you don't miss anything. Or at the very least, you can remove the emails that go into it that are valuable. But be sure to check it regularly. You can go to FrankViola.net/promotions for an article that will explain to you where to find that folder and how to remove it if you desire.

For a long time I didn't even know it existed, and I wasn't receiving valuable emails from people who I wanted to hear from. When I found out that they were going into that folder, I was a bit surprised. But there is a way around it, and I you want to be aware of it.

Something else that's helped with productivity in my own life is to create an FAQ page. This would especially apply to those of you who are in business or ministry. Or any artist for that matter.

I didn't just sit down and create my FAQ page in one or two sittings. I created it over a number of years. It contains every question I've received over and over again. When I received a question, I would copy and paste my answer on a page I created on my blog called **Frequently Asked Questions**.

If you want to look at it you can go to FrankViola.org/faq. This one strategy alone has cut down the number of emails I receive. And in one of the canned responses that you create in Gmail, you can direct people to go to your FAQ page if the question is already answered on that page.

This is a big-league time savior.

I continually update the FAQ page because sometimes there are new questions that people ask. But over a period of time (this is another example of the cumulative effect), the page has become almost exhaustive. Very rarely will I receive a question that's not already been answered on that page.

This strategy will increase your productivity enormously. Plus it's a great benefit to those who are interested in your work.

But again, I want to come back to the issue of productivity in your daily routine. It's essential that you schedule the most important tasks for the day first. Let me tell you something. One of the things that kills procrastination is to do the things that are most important, but that you dislike, first.

Get those out of the way first. There's a freedom that comes with finishing the harder tasks and putting them aside. That's a tip I've learned through my own experience.

- Another productivity hack is to use **typing expansion software**.

On the [Resource Page](#), I have a number of typing expansion applications that you can use for both the Mac and the PC. I use a PC and these are wonderful. What those applications do is tremendous. I can type in a code, for example, SIG. When I type that in, all of a sudden my P.O. address comes up because I've programmed it that way.

Words that you often misspell you program to correct themselves. Words that you often write and sentences you often use, you can program them all into the typing expanding software and use shortcuts to expand them. The cumulative and compound effect in this regard will save you hours of typing over a long period of time.

- Another thing I would recommend is the **Dragon Naturally Speaking** software.

This software is wonderful because it gets to know your voice. You simply speak into it, and it will type out what you say. After a short period of time, it's pretty accurate.

Another thing I would highly advise you to do is to know where everything is. One of the keys to my productivity is that I have a filing system that I keep on top of every week. Usually Fridays and Saturdays are days I use to organize my desktop and my study.

My study gets cluttered every week. So every week, I organize it and organize my folders. I use Smead Manila folders, and I have a folder for just about everything.

I have one for my events for the present year.
I have one that's titled Books and Ministry.
I have one that's titled Goals.
I have one that's dedicated to Affiliates.
I have one that's dedicated to Course Launches.
I have one that's assigned Personal.
I have others that go with each book I'm working on.

On the wall in my study, I have these Rubbermaid wall file organizers where I organize the folders. I can see the folder by each of the labels. (**You can see photos in Chapter 7.**) So I just stretch out my arm, pick one up and go through it as I need it.

So it's important that you know where everything is. You can burn up so much valuable time looking for things that have been misplaced.

- Another productivity hack is I use a special Logitech keyboard and mouse. These are the ones that gamers use.

I am not a gamer nor the son of a gamer, but these are incredible tools. [The Logitech G510s](#) has 54 programmable function keys which save you lots of time. You can program each key the way you want, hit the button and there it is. It gives you a script, a text, a macro, or something of that nature.

I use the programmable keys daily.

The mouse is incredible too. Both the mouse and the keyboard light up, so if you're working in dim light, you can see them clearly. By the way, all the tools that I'm mentioning are on the [Resource Page](#) with links for discounts.

12: TWO ENEMIES OF PRODUCTIVITY AND CREATIVITY

There are two enemies of success as it relates to your productive and creative output.

1. Procrastination
2. Saying *no* to life altering opportunities

In my own personal life, I will give you my basic criteria for saying *no* or *yes* to various opportunities. I break them down into the following:

Spiritual

Stress

Impact

Cost

Spiritual – Do I inwardly have life and peace about this or not? That's another way of asking, "Do I feel that God is leading me to do this?"

Stress – Is this going to increase stress in my life or is it going to decrease stress in my life?

There are some opportunities that, quite frankly, are just not worth the stress involved. Other opportunities do come with stress and it's worth it. So I weigh all of this.

Impact – Am I going to be able to have a large amount of impact or a small one when it comes to this opportunity? Does this opportunity align with my life GPS and calling?

I have said *no* to many opportunities just because they did not offer the kind of impact that I felt was worth the time and the effort. And they didn't align with my calling.

Cost – Is it worth my time in dollars?

One of the practices that I observe is to look at my income the previous year and then divide it by the number of days that I work in the present year. Using that number, I get even more specific and calculate an hourly rate. So I put a dollar figure on what my hours are worth.

Note that I do not base my decision with respect to any opportunity on any one of these four criteria alone. All four are involved: spiritual, stress, impact, and the cost.

And as I look at those four criteria I then make a decision as to whether or not I can afford to accept this opportunity or not. This has been very helpful in my own life. The four criteria have helped me to get very clear on what I should and shouldn't be doing.

And there are many ways to graciously say *no* to opportunities. One way is to be thankful for the opportunity and simply say something like, "I must decline this opportunity to be faithful to my previous commitments."

If you follow this PROLIFIC audio program, you're going to find yourself in a position of having limited time. Why? Because you're going to be committed to focused blocks of time where you're doing your work or spending your time with other people. And you will also be making your own appointments with yourself. To do your work. To plan. To read. To think. To reflect. To dream. And if you're a person of faith, to spend time with God.

Let's now talk about the two enemies of success.

Procrastination is the first enemy. The way to overcome procrastination is to tackle it head on. Namely, take care of the most important things in your life first. For me, I do the hardest things that need to be done in a given day first. I do this so they are out of the way. That strategy kills procrastination. And it has become a habit in my life.

The other enemy is saying *no* to opportunities that can change a person's life. This the bane of many people I've met.

I know for me, and I've written about this before, courses and programs like the one you're listening to (or reading), seminars and conferences have been game changers in my life. If I said *no* to those opportunities, even though they cost money and were an investment of time and energy, I would have lost amazing life-changing opportunity. Sometimes those opportunities required getting on a plane which is an inconvenience for most people. But if I said *no* to those opportunities, I would not be where I am today in many respects.

Consequently, I would say this to you. Look at these two things in your life, procrastination and saying *no* to life altering opportunities, and examine them in the light of your life GPS, your calling, and your passion.

We all have 1,440 minutes in a day and almost 11,000 mornings during the peak years of our professional careers. Therefore, we really want to get it right when it comes to our productivity and our response to various opportunities.

I'll say something else in closing as it relates to what's to come.

Ray Bradbury said, '*You can't try to do things. You must simply do them.*

Very often, trying is intention to fail. Whenever we say, "I'm going to try XYZ," we're letting ourselves off the hook to not follow through. This usually happens at an unconscious level.

I want to encourage you, therefore, to put on a mindset that removes the word *trying* from your verbal library and your thinking. And instead, insert the vocabulary of *doing*. That may seem like a small thing, but it will take you a long way.

So we'll end this session with that thought.

13: MORE PRODUCTIVITY HACKS

What you think and how you think defines who you are.

There is a Proverb in the Bible that says, *'As a man thinks within himself, so is he. As a woman thinks within herself, so is she.'*

When you look at all the moving parts of your life, through the filter of your life GPS, it gives you balance, priority, and direction.

Here are a few summarizing thoughts about productivity.

- Separate your work space from your family space to create boundaries between work and home life.
- Create opportunities to have short breaks or what some call "a water cooler chat."

If you work from home and you come out of your work space, go into the kitchen to take a break, this really helps with focus, productivity, and creativity. That is, if you do it during a rhythm where you have worked for a block of time without distraction.

You don't want to fall off one side of the horse and be distracted constantly. But you don't want to fall off the other side of the horse and work for hours upon hours without any breaks.

Both of those extremes will impede your productivity. Again, sometimes you may want to break up the monotony by going off site to a local coffee shop, diner or public library to change the scenery up. I do this from time to time myself, especially on the weekends when I read. That's when I will go off site, taking a break from my normative work space and change the scenery.

Once you map out your ideal week and create your daily task list, you want to stick to those schedules as best you can. Obviously, in life things will come up that will throw you off course, but you simply reset the next day and plunge ahead.

- Another thing you want to do is master the calendar.

Make the calendar your friend. It is so true, and it's been said many times: what doesn't get scheduled doesn't get done.

This includes making important phone calls. For example, you may be an adult and your parents may still be alive. Schedule a weekly phone call with your mom, dad, or both. Schedule a date night with your spouse. Schedule appointments with yourself. If anything gets in the way, if there's a conflict with any of those things, learn how to give good *no*. Learn how to say *no* in a civil and gracious way. Example: "I'm afraid I will not be able to fit this opportunity into my schedule, but thank you for asking."

- Another thing to focus on is making sure you're comfortable while you work.

I have gone through numerous chairs because none were comfortable enough for me. Again, I do most of my work these days standing up, but occasionally, I will sit down to work. And if

you're just breaking into a standing routine, you'll have to sit down until you're able to go for longer periods of time standing up.

I've broken quite a few chairs. I guess they aren't made well. But the wheels usually break. I have worn out chairs. And recently, I found a good chair at Staples, which I paid a couple hundred dollars for. So you can look at your local office supply store for chairs. Test them out in the furniture area first. Feel the chairs out.

For the chair I use, I bought a special lumbar support that gives me extra cushion in the back. It takes the stress off my lower back. These lumbar supports can be found in many stores.

- Pay attention to temperature.

Some people like it cool at 69 degrees, whereas others like it warmer at 72, 73, or 74 degrees. Temperature is also going to relate to your productivity so you want to monitor at which temperature you are the most productive.

- As I said, diet is critical for your energy and energy is critical for your productivity.

Again, avoid high glycemic carbohydrates. I've also noticed that if you eat a heavy protein based breakfast or a heavy protein based lunch, for example, a massive hamburger or a large portion of ribs, it could knock you out for the rest of the day.

To repeat: The Fast Metabolism Diet is the best eating plan I've ever found, and it gives me optimal energy for optimal productivity.

- Do one task at a time, and don't buy into the multitasking myth.

Finish one task, line it out in your daily planner, and then move to the next task. Productivity is a skill. The more you practice it, the better you will become. I'll talk about the myth of multitasking in one of the later sessions.

- I also recommend batching, which is when you do a similar set of tasks all at once.

Let me give one example of how I batch things. I use a program called **Buffer** which works alongside of Twitter. Once a month, I type out all my tweets into the Buffer program.

You can set Buffer to tweet out your various tweets at different times of the day. I will do this once a month. I might spend 30 minutes on it, and that will last the entire month in regards to tweeting out my various blog posts. Buffer doesn't replace real-time tweeting, which I do once in a while. But for the bulk of my tweets, I have them already preset in Buffer. There's a link to Buffer on the [Resource Page](#). That's an example of batching.

When I was writing five blog posts a week, I'd write a set of very short posts in a day. That's another example of a batching.

- Another thing I would recommend is that when you're asked to commit to an opportunity, receive an invitation, or someone makes a request, you don't have to answer right away.

I always seek to throw a pause between the request and my answer. If the opportunity fits the criteria that I shared with you earlier (spiritual, stress, impact, and cost) in the affirmative and it aligns with my GPS, then I will say yes to it.

If not, I will say *no* because I have to give something up in terms of my schedule in order to fit that opportunity in.

Productivity really comes down to making the wisest choices with your time and energy. You have to learn to be selective and ask yourself, "Is this worth investing in?" "Is it worth my time and energy?" "Am I supposed to be doing this?"

Some people miss golden opportunities because their default switch is set to *no* whereas other people say yes to almost everything. Both extremes are harmful.

Wisdom dictates that you differentiate between what is essential from what is non-essential. Learn to distinguish what is important for you at the time from what is not necessary.

Someone once said, '*If you don't prioritize your life, someone else will.*' This is absolutely true.

I have a lot of friends who are so busy they have no time for friendships. They have no time for new projects, and it's because they haven't applied a lot of these productivity principles that I've been sharing with you.

So in order for you to have the most impact possible and be governed by that life GPS that you've created, you have to learn to evaluate every opportunity and project in which you're involved. And eliminate the things that don't really matter and don't fit into your GPS and execute on the things that really do matter.

Everything in life, when it comes to time, is a trade-off. If you say yes to one opportunity you, in effect, are saying *no* to another opportunity. Consequently, for this reason many people are poor managers of their time and money.

One of the things that is a profound myth is this idea that rest, relaxation, recess, taking breaks, and recharge is a lack of productivity. The myth is that somehow being super busy, overbooked, overloaded, and overwhelmed is a sign of productivity. But it's actually the reverse.

- The more productive you are, the more time you will have to take on opportunities, to rest, and relax.
- The more time you will have for hobbies.
- The more time you will have for family and friends.
- The more time you'll have for adventure and leisure.

And the more you rest, relax, and recreate, the more creative and productive you will be, within margin. Obviously, if all you do is rest and relax, you won't get anything done. But I'm talking about rhythm, a schedule, about fitting the important things in and using your time wisely.

Facebook is an example. It's a great tool, but it's a time vampire. It's a click hole if you allow it to be.

Picasso said, '*Without great solitude no serious work is possible.*'

Now you can set up your easel just like Rembrandt, but that doesn't ensure that you'll be able to paint like him. But setting up your easel like his is not going to hurt you, especially if you could tweak it to fit your own painting style.

This principle applies to everything I've been sharing with you in this program.

Socrates said, *'Beware the barrenness of a busy life.'*

- You want to have clarity of purpose with your life GPS.
- You want to be clear on your mission.
- You want to set goals every year.
- You want to create an ideal week.
- You want to make wise and efficient use of your calendar.
- You want to use a daily task list (action plan).

All of these strategies, I have found, is the secret for staying productive.

Remember what I said about the compound effect and the profound power of incremental change? How do you eat a blue whale? One bite at a time. It's the same way in life as it concerns productivity and creativity.

Willpower gets you started, habit keeps you going. Your brain is like a computer, so you can program it. Habits are the operating system running in the background. As I said before, your willpower is at its peak in the mornings. It's a muscle that can get fatigued through use.

Someone once said, *'A bad habit is a comfortable bed, it's easy to get into but hard to get out of.'*

Habit creation is a skill like any other, so you can develop it. All of the principles, strategies, and practices I've been unfolding in this program will become habit if you start putting them into practice a little at a time.

14: CREATIVITY STRATEGIES – PART I

In this session, we'll talk about creativity. There are two main currencies in the world today: time and money.

That's why it's called *paying attention*.

In a world of grueling demands, time is more precious than currency.

In fact, it can be rightly said that attention is the new currency. Right now, you're listening to this program (or reading this transcript). I have your attention, and that is hugely valuable. When it comes to getting your message out to the world, the value of gaining the attention of others is enormous.

Myself and the other presenters have done that elsewhere in [The Buzz Seminar Master Course](#), which many of you have already taken. In this session, we want to focus on how to increase your creativity.

Again, it's been rightly said that the journey of a thousand miles begins with one small step, and I want to stress something to you along that line.

Every step counts no matter how small.

Every day counts.

Every stroke counts (to use a painting metaphor).

Progress is made one step at a time.

A house is built one brick at a time.

A World Series is won one game at a time.

Every big accomplishment is the sum total of a series of little accomplishments. And this is true in the area of goal setting, productivity, and creativity.

One man said, *'Discovery is said to be an accident meeting a prepared mind.'*

Hold that thought as we go through this segment on creativity.

Walt Whitman said, *'Man's mind, once stretched by a new idea, never regains its original dimensions.'*

That means, in effect, that creativity begets creativity. And one of the ingredients of creativity is to open your mind and expose yourself to new ideas.

So we've talked about being productive, and one of the key questions to ask in that journey is this...

What's important now?

What do I need to do to sleep peacefully?

Again, Socrates said, *'Beware the barrenness of a busy life.'*

Just being busy is not the goal here. Being creative is the goal. Being clear on your purpose, your life's mission, and being productive toward that end is the big goal.

Elizabeth George said, *'If you don't plan your day, someone else will plan it for you.'*

That's why I stress the critical importance of planning your day. This is true for productivity, but it also applies to creativity. It's wiser to do fewer things better than many things poorly.

Let's talk now about the creative process. It begins with play, rest, and recreation.

Play is essential for your health and for your brain functionality. Play and recreation are built into the bloodstream of the universe.

Someone once said, *'We live in an ironic society where even play is turned into work, but the highest existence is not work. The highest level of existence is play.'*

So play isn't just for children.

Plato said, *'You can discover more about a person in an hour of play than in a year of conversation.'*

I'm not sure if that's actually true, but I think in some cases it probably is. The fact is that so many people that I know are working so hard and so much, yet we were created to play.

G.K. Chesterton is one of the few people who approached God as an artist. He was a person of faith, but he was also a creative. And he understood that creation itself was creative.

Chesterton viewed God as a playwright who had written a good drama that was messed up by the actors. But he saw the universe not so much a matter of God at work, but God at play. Play is the oxygen for imagination. It sparks creativity. It ignites innovation.

As a believer, I don't believe that God created us to work at life, but to play and to find joy in living. Play takes many different forms. For each person, it's different. But it is not work. It's some kind of recreation, which produces rejuvenation, which in turn, produces creativity.

One of the myths that I had labored under for many years is that play, leisure, recreation, and past times are all a waste of time. If I was relaxing or recreating, I wasn't being productive. When, in actuality, play, recreation, leisure, past times and rest is the key to your cognitive abilities and your creative impulse. The same is true for sleep.

A sleep deficit will impede your productivity but also your mental performance and your creativity.

Picasso said, *'Without great solitude no serious work is possible.'*

- Learn to remove mental clutter.

When you remove physical clutter, perhaps in your work station or on your desktop, you clear space in those areas. The same is true with your mind. Creating a daily action (task) list removes clutter in your mind. The task list is a "to-do list" on steroids. By the act of writing out

my action list every day, which grow out of my goals and grow out of my life GPS and calling, I'm clearing space in my mind to think about other things. I'm de-cluttering my mind to think about other things and even to see the world differently.

The most successful people in life have one thing in common. They think differently from everyone else. However, they weren't born that way. They've trained themselves to take a different view on what's around them.

We remember 20% of what we hear, 30% of what we see, and 50% of what we see and hear. And we even remember more when we actually *do* what we see and hear. So successful people are great observers and great listeners. And they put into practice what they learn.

Someone once said, '*Maturity is when all of your mirrors turn into windows.*'

The one listening the most is the most mature in a relationship.

So developing the art of observation and looking at things in different ways will foster and fuel your creativity.

Creative thinkers also understand that thinking is a discipline. I actually schedule time during my week to reflect and think after I have gone through my task list. In the afternoons, I will rest and reflect.

People often don't know where they're headed. They can't see the next step because they schedule no time simply to think. There's also a correlation between creativity and randomness.

1) Creativity is often defined as the ability to see connections that others do not see.

Oftentimes, these connections come when you're in your most relaxed state. Consequently, concentrated periods of time for relaxation, rest, and play are essential to the creative process.

Think about those *Magic Eye* books from the 1990s. You have to relax your eyes, lose control, and view the image differently from the norm (by crossing your eyes). The result? You see another image that you couldn't detect before.

2) Creativity comes from looking at ordinary things in an extraordinary way.

3) Negativity kills creativity.

Being exposed to negative and toxic people, either in person or online (virtually), is a major creativity killer. There are individuals in social media that exist to smear people, to harass people, to bully people, to be conflicting and disagreeable, and quite frankly, these people are an emotional drain on any human being.

Again, if you use social media, you would be wise to defriend every person who is negative constantly, who trashes others, who puts other people down to lift themselves up. You'd be wise to unfollow them on Twitter also.

You would be surprised at how much creative energy would be restored in your life. Because being creative involves emotional labor, and if you allow toxic and negative people into your life (even through social media), you are draining yourself big time.

I wrote a post on my blog several years ago entitled *5 Reasons to Unfriend Someone on Facebook*. The link to it is on the [Resource Page](#).

I would read that article and assess the time you're spending listening to draining people. If you want to be an artist and a creative, then you have to do some cutting in that area. The payoffs are remarkable. So you may want to seriously think about removing those people from your life, if at all possible. (Family members may be a different story. But you can at least provide some reasonable boundaries with them.)

4) Another thing that helps the creative process is to find sources of inspiration and awe. And reconnect to them regularly.

I've already talked about the power of music in my own life. I will sometimes drive to a destination just to listen to a timeless CD album of music that is enormously creative.

Sometimes I will watch a movie because of its high-level creativity. I have plaques in my study that inspire creativity. All of these things that I'm talking to you about foster moments of insight, those eureka moments, those creative boosts.

5) Create some temporary distance between yourself and the problem.

If you're working on a problem continually, your mind immediately gets fixated on previous solutions. It keeps falling into the same grooves instead of finding new possibilities. That's why taking a regular break from your work (something I do daily), lets the old pathways fade. And when you return to the original problem that you're working on, you're much more open to see new possibilities.

When you return to it, what didn't seem obvious before now becomes clearly obvious. You're able to connect experiences and ideas, synthesizing new things.

6) Creativity is about designing a different recipe with the same ingredients that are available to everyone else.

Steve Jobs made the comment once, '*Creativity is just connecting things.*'

If you think about it, whatever is created comes from the ingredients that are already available to us all. It comes from planet earth in some form or fashion. What's different is the recipe.

Every piece of music uses the same notes. The arrangement, the recipe, is what's different. Every book uses the same letters in the alphabet and words in the dictionary. The ingredients are the same, the connections are what's different.

Speaking of the realm of music, you can look at the most creative artists and bands historically, and they were all standing on the shoulders of various influences who went before them. They took those influences and then began building on them, reshaping and retooling the music to make something brand new.

This is true for writing, for art, and for anything else that's creative. The ingredients are the same, but the recipes are different.

In order to unleash your creativity, you've got to build into your life intentional times for reflection, times for play, times for recreation, and times for thinking. Because man creative ideas are the result of new combinations of existing ideas or inventions.

Focused times of relaxation is one of the critical keys to coming up with creative ideas.

7) Creativity is born in the womb of adversity.

Something else that's related to the creative process is adversity in difficult circumstances.

Orson Welles pointed out in his movie *The Third Man*, that during the 30 years in Italy under intense circumstances and pressure that were filled with warfare, terror and murder, Italy produced Michelangelo, Leonardo Di Vinci, the Renaissance.

In Switzerland, where there was peace and democracy, the only thing they produced was the Cuckoo Clock.

The point was that when you look at the pantheon of artistic work throughout the centuries, the greatest creativity was often expressed in the midst of war, economic uncertainty, fear and other adversities.

This means that creative insight, breakthroughs in creativity, not only come during rest and relaxation, but they also emerge out of adversity. Why? Because you're presented with problems which can stimulate your own thinking on various matters. This is why some of the greatest writers of all time were people who had immense adversity in their lives. And while creativity is related to inspiration, you don't wait for inspiration to hit you.

Chuck Close said, *'Inspiration is for amateurs. The rest of us just show up and get to work.'*

In the book, *Daily Rituals*, which is on the [Resource Page](#), you will see the story of 161 creative professionals throughout history who chart their daily routines. The book is hugely inspiring and may give you your own idea. But many of those creative people faced enormous adversity in their lives.

Adversity is the womb in which creativity is often born. Rest, relaxation, and reflection prepares that womb on a personal level.

8) Creativity grows through routines, both active and passive. This includes scheduled blocks of work, proper sleep, intentional breaks, and deliberate times for recharge.

Creativity often happens during the down times when you're not working, when your mind wanders. Your brain makes connections that it wouldn't normally make. Relaxation is the seedbed for creative insight.

There's an exercise you can do that will give you an idea of the possibilities of creative thinking. Take something familiar like a hammer, stool, knife, or spoon. Then come up with as many legitimate uses for that particular item. If you do this exercise with a group of people, some will be bound to what they already know while others will see new possibilities.

If you do this exercise and you sleep on it for a couple days, then come back to it, you'll find that your brain will often generate possibilities you didn't see in the first round.

One man described being a creator this way: *'It was a flash of inspiration ... a kind of 30-year flash.'*

The point being there is that you don't wait for inspiration to hit you. You work, you rest. You work, you think. You work, you recreate. You create, you play. And in time, this becomes a 30-year flash of inspiration.

Very often when you are faced with a problem and need a creative solution, the creativity comes out of wrestling with the problem and yielding defeat. So often, when we stop searching for the answer, the answer hits us from nowhere. It hits us at times when we're not directly focused on the problem.

An answer to a problem that seems so daunting now becomes incredibly obvious later. The mental block has been transformed into a creative breakthrough, and that in essence is how the process works.

Someone once said, *'Eighty percent of success is showing up.'*

This is why routines are so vital. That's why it's critical to begin your day with your creative work first and your reactive work second.

Emails, phone calls, text messages, etc. most often fall into reactive work. But creating content is your creative work.

Thomas Edison said, *'Genius is one percent inspiration and ninety-nine percent perspiration.'*

One writer said, *'I don't wait for moods. You accomplish nothing if you do that. Your mind must know it has got to get down to work.'*

Something about creative minds is that they are highly susceptible to distraction. Our newfound creativity poses a powerful temptation to drift off from our focus.

There are times during the creative process when it pays to reset and switch things up. For example, suppose that you're at a problem-solving stage to generate new ideas and nothing is coming, or perhaps you're trying to write a piece and you've run out of juice, nothing is flowing.

It's important to have a recess. To step away from the work and do something else. Then come back to it the next day. I call these **creative breaks**. Your brain needs time to replenish, to reset. You need time for distance from the problem. You need time for recess.

Very often, when you step away from the problem, or while you're sleeping and your subconscious is working to reset your creative mind, you come back to the problem later with a fresh pair of eyes and a new set of ideas.

E.B. White said, *'Creation is in part merrily the business of foregoing the great and small distractions.'*

One prolific author of many novels made the statement, *'Waiting for inspiration to write is like standing at the airport waiting for a train.'*

The fact is that waiting for everything to be perfect is almost always an exercise in procrastination. The same with waiting for a moment of inspiration.

When it comes to your emotional, mental and/or physical life, and even your spiritual life, you have got to have times of rest in order to recharge.

The paradox here, the stunning irony, is when a person who spends a good deal of time in recess, rest, and recreation is actually (in the end) much more productive and creative than the person who is constantly working.

I have found this to be true in my own life. It is one of the secret sauces to my creative output as well as to my productivity.

Every day I have time for rest and recess. Every week I carve out time for recreation. When I feel the battery draining, I pull the plug on my work and I put the battery in the charger.

Consequently, replenishing your energy leads to greater creative output.

One Harvard study showed that proper sleep and incubation leads to creativity. People are 33% more likely to infer connections among distantly related ideas if they're getting proper sleep and adequate rest.

Some of the things that I do for recreation, recharge, and rest are as follows: As an evening ritual, I will often watch a movie or a television program that's not related to my work. It could be a news program, a TV series, or a film, but this is my way of unwinding, decompressing, and recharging.

I also go on walks when the weather permits. I also have a hobby which basically is homerun derby with myself. I have a pitching machine. I have baseball bats that I use and a bucket of baseballs. I then go to a baseball park nearby, and my goal is to hit as many homeruns as I can on a full length baseball field. That exercise is in addition to the strength training that I do.

Sometimes I will go on what's known as **Sunday drives**, although it's not always on a Sunday. I will actually just drive to a location where I've never been before. This gives me a sense of new scenery.

Then I will go on a quarterly personal retreat, and this is where I will spend a day or two somewhere near water (an ocean or lake). This is not the same thing as a family vacation. This is where I go on a personal retreat.

I try doing this quarterly, and I will take with me my folder that has my life GPS, my goals for the year, my ideal year, my ideal week, etc, and I will go over all of that as well look at my upcoming projects for the year and various other things I have planned for the future.

This is a time of reset, recharge, replenishing, refocus, recreation, thinking, planning, and it's incredibly valuable.

But essentially, routines and rituals help you to find a rhythm. Regular sabbaticals will not happen unless you carve out time on your calendar to do them. Consequently, I carve out the weekends during the year that I'm going to have my off-site quarterly every quarter. If I didn't do that, they simply wouldn't happen.

Someone once said, *'The artist who aims at perfection in everything achieves it in nothing.'*

It's very important to put out your art, whatever it may be. It's important to launch your creations at some point. Even though it's not perfect. If not, you will be stalemated in never launching.

You will be sabotaging yourself because your work will never be perfect. You can launch it and always improve it later. (Software programs are like this. Beta version, then versions 1.0, 1.2, etc. If software companies waited until their product was perfect, they would never launch.)

This program that I'm creating right now is not perfect according to my standards. My personal standards for quality are very high. But if I waited for it to be perfect, I probably wouldn't ship it or launch it for years to come, possibly never.

But I could always improve it by adding more content to the [Resource Page](#). And by having this transcript edited.

As I learn more, make more discoveries, and find more valuable resources, I plan to add them to the Resource page.

But there's yet more.

15: CREATIVITY STRATEGIES – PART II

Let's talk more about creativity.

How do you sharpen the blade when it comes to your creative output?

Awareness of the challenge is the first step to making a change. In life, becoming aware of a problem is half the solution, and it's the half that many people find to be the most difficult. In my own life, I wasn't aware of many problems until they were pointed out to me. When I became aware of them, I was able to leverage a strategy to overcome them.

What you affirm and focus on grows in your eyes. What you give your attention to becomes more appealing. This is true with food. There are always exceptions, of course, but generally we acquire tastes for food. Consider music too. How many times have you heard a song and it didn't really hit you as anything remarkable, but after a while you fell in love with it?

The same is true with creativity.

In this session, I want to share the keys to my own creativity. If you know my work, you know that I am a critic of people who write books that essentially say the same things that have been said many times before.

So I try to build on what's come before and create something brand new. Again, we all have the same ingredients; it's the recipe that's different. It's how we put those ingredients together that forms or creates that which is unique.

I have sought very hard in my own books to say things that have not been said before, to present things in a fresh way, to bring combinations to various ideas that have never been brought together before.

My goal is that my future books will do the same. Whether you're concerned with your particular art, with your creative output, whatever it may be, you may want to think about that principle. If it's already been said before, why say it? If you're going to repeat something, at least say it in a brand new, fresh, compelling way.

Okay, my keys to creativity are as follows (some of this will be review and some of it will be new).

- I have to get at least 7 hours sleep. I try to get 8, sometimes more.

This is huge on the creative process. If it has to do with brain recharge and rejuvenation; body recharge and rejuvenation.

- I give myself to rest, relaxation, play, recreation, and leisure which resets my mind to be in a creative state.

I try to build some of this, especially the rest part, into my schedule every day. Usually in the afternoons and the evenings. I also make time for regular retreats.

- An optimistic attitude is huge to creativity.

Negativity shuts down creative insight. Even during times of challenge in adversity, it's easy to become negative and pessimistic, which is why there has to be a resistance to negative thinking.

I am wired by nature to see the glass as not being half full. That helps me in one way. And that is to press on, to look for opportunities to fill the glass to the full and replenish what's lacking.

But the other side of it is I have to resist negative, pessimistic thinking. And that's where positive people in your life can be a real asset. They can speak encouragement, reality, and words of optimism to you.

- Brainstorming is also huge for creativity.
- [Mastermind groups](#) are wonderful.
- Collective inspiration, even collaborating with a friend, has sparked enormous creativity for me.

There are several people who I have regular conversations with. I will pass by them ideas I have. We'll talk about them and just by the process of conversation, I will receive insights that I would not have seen before.

Being isolated and not conversing with others is a railroad track to being non-creative.

- Another one is reading books, watching movies, and listening to music.

Now by reading books, I don't mean just in your specific field. I mean in other areas that you're interested in. For example, I don't read fiction, although I think reading fiction is great for the creative process.

I'm not wired to read fiction, but I do read life stories and biographies. I will read the biographies of baseball players I admire. I will read the biographies of music artists that I have found profoundly inspirational. I will read their stories.

When I watch movies, I prefer to watch fiction movies, even though I don't like reading fiction. And if I'm really interested in a subject, I'll even watch a documentary. But I hate films that are "based on a true story" because they're virtually always untrue to the real story, so I prefer watching a documentary.

When reading books in my field (theology and history), I will often read outside my tradition. I'm not Catholic or Anglican, but I will read Catholic and Anglican writers. This exposes my mind to new perspectives. The problem in theology today, and it's probably true in most fields, is that authors simply read people from their own persuasion or tradition. And this leads to the echo chamber principle where everyone is parroting the same people. This principle is in the drinking water of modern Christian books.

That said, all the things I mentioned stimulate creative insights.

I also keep a notebook with me at all times. If I'm in front of the television, I have a notebook next to me. When I'm out and about, I have a small notebook in my pocket. When I'm driving, I have a notebook with me. I use them to jot down ideas.

Again, the Chinese proverb, *'The faintest ink has a better memory than the sharpest brain.'*

If you don't write it down, you're inclined to forget it. And this is the case with creative insights that come to you. It's important to write down new ideas and thoughts that strike you.

- Another thing I like to do is read great speeches of the past, whether by Churchill, J.F. Kennedy, the Roman Philosophers, the Roman politicians, Abraham Lincoln, etc.

The Gettysburg Address is the high water mark of eloquence. Speeches by Martin Luther King Jr. are also phenomenal specimens of creativity.

Reading the great speeches of the past helps foster creativity. I'm someone who speaks publicly, so reading others who have given great speeches helps lubricate and give fresh ideas to some of my own speaking. Again, you're the most creative when you are the most relaxed. And being relaxed in the midst of adverse circumstances brings greater creativity, bringing together the two things we talked about in an earlier session (relaxation and adversity).

Being in the creation business, there is something called **Creativity Depletion**. This occurs when you're zapped of all your creative energies and your creative adrenals are shot.

You're emotionally and mentally drained. You're moving fast into lethargy. If you sample some of the most creative people in history, which I have done, they often speak about solitude as a continuous habit to keep their creative juices flowing.

Here are some examples. This is from Mozart. I'll paraphrase what he said because it's long. He basically said, *'When I am completely myself, entirely alone and of good cheer, it is on such occasions that my ideas flow best and most abundantly.'*

Einstein said, *'Although I have a regular work schedule, I take time to go for long walks on the beach so I can listen to what's going on inside my head. If my work isn't going well, I lie down in the middle of a workday and gaze at the ceiling while I listen and visualize what goes on in my imagination.'*

Different people require different amounts of solitude. Extroverts need less than introverts do.

As I said before, I'm an extrovert which means I derive energy from talking to people.

By the way, recreation is any activity that refreshes and recreates. It's any activity that renews your health and your spirits through enjoyment and relaxation.

It's any activity that diverts, amuses, stimulates or rejuvenates.

Just consider the word *recreation*. Re-creation. It is recharging your creative abilities. As I said before, I used to think of recreation and leisure activities as the near equivalent to wasting time.

Years ago, I used to have 12-hour workdays, and I would also work on Saturdays and Sundays. But I cut all of that back, and I have been able to produce much more and be more creative in

far less time because I built recreation into my life. I also employed the productivity hacks I told you about earlier.

Here are some ideas for recreation that I have done over the years:

- ⇒ Walking around the mall
- ⇒ Taking a long drive
- ⇒ Having a phone conversation with a friend about non-work related matters
- ⇒ Playing a video game
- ⇒ Watching or playing a sport
- ⇒ Listening to music
- ⇒ Sitting on the beach reading a fun book
- ⇒ Watching a movie or TV show
- ⇒ Watching news programs or documentaries

Recreational activities will differ from person to person. You may be thinking of a recreational leisure activity now that fits and suits you. You might want to turn the volume up a little on that if you're working too much because the payoff is a renewed understanding, renewed creativity, and renewed productivity. This is true especially if you put into practice the productivity hacks that I've outlined previously.

Another strategy for creativity has to do with nature. As someone who has studied the Gospels, it's interesting to me that Jesus took time to step away from His environment and retreat.

The New Testament word in Mark is often translated, 'And Jesus came apart.' Jesus separated Himself from His normal environment, retreating to three key places. And they were all natural.

Sometimes He separated Himself and went into the desert. Sometimes He separated Himself and went into the mountains. And sometimes He separated Himself and went to a place near water.

Desert. Mountains. Water.

These were sacred landscapes or sacred places that restored Jesus' physical, mental and spiritual harmony that rejuvenated His soul and reset His ministry.

So water, desert, and mountains are the three places to which Jesus set Himself apart. He separated Himself from His work environment, His environment of intense ministry, to refresh and recharge.

In that connection, there are huge benefits for getting outdoors. According to studies that have been done on this subject, a person's cognitive abilities increases 20% by experiencing nature. Being outdoors specifically increases memory, attention, creativity, and problem-solving skills.

There is a benefit of detoxing from the digital world that all of us are immersed in, and to instead, shift gears and immerse ourselves in nature.

Being in a natural setting gives you more oxygen, especially if you're doing some kind of exercise like walking or hiking or jogging.

Being outdoors is known to improve your mood, especially when you look at the beauty of creation. If you're a person of faith as I am, you will see the fingerprints of God in His handy work. Seeing creation gets your mind off of your problems and the drama that fills life. It puts everything in perspective, especially when you look at the sky or the ocean and its vastness. It not only sharpens your mind, but it relaxes you. The sun gives you vitamin D, which is huge on your mood. It reduces anxiety, stress hormones, and increases your immunity.

So being outdoors and experiencing nature has a powerful effect on your mind, body, and spirit. It refreshes, rejuvenates and sharpens.

When the weather permits, I will walk or site outside and observe nature. I love being in front of water. For me, it has an enormous effect on my mind and spirit.

To unplug from email, social media, and do a digital detox at given periods of time to get outside and experience nature is a great practice. You will feel the stress drain from your body and your brain. It's a powerful tool to reset your creativity.

The other thing that I would suggest to you is the power of rituals and routines in allowing you to be creative. To build those into your schedule. Times for unplugging, times for pressing the reset button on your energy levels each week. Some people do a digital detox once a week, picking a Saturday or Sunday, where they have no screen time.

I have not done that per se, because one of the things that helps me relax is to watch a TV show, a documentary, a piece of news or a movie. But in terms of email and social media, I spend a limited amount of time on those things each day because they can zap my energy and creative powers if too much time is given to them.

Albert Einstein rightly said, *'Imagination is more than intelligence.'*

Something else that I have found and will pass on to you is this. if you're faced with a complex problem that needs a creative result, think on it the night before you go to bed and sleep on it. Oftentimes, when you wake up you will have an insight into the problem. You'll get a creative solution. This doesn't happen all the time, but enough to make it worth sharing.

- Self-imposed deadlines fuel creativity.

I put a deadline on virtually everything I do. Consequently, if I have a book project that I need to get completed in a year, I will break it up into smaller chunks, each with their own deadlines.

This puts me in a productive mindset. It gives me momentum and fosters creativity. When the deadline looms near, the race to beat the clock helps me to think in smarter and more efficient ways.

But creativity is like any other skill. It needs to be practiced and developed. Since you are an artist and a creator of some kind, I would encourage you to begin to pursue creativity by putting into practice these strategies to unleash more creativity into your own life.

If you get stuck on anything, or you begin to be fatigued emotionally or mentally, go for that walk, get your mind off it, clear your head.

I'll tell you something else that is a wonderful practice in my own life when it comes to creativity. It's sitting on a riding lawnmower and mowing the lawn. I've been doing this for years. It is one of the best ways to clear your mind, break your focus, and create a calm and relaxing environment mentally to increase moments of clarity.

I have a friend who's in construction and he made the comment, *'The happiest person on the planet is the person who rides a lawnmower for a living. It's the happiest, most contented occupation there is.'*

I've never been paid to mow lawns, but every time I do it I absolutely love it. You're in nature. You're doing something relaxing. It sets your creative mind free and seeds your own creative ideas. You may find yourself talking out loud about your ideas while you're on that mower. No one will hear you. Give it a shot and see how it works for you.

- Clutter clash can hamper creativity.

Tidying up, organizing, and de-cluttering is an avenue that gives you more creative space in your mind. Messy surroundings can be emotionally draining and impinge negatively upon your creativity as well as your productivity.

There have been studies done that showed when people had a clean, organized work space, they were far more likely to persist through a difficult task than those who had a messy work space. At the same time, you don't want to go crazy with de-cluttering to the point where you throw out things that are essential. So you want to do it in moderation.

No doubt there have been extremely disorganized and messy people who were extremely creative. But my argument is if they de-cluttered, they would be even more creative and they would be more apt to act on their creativity.

I know of at least one person who's extremely messy, more so than any individual I've ever met, to the point of the ridiculous. To the point of buying the same things over and over simply because he misplaces them.

This individual is extremely creative, but not very productive. I'm convinced that if he put a rein on his tendency to be cluttered, he tidied up a bit and organized, he would be far more productive, as well as more creative.

So this is just something to think about.

My inclination is to be organized, but in a week my work space is cluttered with papers, books and mail. So I have to keep on top of it each and every week (usually on Fridays). I have a system where I know where everything is. I know where everything goes. I have bins organized by topic. I use the Mead folders and wall organizers for project I'm working on. I have file cabinets and bookshelves. It takes time to organize, but the payoff for both your creativity and your productivity is well worth it.

Remember this. Creativity itself begets creativity and conversations with friends sparks new ideas and new connections.

So expose yourself to new things and new people. Expose yourself to new books, new films, new music, and new surroundings so that your brain will have material for creating new connections.

Randomize your life. Break out of the echo-chamber and the ruts.

At the end of the day, creativity happens inside a container of discipline. And in this session, I've introduced you to some of those disciplines.

But there's still more.

16: CREATIVE STRATEGIES – PART III

In this session, we're going to make a transition.

In speaking of transitions, someone rightly said, *'When one door closes, another opens. But it's no fun standing in the hallway.'*

We're going to move from creativity to writing. And in this session, I'll talk about creativity a little more, along with quoting some of the great creators, artists, and writers from the past, to solidify and cement some of the principles that I have been discussing with you.

I want to say something else too about this whole business of work, productivity, and time management.

I have come to believe that relationships are the most important thing in life. Even beyond one's work. As a person of faith, I believe that one's relationship with God is most important. Your relationship with your family and your friends is also hugely important. Relationships require an investment of time.

So for me, all the productivity hacks that I've been sharing with you have freed up time in my life to foster and nurture relationships. I have many friends who have virtually no time. Not just for family, but for friends. They have no time to build and nurture their relationships. They have no time for other people.

This is a tragedy because relationships are paramount. As I've been sharing a lot of these methods, strategies, and secrets, I have populated in my mind the many people who have absolutely no margin in their lives. They have no free or excess time wherein they can foster and build and nurture relationships. I want to say that at the outset of this session because it's something very much on my heart.

I believe if you put into practice all of the things that I have unveiled so far, as well as the other things that I will be unveiling in the rest of the program, you will have more time to invest in your relationships. That includes your relationship with God, your family, and your friends.

That said, let's talk more about creativity.

The hallmark of originality is rejecting the default and exploring better options. The starting point is often curiosity, and pondering why the default exists in the first place.

This causes us to question the defaults. When we experience something familiar and we learn to see it with fresh perspectives, it enables us to gain new insights into old problems. The starting point could also be dissatisfaction or an awareness of why something is not working.

As Ronald Reagan once said, *'Status quo is Latin for the mess we're in.'*

This is the genesis of many of my books. Perhaps the most striking being *Pagan Christianity* that I wrote with George Barna in 2008. In that book, we asked why the default existed in the first place. Building on that book was *Reimagining Church*, which offers non-conformist options that were tested in real life.

Non-conformists only change the world when the world is ready for them. This is important because whatever your work is, timing is a consideration. There are, for example, some articles that I have been sitting on for years, but I haven't published them yet because the time is not right.

It's the same with books. It is for this reason that many non-conformists experience failure. The unsung geniuses of the past either never show up in books at all or in any other medium. Or they're only heard about after their death. Vincent Van Gogh is one such example.

The bottom line is that the path to being original and the path to being creative is a struggle. There's no map. It's uncharted waters in many respects. And the journey can be maddening.

There are many paradoxes when it comes to being creative, and I hope this program has given you a path to walk on as you move further in the journey.

The greatest shapers of the creative path never stop at being original themselves and contributing something of value to the world. They also create cultures that unleash originality and creativity in others. And that's one of the reasons why I've produced this program.

I now want to take you on a journey by giving you some excerpts from some of the greatest creators of our time...

W.H. Auden says, *'A modern stoic knows that the surest way to discipline passion is to discipline time. Decide what you want or ought to do during the day, and always do it at exactly the same moment every day, and passion will give you no trouble.'*

He went on to say, *'Only the Hitler's of the world work at night, no honest artist does.'*

I find that interesting because I rarely work at night. However, there are artists who do. So if you're a night person and you do not see value in having a morning routine for your work, and you're stuck on the night, then go for it.

Beethoven rose at dawn and wasted little time getting down to work. He would work at his desk until 2:00 or 3:00 in the afternoon. He would take occasional breaks to walk outdoors, which aided his creativity. And as we've talked about already, the occasional break after focused, concentrated blocks of time is essential to the creative process and to your productivity.

The great Danish philosopher, Kierkegaard, was dominated by two pursuits. Writing and walking.

Typically, he wrote in the morning and then went on a long walk at noon. He returned to his writing for the rest of the day. His walks were where he had his best ideas.

Henry Miller, when he got older, found that any work he did in the afternoon was unnecessary and even counterproductive. He said, *'I don't believe in draining the reservoir, do you? I believe in getting up from the typewriter away from it while I still have things to say.'*

Two or three hours of work in the morning were enough for him, although he stressed the importance of keeping regular hours in order to cultivate a daily creative rhythm.

William Faulkner wrote best in the mornings. During his most fertile years he worked at an astonishing pace, often writing 3000 words a day. Sometimes double that even.

He said, *'I write when the spirit moves me, and the spirit moves me every day.'*

In other words, you don't wait to be inspired to do your work. Many of the creators of the past and present would talk about this principle of punctuating your day with pauses, to get your mind off your work. To leave it alone and put your mind somewhere else. And so often a solution to the problem you're working on will bubble up spontaneously.

Jonathan Edwards, the 18th-century preacher and theologian, would break up the long hours of his private study by doing some kind of physical exercise like chopping wood in the winter, taking walks, horse riding, etc. On his walks he carried a pen and ink to record his thoughts.

One author made this interesting comment, *'It almost seems as though a writer's works, like the water in an Artesian well, mount to a height which is in proportion to the depth to which suffering has penetrated his heart.'*

This gets back to the idea of going through painful times and experiencing adversity as an ingredient to creativity.

Along those same lines, someone asked Hemingway, 'What was the key to being a great writer.' His answer was, *'An unhappy childhood.'*

W.B. Yeats was someone who wrote for at least two hours every day, whether he felt like it or not. Many other writers had either a required time block for writing each day or a daily word count. I've never had either. As I've stated previously, I allocate certain days to writing. And I will write whether I feel like it or not. Sometimes for 10 or 15 minutes. Other times for much longer.

Then there are those bursts of inspiration which can hit at any time, even in the evening or the early mornings. Those do not happen very often, but they do occur.

Wallace Stevens was another creator who would take long walks, stopping now and then to scribble down lines. He did it on envelopes that he carried in his pockets.

One screen writer who has put out many popular films made the remark; *'I've found over the years that any momentary change stimulates a fresh burst of mental energy. So if I'm in this room, and then I go into the other room, it helps me. If I go outside to the street, it's a huge help. Going for walks works just as well. I think in the cracks all the time. I never stop.'*

Maya Angelou had an interesting practice. After she would write, she would read what she had written to her husband. But she wouldn't invite comments. Hearing it out loud was good for her. Sometimes she could hear the dissonance and then she'd straighten it out in the morning. She would do these readings in the evenings. The only comment she wanted on her work were from her editors.

George Gershwin was dismissive about inspiration saying that if he waited for the muse he would compose three songs a year at most. It was better to work every day. He said, *"The songwriter must always keep in training."*

Joseph Heller, author of *Catch-22*, wrote virtually all of that book sitting at the kitchen table in his Manhattan apartment in the evenings after work. He spent two to three hours a night on it for eight years. That's an example of someone who worked in the evenings rather than in the mornings. However, with Heller, I believe he had a day job which prevented him from writing in the mornings.

Flannery O'Connor made the statement, *'Routine is a condition of survival.'*

Throughout his adult life, Ernest Hemingway rose early at 5:30 or 6:00 a.m. woken by the first light of day and that's when he began his writing.

I've always found Hemingway to be inspirational, so I want to read some quotes by him about the creative and productive process.

On writing he said, *'Nobody really knows or understands, and nobody has ever said the secret. The secret is that it is poetry written into prose, and it is the hardest of all things to do.'*

I would say this gets back to what literature is, which is what I try to write and have been writing since *From Eternity to Here*. Hemingway beautifully describes what literature is. The secret is to create poetry written into prose.

And he's right. It's one of the hardest things to do. He also said, *'In truly good writing, no matter how many times you read it, you do not know how it is done. That is because there is a mystery in all great writing and that mystery does not dissect out.'*

He also said, *"Writing is something that you can never do as well as it can be done. It is a perpetual challenge and it is more difficult than anything else that I have ever done, so I do it and it makes me happy when I do it well ... After a book, I'm emotionally exhausted. If you are not, you have not transferred the emotion completely to the reader. Anyway, that is the way it works with me."*

Someone asked Hemingway, "How much do you write a day?" His response, *'The best way is to always stop when you're going good and when you know what will happen next. If you do that every day, when you're writing a novel you will never be stuck. That is the most valuable thing I can tell you so try to remember it.'*

He then expanded it a bit and said, *"Stop while you're going good and don't think about it or worry about it until you start to write the next day. That way your subconscious will work on it all the time. But if you think about it consciously or worry about it, you will kill it and your brain will be tired before you start."*

He went on to say, *"I had learned already never to empty the well of my writing, but always to stop when there was still something there in the deep part of the well, and let it refill at night from the springs that fed it."*

He also said, *'Writing at its best is a lonely life.'*

Someone asked him, "How can a writer train himself?" His answer, *"Watch what happens today. Remember what the noises were and what was said. Find what gave you the emotion, what the action was that gave you the excitement, then write it down, making it clear so the reader will see it too and have the same feeling that you had."*

In a letter to F. Scott Fitzgerald, Hemingway wrote, *'I think you should learn about writing from everybody who has ever written that has anything to teach you.'*

I totally agree with that statement, and I have sought to practice it in my own life.

On another occasion Hemingway said, *'Listen, there is no use writing anything that has been written before unless you can beat it. What a writer in our time has to do is write what hasn't been written before or beat dead men at what they have done ... All modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called Huckleberry Finn. It's the best book we've ever had. All American writing comes from that. There was nothing before and there has been nothing as good since.'*

Here is something Hemingway said that's quoted very often. *'I write one page of masterpiece to 91 pages of garbage. I try to put the garbage in the wastebasket.'*

That should comfort any writer. I know it does me. Hemingway also said, *'I have always hoped for sound, intelligent criticism all my life, as writing is the loneliest of all trades.'*

Finally, I'll read this last quote from Hemingway as I find it as valuable as all the others. *'You must be prepared to work always without applause. When you are excited about something is when the first draft is done, but no one can see it until you have gone over it again and again, until you have communicated the emotions, sights, and sounds to the reader.'*

We haven't even gotten to the writing section of this program, but I hope you've found these quotes by other creators to be helpful. I think they strengthen and illustrate many of the principles that I've shared in earlier sessions. But it's good to hear from the creators themselves.

I personally find such things highly inspiring.

17: MY WRITING PROCESS– PART I

In this session, we will begin the topic of writing. Just to give you some background. I have written over 24 books. But I've been writing for many years, and I've learned a lot about the process.

I'm going to share with you my own personal process and the various things that I've learned over the years about writing. This does, in fact, tie in to creativity and productivity as well.

Christopher Morley once said, *'The most valuable writing habit I have is not to answer questions about my writing habits.'*

In like manner, Hemingway rarely talked about his writing habits, feeling it would bring bad luck. However, he did leak them out here and there.

So in the spirit of Hemingway, I'll leak a little here about my writing process. Basically, there are four different methods I have used over the years to write a book.

1) The first method is to have a series of conference messages or seminar talks transcribed.

For example, my book *From Eternity to Here* is based on messages I delivered in five different conferences in the United States in the years 2005 and 2006.

When you have audios transcribed, they need to be heavily edited. But they give you the material. They hand you the clay, so to speak, that is put upon the wheel. To me, this is the hard part of writing. It's to get that paint on the canvas.

So having audio messages, talks, and seminars transcribed gives you that beginning point. It provides the content. All you have to do is mold, shape, and polish it.

2) The second method is to combine a series of articles you've written together. This is the act of repurposing content. Then revising and/or updating it.

This is one of the reasons why every writer and author should have a blog in my opinion. Not only does a blog give you practice. And not only does it allow you to test your material to an audience before you actually publish it in print form. But it gives you content from which you can later produce a book.

My book, *Revise Us Again*, is an example of this method. About 65% of that book is made up of previous articles I've written in various publications, including my blog, journals, and magazines. About 35% is brand new material. But all the chapters are tied together by a common theme.

In like manner, I have a series of five books entitled [The Rethinking Series](#) which are largely based on blog posts that I've written between the years 2008 and 2014.

Some of the material in that series is new, but the majority of it is reworked articles and blog posts that were simply dying in the blog archives. It also contains articles that were written for magazines and journals over the years that many people have never seen.

3) The third method is to sit down and write a book from scratch.

Most of my books have been written this way. Let me tell you how. I'll walk you through the process.

- First, I write a tentative table of contents.

I say "tentative" because it's usually going to be modified and rearranged as I get into the actual writing process. But the general framework stays pretty much the same. For me, the table of contents is like a map that helps me navigate where I'm going.

- Second, I begin writing the chapters.

I don't usually write the chapters in order. I very often will start with the Introduction, but then I will move around. This part of the process is like throwing a lob of clay on the wheel. The clay is disorganized and without form. I just write my thoughts on the screen; it's raw material to work with later on.

- I write the easiest chapters first.

The reason for this is because it builds momentum. Many authors get stuck when they start with the most difficult chapters first. They can't seem to get momentum so they end up quitting. So I recommend you start with the easiest chapters first.

Then, once I've got some clay on the wheel, the real work begins. This is where I shape, mold, add, remove, edit, and rewrite. For me, the art of good writing is rewriting. The secret to great writing is to rewrite! I keep rewriting until it's in decent shape; not perfect but decent.

Once all the chapters are in good form, I print them out and read the chapters slowly and sometimes even out loud with a red pen in hand. I make edits, changes, removals, and additions. I usually double and sometimes triple space when I print it out so I have room to make edits. Reading the printed manuscript in hand is very different from reading it on the screen. Things I wouldn't notice or see on the screen suddenly come to light when read in hand.

- Next, I insert all the changes that I made on the manuscript with my red pen into the document on the computer.

This is the part that I despise. It's laborious, tedious, and reminds me of one man's famous words, *'I love being a writer. What I can't stand is the paperwork.'*

Phillip Roth said, *'Writing isn't hard. It's a nightmare.'*

And it's during this part of the process that I can identify with those words. I wish I could hire someone to do this part, but they'd never be able to read my handwriting. It's a cut below chicken scratch. Sometimes I can't even read it myself!

- The next part is where the magic happens.

Here is when I rewrite, edit, rewrite, edit, cut, edit, rewrite, and edit. Sometimes I'll print it out a second time and go through it carefully to do more editing until I have something that I feel comfortable with.

Here is where I resonate with the words of Winston Churchill who said, *'Writing a book is an adventure. To begin with, it is a toy and an amusement. Then it becomes a mistress. Then it becomes a master and then a tyrant. The last phase is that just as you are about to be reconciled to your servitude, you kill the monster and fling him out to the public.'*

Tru dat! (True that!)

Like Hemingway, I write best in the mornings between 7:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. I'm also a plodder. I plod a little each day.

Some days I'm highly motivated and can peel off thousands of words at one sitting. On other days I'm like James Joyce. One day a friend of Joyce found the author hunched over his desk and asked, 'What's wrong?'

Joyce responded, *'I've been working all day and have only written six words.'*

His friend said, 'Six words is normal for you in a given day.'

Joyce replied saying, *'I know, but I don't know what order to put them in!'*

I concur with Gene Fowler who said, *'Writing is easy. All you do is sit staring at a blank sheet of paper until the drops of blood form on your forehead.'*

Or as Red Smith said, *'There's nothing to writing. All you do is sit down at a typewriter and open a vein.'*

Some authors are regimented. They force themselves to write a certain amount of words each day. I once tried to play that game and the uniform didn't fit me. I try to write a little each day, and when I'm really inspired, I write a lot.

When my co-author George Barna puts a book together, he will take a week or two out of his schedule. He will block everything else out, and all he will do is write from morning till evening, only taking lunch and dinner breaks.

Another author writes one page a day. After 365 days he has a 365-page book completed.

I've never been able to be regimented. As I talked about my ideal week with you, I have some days in which I write. But I don't have an allotted time period for the writing.

Sometimes I will write for 30 minutes. Sometimes I'll write for 2 hours. And sometimes I'll write for 15 minutes. It all depends on the mood, the energy, and what else is going on in my life. It also depends on the deadline.

Occasionally, I will wake up in the middle of the night with a new fresh idea that's never hit me before. And I'll get out of bed and write an entire article. Oftentimes, those articles become my unfiltered updates or blog posts.

Rarely do I do that with books, however. It's mostly articles. Something else. When I write my books, I seek to produce literature. This is especially true for my books, *From Eternity to Here*, *God's Favorite Place on Earth*, *Jesus Manifesto*, and *The Day I Met Jesus*.

Oscar Wilde once said, *'The difference between journalism and literature is that journalism is unreadable and literature is not read.'*

Another author said, *'I write when I'm inspired. And I see to it that I'm inspired at 9:00 every morning.'*

4) The fourth method is one that I have used on rare occasion. However, for the 80% of Americans who wish to write a book, but don't know how to get started, this method works wonders.

Many of my friends will tell me, "I want to write a book. Here's the idea. Here's the title." And I'll encourage them to write it.

A year later, I'll ask them how the book is coming along. They will say, "Well, I haven't gotten started yet." Then another year goes by, and they will say the same thing.

Let me cure that for you. This is for every person who has a great book inside of them, but they don't know how to get it out.

This method tells you how to take the knowledge and ideas that are in your head and turn them into a professional book so the world can consume what you've written. Let me say this. I didn't invent this idea myself; it goes way back in time.

Socrates, the famed philosopher, never wrote anything down. Plato recorded his words. Jesus of Nazareth (Jesus Christ) never wrote down a word. His disciples recorded His words. Winston Churchill dictated all of his books to his secretary.

That's essentially the idea in a nutshell with a little bit of nuance to it. Now what you want to do is get out a sheet of paper or get out your computer, and make notes.

Here's the process.

- You have to figure out exactly what your book is about.

First, determine what the book is about. This is important. It may take some time and thought to come up with a book idea. Once you have it, go to the next step.

- Answer the question: who is this book written to?

Unseasoned authors will always say it's for everyone. That's blatantly false. No book is for everyone. And if you think it is, I will tell you that few people will read it. You have to be highly specific about your target audience.

Example: This book is for left-handed Albinos who live in Ouagadougou. Or, this book is for women between the ages of 21 and 55. Or, this book is for those who are involved in Islam in the United States who have been recruited by someone else. Or, this book is for young men between the ages of 18 and 30.

You need to figure out who your target audience is. This is huge. Who are you writing for primarily? It doesn't mean that other audiences won't benefit. But you must identify the target. Who are the main readers you want to put your book in front of?

- You need to write the book *to* and *for* that target audience.

Many authors have an individual in that target audience that they have in their minds. And as they're writing, they're writing to that person.

Too many authors write for themselves, and that's a huge mistake. You need to keep your reader in mind, and write to and for them. That will change much of your wording, how you introduce the book, how you end the book, and how you structure the book.

You also want to be specific on what you want to say. You want to be specific with your core message in the book. Too many authors try to pack everything they know about a subject in one book, and that's a mistake. That's why there are series of books.

If you try to cram everything you know about a subject into one book, it's going to produce a bloated, meandering mess that will be hard for people to understand. It will have no natural audience.

- Create an outline for your book.

In the outline, you want to think about some stories you want to tell to illustrate your points. You want to make a bulleted list of the points you want to make in the book, and you want to answer these questions:

- What is the reader going to get out of reading your book?
- Why should they invest the time and money to get a copy?
- What's in it for them?

You need to step into the shoes of the reader and answer those questions yourself.

As a reader of the book you want to write, what are you going to get out of it? How is it going to benefit you? This is huge. The answer is what you want to build that entire book around, so you have to get clear on this.

To give you an idea of an outline, pick up a book that may be in the same genre as your book. Then open up the table of contents and look at the structure. Look at the chapter titles. That will give you an idea of an outline. An outline and a table of contents are similar.

However, you basically want to organize your thoughts concerning the main points you want to make and how the book is going to benefit the reader. That is the hard part of this process.

But here is where the secret sauce lies. You are going to pretend that you're interviewing yourself about your book.

Consequently, you're going to create a series of questions that you are going to ask yourself.

Pretend you're a radio show host and you have two hours with *you*, the author. As the radio show host, you don't know much about the book, so now you have to begin to ask questions to find out what the book is about and why people should buy it.

Write down as many questions as you can think to ask about your own book beginning with... *why did you write this book? Who is it for?*

Now you're going to get into the nitty-gritty.

What are the main points of the book?

How will these points benefit the reader?

Once you have made an exhaustive list of questions, as many as you can think of, then hand those questions to a friend or family member and have them interview you. *And record the interview.*

Make sure they probe deeper. So when you answer a question, let them know ahead of time that you want them to say things like, *'Why did you say that? Can you give me an illustration? Can you be more specific?'*

Have them pull the content of the book out of you.

The book is inside of you. You need someone to bring it out. Don't worry about being perfect in your answers. Just answer the questions naturally and normally. But make sure you record it.

Get yourself a digital recorder and record the interview. You may have so much content that the interview may go for so long that you may have a series of interviews. Hence, you'll have a series of recordings.

Feel free to explore tangents. Instruct the person that's interviewing you to ask follow up questions. Put them in the seat of the reader. Don't let them be general. Have them quiz you about stories, illustrations, and what are you basing your ideas on and why they are important in helping people.

Have them probe deeper into the specifics. If you make a broad statement, have them ask you for a specific example or a set of examples. You want the person who is interviewing you to put themselves in the reader's mind. What would they want to know next? What questions will the reader have?

Tell the person interviewing you up front that if something you say doesn't make sense to them, have them ask the question again or reframe the question. Because if your answers don't make sense to them, they won't make sense to some of your readers either.

So relax, let the conversation flow, tell stories, give examples, and provide illustrations. Try to get all of your wisdom and knowledge about this book in the interview. Again, don't worry about the way you phrase things; just let it all flow naturally.

Here's the next step.

- After you've made the recording, pay someone to transcribe it.

I use Janette Mowry at [Success Transcripts](#) to do my transcribing. So I would hire her to transcribe the interview. Then, once you get the transcription, you no longer have the blank page problem.

All the words, all the ideas, all the content is there. The clay is on the wheel. The paint is on the canvas.

Now you're going to rewrite and edit. You will connect and expand, rearrange, transition, move things around, and keep rewriting it until you remove all the clutter.

Clutter is the disease of writers. Unnecessary words, meaningless jargon, complicated words, etc. The secret of good writing is to strip every sentence to its cleanest component.

If you have words that serve no function or long words that can be changed into short words, make those changes. If you have long sentences that can be cut into two or three sentences, do that. If you have adverbs that carry the same meaning that's already in the verb, make the change. If you have passive sentences that could be turned into active ones, do so. You want to kill the passive voice as much as possible. "The ball was thrown" is passive. "He threw the ball" is active.

All of the above weaken your sentences. So you have to cut and remove the clutter. That is a key ingredient to great writing.

Watch out for clichés. Remove the useless adverbs. Beware of word repetition. If you use the same word over and over again, find another word to fix the repetition. I'm not talking about the word *the* or the word *and*, but other words that reappear repeatedly.

Use exclamation points sparingly. This was a big mistake I made early in my writing career. I would often use exclamation points to communicate passion. Well, in today's world, exclamation points don't communicate passion, they communicate anger. So you want to cut those as much as you can.

One or two in a book is okay. But again, I made this mistake when I was writing in 2008 and before. Today, I will sparingly use an exclamation point for emphasis.

Once you've written your book on the computer screen, go through the third method again.

Print it out, read it out loud, edit it with a red pen in hand, go back to the computer and import your edits, etc. Then have someone else read it. It could be a friend, a spouse or other family member.

Ask them to be brutally honest. To mark those things that don't make sense to them, that are weak, or that need to be changed.

If your book is controversial, give it to one or two people who you know will disagree with it. People who are on the opposite side of the fence. Ask them to critique it. Then come back and import what they critiqued.

If it's a genuine critique, and it's a good one, reword what you wrote. If a specific critique is correct, change what you wrote. If it's not correct, add the objection and answer it in the book.

Some readers will have the same objection as your critic had. So build a response into your book, anticipating that other readers will have that same critique, and answer it up front.

Let me say very clearly: if you're going to be a writer, you're going to receive criticism. The more successful you are and the more impact you have, the more criticism you'll generate.

I wrote an article that's listed on the [Resource Page](#) that you would do well to read. It's called *Three Kinds of Critics and How to Respond to Them*. Not all critics are the same. I also have one called *Haters Gonna Hate* and that's specifically a discussion on a certain kind of critic. The three kinds of critics are:

- Supporters who have your best in mind and want to make you a better writer.
- Objectors who have a genuine disagreement with you, but they aren't hostile toward you personally.
- Trolls. These are toxic and hostile people which you would do well to ignore.

In the article, I talk about how to respond to each critic. I also have an article on the [Resource Page](#) called *An Important Lesson from Charles Manson*. It's an intriguing title, but read it and you'll see what I'm saying. All writers should read those three articles.

C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien were members of a scholars writer's club where they would critic one another's work. They would read one another's work to each other and give and get feedback as well as sharpen one another.

It was essentially [a mastermind group](#).

Lewis' reaction to criticism by his peers and supporters was to turn everything into grist for his mill. He would incorporate every critical comment into his work.

Tolkien, on the other hand, would react in one of two ways. He'd ignore the criticism all together or he would destroy the work and start all over again.

Sometimes our reaction to criticism, when it comes from supporters and even objectors, will result in one of those reactions.

So those are the four ways in which I write a book. They are my methods and writing process. I think that any one of those four ways will be helpful to you if you put them into practice.

18: MY WRITING PROCESS – PART II

To zoom in more closely, here are some things that I like to do when I'm doing heavy writing.

- Sometimes I will light a candle of peppermint or Jasmine sea salt which are some of my favorite scents.
- I will have music in the background, typically.

I've already shared with you what stations I use on Pandora. Sometimes I will have absolute quiet. No background noise at all. It simply depends on the mood.

- [The Logitech G510s](#) keyboard is essential. I use it for 99% of my writing, unless I'm on the road and use a laptop.
- I make sure I'm not distracted. I take blocks of time to focus on my writing at hand.

For would-be writers, if you haven't written a book yet, I encourage you to [begin blogging](#).

T.S. Elliot once said, *'Writing every day is a way of keeping the engine running, and then something good may come out of it.'*

So hone your skills. Receive feedback, and take it to heart. Again, you're going to receive criticism, even if you blog. So if you're serious about writing, you cannot have thin skin. And you can't be a perfectionist. At some point, you have to "kill the monster and fling it to the public," as Churchill said.

Editor deadlines help with this.

One author said, *'If there is a special hell for writers, it would be in the forced contemplation of their own works.'*

With all the omissions and failures that any finished work of art implies, those words are true.

One of the worst things that I've experienced is to open up a book that I've written that's already been published, and look at a few pages. The way I'm wired, I suddenly see the mistakes. I see the things I omitted. I spot the things I could have strengthened or reworded.

You're never going to get to the place where your work is perfect. There has to be a point where you ship it. It's better to get your work out and revise it later than to never release it at all.

At the same time, you want to make sure that you do your best to make it as accurate as possible, which is why I advise that if it's controversial at all, give it to a critic ahead of time and let them tear it up. And then rework it.

That said, here are a few pieces of advice that I have for authors.

1. Be sure your book contains unique content.

There are so many books on the market, and so many of them just repeat what others have said already. If you're going to take the time to write, have a unique angle, perspective, or approach to the subject

2. The reason why anyone would want to write a book should be to spread certain ideas far and wide.
3. Build a readership base.

In [The Buzz Seminar Master Course](#), myself and eight other presenters teach you how to do that. Building a readership base is beyond the scope of this program, but if you want to learn how to do that, then I recommend you get the Buzz course. It contains proven strategies to build a loyal readership and an interested audience.

4. Be involved in choosing the title, cover, and the back cover copy.

If you're self-publishing, this is a given. If you go with a publisher, you really need to be involved. If you don't, the publisher will decide everything. As an author of your own work, you want to be in control of your work.

5. Don't expect your publisher to sell your book.

You have to sell it. The publisher does little. A few people (not many) will resent you just for mentioning your book. There is massive confusion between...

- Selling
- Marketing
- Promoting in a spammy way
- Informing

When you inform people who have already opted into your email list about your book, those people (your followers) want to hear from you.

You're simply informing them. You're not even telling them to buy. You're making them aware of what you have written. If they're following you in some way, be it through your blog, Facebook, Twitter, etc., they want to hear what you're up to and what you're working on. If not, they shouldn't be following you on those mediums in the first place.

On the other hand, if you email people who you have no relationship or you go on a Facebook group, and you tell people about your next book, that's essentially spamming.

Now if someone has opted into your email list and they complain, something is wrong on their end. Since they opted into your list, they are saying they want to hear about your work. When opt-in subscribers complain, a lot of that comes down to jealousy. If a person doesn't want to hear about your work, then why would they opt-in to your email list or your blog in the first place?

6. If you're challenging the status quo, expect opposition, character assassination, and even threats.

7. Expect reviewers of your work to completely misrepresent what you believe, what you have said, and even engage in masterful straw man arguments.

This is not true for all reviewers, but many reviewers will engage in this. Especially if your book is changing people and having an impact. So again, writing books is not for people who have thin skin.

8. Expect some people who read these reviews to believe the misrepresentations and begin the bashing machine without ever reading the work themselves to find out if the review was accurate or not.
9. Don't expect those who have read your work and understand it to know about the bad reviews and respond to them.
10. Don't expect any of your critics to challenge you privately to a public debate or discussion on your work.

I can only think of one time when that happened. It was when I wrote *Pagan Christianity* in 2008. If you go to PaganChristianity.org and check out the *Answers to Objections* page, you'll find those debates.

11. Remember: if you have something worthwhile to say you will attract disagreement, hostility, spin, and opposition.
12. How you respond to your critics speaks volumes about you and the message you carry.
13. Always be open for correction, adjustment, and more light (insight).
14. Use short sentences whenever possible.

This will broaden your audience and make your work far more readable. It was one of the secrets to Hemingway's success as a writer. So if you can strive for an average of 7-12 words per sentence, you're doing well.

15. Break up your chapters into sections with subheadings.

This makes your writing more digestible and readable.

Now let's talk about **writer's block**.

Ernest Hemingway called writer's block the white bull. It's that empty page that's like an angry beast staring back at you, taunting and daring you to spill your ink upon it. Ink that's all been used up.

Some call it mental block; others call it artistic rut. In essence, you're blocked. The creative juices have stopped flowing and the well has run dry. There's no inspiration. It's all evaporated.

As a writer of both non-fiction and fiction (in my biblical narrative books), I've starred back at the white bull, even going nose to nose with it.

Here's what I've learned. Writers block is a symptom of something else. It's an indicator that your creative battery has been drained, and it's begging you to recharge it.

With that insight, here are seven ways that I've learned to recharge my creative battery and become unblocked.

- Recreate.

Find something else to focus on that's relaxing. It may be for a day or a few days. It may be for a week or more. Again, this is counterintuitive because we think of recreating and relaxing as not being productive, but when it comes to creativity and writer's block, it is one of the most productive things you can do.

- Get a virtual mentor.

This could be in the form of courses, audios, master classes, etc. For those who have taken *The Buzz Seminar Master Course* we have a closed Facebook group called *The Hive*. All the presenters and the people who have taken the course are a part of it. They encourage each other and ask each other questions. They, in effect, mentor one another.

- Read your contemporaries.

One of my co-authors said to me once that if you're ever unmotivated to write, start reading your contemporaries. People who are in the same niche that you are in. Why? Because you will get mad. You will get mad over the disagreements you have with them, and that will motivate you to write. I have found this to be a priceless piece of advice.

- Watch movies.

Movies relax your mind. But they're also a piece of art. If they're good movies, then they're good art. Movies can spark all kinds of ideas that you would not otherwise have had, and they can be incredibly inspiring.

- Listen to a full album by an artist or group.

Again, creativity begets creativity. I say listen to the full album because albums are a body of work. When you just listen to a song or two, a hit here or there, you're not consuming the entire body of work.

I have talked elsewhere about how [a book is very much like an album](#) and how [authors are very much like music artists](#). The difference is that music artists hit their prime early in their youth, usually late teens or early 20s. Whereas authors hit their prime later in life in their 50s and up.

- Go for regular walks or runs.

Walking feeds the brain with ideas. Your body is being stimulated and your brain is as well. So bring a notepad or a digital recorder with you as you walk. You can then record the rush of creative ideas that hit you.

- Mow a lawn on a riding mower.

I've talked to you about this already. If you don't have a lawn to mow, maybe you have a friend who has a large yard with a riding mower. If so, offer to mow the lawn for them. It's a great way to recharge.

There's another method that some people have in their life for breaking writer's block. I've never had one, but it's...

- A muse, that is, a person who inspires you consistently.

Up until this point, different people have inspired me at different times. But I've never had a muse, a single individual who fills that role on a consistent basis. And I would have no idea as to how to tell you how to find one either.

When we talk about writers' block and there are basically three kinds.

- 1) External blocks – when real life intrudes where you have a crisis, a problem, or a struggle. And it gets you down emotionally.

For this, you need time to process. You need time to decompress. You need time to get over the problem. Some people bounce back quickly. For me, I usually bounce back in a day or two when there's an external block. Some people need more time. Don't be hard on yourself though. Recognize that it is seasonal; it's temporary and you'll get over it. "This too shall pass."

- 2) Internal blocks – this is your emotional or physical state.

Maybe you're sick or you have a fear you need to overcome. Maybe you need to face procrastination head on. This is something that all creators face. Steven Pressfield talked extensively about it. He called it **the resistance**.

There is lined up against you, physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually, an impulse that opposes you from getting any creative work done.

The resistance is the bane of all artists. Every time you get up in the morning you have to fight the resistance. And if you give in to it, you will not create.

So know that the battle is common to every artist, every writer, every musician, to every person who creates.

One of the plaques on my wall comes from Seth Godin's *Lynchpin* session. I have his book *Lynchpin* which, arguably, could be his best work. On this plaque are the following statements...

*Fight the resistance
Emotional labor is hard work
Engage the things that frighten you
Do the work that matters
Art creates change and art changes you
You are a lynchpin
Draw your own map
Do the work, not the job*

*Criticism accompanies art
Work that matters is work that makes a difference*

There's more on the plaque than those statements, but those are among my favorite.

3) The third block is writing itself.

You're going well, steaming ahead, and then you get stuck. The ink runs out. The juices stop flowing.

But if you employ the strategies I've given you, I believe you'll get unblocked. It's been that way for me in every case.

So there's an external block, an internal block, and the block of writing itself.

Another solution to writers block is to go back to the fourth process that I talked about for writing a book. The interview and transcribe method.

Seth Godin once said something to the effect that "you can get writer's block, but no one gets talkers block." So talk about what you want to write with someone, record it, and get it transcribed.

Sometimes there will be a situation where you have to revise your work. You have to revise it because the present arrangement, approach, or structure you've been using just isn't working.

In this case, you need to apply a new strategy. You have to do some reframing. So if that's the case, restructure it, reframe it, and reorganize it. This too can break writer's block.

If all else fails, take a vacation.

Vacations have a way of resetting your entire rhythm in every area. For this reason, I'm a big fan of vacations.

Ernest Hemingway said, *'There is no rule on how to write. Sometimes it comes easily and perfectly. Sometimes it's like drilling rock and then blasting it out with the charges.'*

The bottom line is that in order to produce a book or a blog post, you have to get down to the business of writing and *just do it*. **Fight the resistance.**

Writers are creative people, and stress kills creativity. So learn how to relax and build rhythms of relaxation into your schedule that renew your mind.

Relaxation is the charging of the battery. But renewal (which would be embodied in a vacation) is buying yourself a brand new battery right from the factory.

For writers, we often deal with discouragement. It happens often. It's normal and part of the process

So it's easy to get into a funk emotionally. When this happens, the vacation can help.

If you're unable to go on a vacation when you need it, put on some upbeat music. This will put you into an emotional state that's positive and happy.

Also, as a person of faith, reading the Psalms can be helpful. Write down a gratitude list and review it. Jot down 10 or more things that you're grateful for and start there.

It's easy to look at the glass as being half empty and forget about the other part that's full.

Your emotions follow your thoughts. Your feelings follow your thought life. Consequently, if you focus on something that's positive, your emotions will follow. That's a life tip that's written in concrete.

Smiling and laughter also affect your emotions. Stop worrying about things you have no control over. That's easier said than done, but learning how to resist worry is essential. Put the past to rest, and don't fret about the future. *Instead, live fully in the present.*

Remember that each day is a gift. Keep these things in mind as you create. When you create, you are building upon the discoveries, findings, and insights of other people.

Whether you're conscious of that or not, the work of an artist and a creative is inspired and influenced by others.

Consequently, if you want to be a creative, or you want to up your creative game, you should follow the lead of all great artists and steal inspiration from others.

Knowing this principle, Picasso said, '*Art is theft.*'

Picasso wasn't advocating plagiarism. Plagiarism occurs when you take something from another person verbatim or you take an idea that is completely unique to them and claim it as your own. For instance, a particular author or artist has originated the statement, yet you don't give them proper credit.

Rather, "stealing inspiration" is more like the British rhythm and blues artists building on the old American southern blues tunes, taking those tunes, reshaping them, and being inspired by them. Then building on them to create something new.

As I said before, we all have the same ingredients to work with. It's the recipe that makes the difference.

So it's important to study those artists in your field who have gone before you. Creative work builds on what came before. Nothing is *completely* original. Do a deep dive into a range of your favorite artists. They will make you realize that you're part of a creative lineage.

Always be reading. Build a library. Then give credit where credit is due if you find something of value that another has written.

When it comes to writing, creativity is often fostered by physical activity, whether exercise or building something with your hands. Physical activity actually kick starts your brain into thinking and engaging your senses fully.

This not only applies to physical exercise, but also to working with your hands in building something or repairing something. A side project and a hobby are indispensable for creative writing.

Sometimes the magic happens when you're involved in a side project rather than with your main work. Some people call this **practicing productive procrastination**.

Of course, it's not procrastination per se. You're just focusing on something other than your main work. And that activity draws on other parts of your mind and your brain.

One person said, '*A hobby is something that gives but doesn't take.*'

Geography is important also. Travel, going to a new town sightseeing, makes the world look new to you.

When that happens, your brain works harder. Traveling can give you insights that you normally wouldn't come by otherwise. And it could be as simple as taking a drive to a new town and driving through the neighborhoods. Or taking a walk on main street and being exposed to new scenes. Locations in geography do something to the brain that enhance creativity.

Something else about creativity when it comes to writing is the power of simplification and subtraction. We live in an age of overload and information abundance. Consequently, focus is hugely important,

Dr. Seuss wrote his bestselling book with only 50 different words. Consequently, creativity is not only a matter of what you put in, but the things you leave out. This principle applies to your writing.

You could remix and reimagine a presentation of ideas that uses less than more.

To give an example, one of the books I'm working on right now is going to have very short chapters and no table of contents. That is, if my publisher will allow it.

I have a lot more to say about writing, so we'll go further in the next session.

19: WRITING TIPS – Part I

In this session, I want to talk more about writing as it relates to productivity and creativity. Here are some further pieces of advice that I give to authors and writers.

1. If you're writing nonfiction, be sure that you've experienced what you're writing about for at least five years.

Too many authors, I feel, write as armchair philosophers. The discerning reader can usually tell if you're writing from experience or theory, even on a subconscious level. I've also discovered that if you haven't tested your ideas out in shoe leather and haven't experienced them yourself for a sustained period of time, you will have to go back, revise, rewrite, and even abandon some of the things you published. Not a good thing.

Having experience before you write and teach others is critical. Someone once said *'it's vain to sit down and write if you haven't first stood up to live'*. So get experience under your belt first. I don't mean a few months, I mean years before you pass on those gems to other people. It's important that they're first tested, tried, and true in your own life.

2. If you're a first-time author, start talking about your first book on your blog at least a year before it releases.

It's a given that if you're an author, you should have a blog. Build momentum, build interest, built anticipation long beforehand. Build a relationship with your potential readers by giving them free content via the blog before the book arrives on the scene.

3. If you're writing your book on a hot topic, keep in mind that the hour might pass by the time your book comes out.

Why is this a problem? Because it takes eight months to a year from the time you submit your manuscript until the book is available for purchase. Consequently, if your hot topic cools down during that time period, the timing will not be ideal for your book to come out.

The exception to this is if you're an incredibly fast writer and you self-publish the book in a digital form. That takes a lot less time. But with a traditional publisher, it typically takes a year from the time you submit the manuscript until the time it hits the bookstores.

4. Find a writing schedule and a writing space that works best for you.

Atmosphere, smells, decorations, color, background noise, etc. all of these things are important to productive writing. Your writing space must also be free from distractions as we've said before.

5. Consider co-authoring some books. But make sure you have writing chemistry with your co-author.

I have co-written several books with other authors. I have also co-written articles with other writers. Co-authoring can be a lot of fun. It can strengthen your book or your article in many ways. It can also be frustrating. I have an article that I wrote entitled *Co-Authoring: The Good,*

the Bad and the Ugly. You can find that on the [Resource Page](#). it contains all I have to say about co-authoring.

6. Let people sample your book.

Give them 10 to 20% of the best parts or give them the best chapter. Give them a 'taste test' of the book. I have used the term 'taste test' for some of the samples for my books. (I'm not sure if it's original with me or not.)

There is a taste test of *The Day I Met Jesus*, and there is a taste test of *Jesus Now*. I believe there is also a taste test of *God's Favorite Place on Earth*.

7. Start a blog because blogging prepares you to write a book in the following ways:

- First, it clarifies your thinking on a given topic.

Writing a blog post untangles your thoughts and puts into focus what you really believe about a subject. That's true for writing anything down whether it's your life GPS, your goals, your dream year, etc.

Writing has a way of clarifying what you really think and putting what's in your heart on paper, articulating it in a way that makes sense to you.

- Second, blogging test drives your material to an audience.

This helps you to hone your craft before you publish a book.

- Third, over time, blogging gives you a treasure chest of material from which to draw when you write a book.

As I said before, one of my writing methods is to turn my blog articles into chapters in forthcoming books.

- Fourth, blogging allows you to create a built-in audience who will be interested in buying your book.
- Fifth, if your blog is successful and draws high traffic, you will capture the interest of publishers.

The main thing most publishers are interested in today is how large your platform is. They want to know the answer to this question, "Do you have a readership and is it significant?"

I personally know two bloggers who received wonderful book deals from two major publishing houses all because they had successful blogs.

One of them was given a book advance of \$40,000, which is very large for a first-time author. It's even large for most veteran authors. But it was because this person had built a successful blog with a large readership that they were offered the advance.

8. You get six months or a year of vitality after your book releases.

After that window, few people care about your book because it's considered old. This is because of the glut in the book market. The exceptions are classics or mega bestsellers.

9. Writing is a craft. Start out as a novice, become an apprentice, and finally, if you keep at it, you'll become a master.

Going back to the issue of experiencing what you write for at least five years, if you're writing a nonfiction book, G. H. Lang once said that a person shouldn't publish a book before the age of 40.

He was talking about spiritually-based books that were nonfiction. When it comes to that genre, which is my own genre of writing, I agree with him fully.

It's essential that you let maturity and experience take its course, and that what you're writing about is reality, tested, and proven in your own life for years.

10. If you want your book to have the most impact possible, seek a legitimate publisher to publish it.

I've self-published, and I still self-publish (only digital books). And I've gone with traditional publishers. The difference is night and day.

Having a publisher gives a book credibility. It gives it a much better look and feel. It gives it far more distribution. And the whole process, overall, is far more convenient to have a publisher do everything from the typesetting, to the editing, to the cover design, to the printing, to the marketing, to the promotion, etc.

You add your efforts based on what they've done.

Self-published books rarely get traction. That doesn't mean there's not a place for them. Again, I self-publish digital books regularly, but the distribution is limited.

There are a few things that will give you, as a creator, more credibility than writing and publishing a book. Even if you self-publish a book, it's well written, the cover design is excellent, and it contains information that people find valuable, this will also give you credibility and authority.

The truth of the matter is that Amazon.com (or whatever the extension is for where you live) is the third largest search engine in the world.

But it's a search engine for authority. That is to say, people who are looking for an authority on a given subject will search Amazon. And if you have a book on Amazon, whether it's self-published or traditionally published, that book can appear on Amazon so people searching for the topic of your book will find it.

If you're going to go with a traditional publisher, then you should obtain a book agent. We talk about that in detail in *The Buzz Seminar Master Course*. In fact, a veteran book agent is one of the presenters.

11. Try to get endorsements, but don't panic if you can't.

Endorsements mean nothing to some readers and they mean a lot to others. But they never make or break a book.

Writing a book is a painful, arduous process. And there is no one correct writing style or method.

I have talked about my style, and I have given you my methods. Find a style and a method that works for you and stick with it. There's nothing wrong with experimenting. Expect to have seasons where you will grow weary of writing and lose inspiration and motivation. This is perfectly normal. That's the time to explore how to recharge your creativity and discover what inspires you to write.

12. After you are published, be available to dialogue with your readers.

For me, I prefer to do this through a blog. Other people enjoy doing it on social media.

13. Never forget that it takes a long time for the message of a book to begin to create a visible effect in the world, so be patient.

You may see the impact in your lifetime. Then again you may not. Sometimes a book changes the world after the author has passed on.

Another method I have when it comes to book writing is one of my manila folders is entitled *Books/Ministry*.

I have several sheets of paper in that folder that I have written, and one of them are the book ideas that I have for the future.

I have a list of books that I would like to write in the future, and so you may want to try this also. Create a list of book ideas as they come to you.

Again, you can do this when you are using your downtime to think, whether it's when you're relaxing or driving or going for a walk.

But the bottom line is that when it comes to writing or any other creative act, genuine creativity involves significant work.

You have to do the hard work of practicing and investing in your craft. And this is where a daily routine is so helpful.

As I said before, real creativity evokes and attracts criticism. Any time your head rises above the log, someone is going to take a shot at you. If you're flying over the target, you're going to catch flack.

I want to say something else about creativity and money. When you put a price on something and you sell it, you are creating value for that particular product.

Art that is offered free of charge is often ignored, disregarded, and viewed as not being valuable.

If you've produced a work of art, whether it's an album, a DVD, a video, a book, a course, and you don't require people to invest financially into it, people don't have skin in the game to go through your art and consume it. The message that's being conveyed subconsciously is that you really don't think it's worth anything. Consequently, many people will feel the same.

I have a bookshelf that is littered with books that were given to me for free. Do you know how many of them I've read? Very few, if any.

Why? No skin in the game. I didn't pay for them. Now I'm someone who gives most of my work away for free. My blog is free. I have over 120 podcast episodes that I've produced that are all free. A number of my eBooks are free. And routinely, my publishers will allow me to give away some of my published books in digital form to my readers for free.

But even in those cases, many people do not read or listen to what they receive for free.

The point I'm making here is that if you are a creator, do not feel guilty about charging for your art. "The labor is worthy of its hire." I'm quoting from the New Testament.

You're actually doing people a service by putting a value on your work because most people will not consume what you have created if it's free. And they won't benefit from it. Obviously, you believe your work will benefit others else you wouldn't have created it in the first place.

If you want people to consume your work so they will benefit from it, putting a price on it requires that they have skin in the game. It requires that they have invested in it. So the chances of them going through it are far, far higher than if you gave it to them. Consequently, the chances of them benefiting from it are higher. Even the chances of having their lives changed by it goes up dramatically.

This all gets back to this question of productivity, which is working less and accomplishing more. It comes back to doing the appropriate thing at the appropriate time for the right reasons, asking yourself on a continual basis, "What's important right now?"

Shakespeare said "*To thyself be true.*"

If you're an artist, be a person of principle. Do what is right and let the consequences follow. If you don't prioritize your life, someone else will.

Make sure you take time for planning, for reflecting, for looking at the big picture (your life GPS). Poke your head above the clouds from time to time and get perspective.

Learn how to say *no* to opportunities. Learn to put a pause between the request and your answer. Look at your calendar and come back to the individual who has offered you an opportunity or made a request. Learn the art of saying *no* in a civil and gracious way.

Remember: every time you say yes to one opportunity, you're saying *no* to another. This is because time is a limited commodity. It's not an infinite resource nor is it a renewable or replenishable resource.

All of us have 168 hours in a week. Understanding how to focus my time and make decisions based on my life GPS has been one of the secrets of my success.

By the way, I'm someone who tilts pretty hard at saying *yes* when people make requests. That's because of my faith. Jesus said, "Give to those who ask and don't turn them away."

However, sometimes that's not possible because saying *yes* to one person is saying *no* to another. So it's important to be able to say *no* at the appropriate times to various opportunities and requests.

But there's this other extreme that I've seen people embrace, even professing Christian, and they quote Warren Buffet who said "*Very successful people say no to almost everything.*"

The problem with that is saying *no* to almost everything almost always means forfeiting life-changing opportunities that will increase your impact. But it also means turning down opportunities that perhaps God wants you to say *yes* to. And it means saying *no* to people in need, which is contrary to Jesus' teaching.

Again, if you're a believer and a follower, it's something to think about. But being productive and creative begins with clarity and setting the intention. It begins with planning, using a calendar, and being deliberate.

Another exercise I would encourage you to do as it relates to productivity and creativity is to conduct a **project audit**. This is similar to the activity audit we spoke about in a previous session.

Here's how it works. Write down everything that you're involved in project-wise, creation-wise, and time-wise as it relates to your work. Then rank each one from 1 to 10 with respect to how much impact each one is having, how much profitability each is having, how much stress is involved in each, and if you have a sense of peace, inspiration, and motivation to continue doing those things.

When you do your evaluation, No. 1 is on the low end of that criteria. No. 10 is on the high end.

Once you complete the audit, I would consider removing anything that's not a 7 or 8 and above.

I do this every year in my own life, and I find myself cutting out many things as I've shared before. Then I put the time that I was allocating to those projects that I've cut into the projects that are having the most impact. This will also make more space in your for saying *yes* to more opportunities.

But, again, this goes back to architecting your life's work and designing your GPS. Note that the destination that you envision for your life and your work determines everything else.

If you're saying *yes* to everything, or most things, out of obligation, duty, or because you don't want to hurt someone's feelings, it will have a cascading effect on your entire calendar and on your time. This will affect your productivity and your creativity. So you don't want to allow yourself to be driven by impulse, particularly the impulse of the moment.

We're really talking about editing your life as it concerns your work, subtracting some things and adding other things.

Stephen King said "*To write is human, to edit is divine.*"

And much of writing process, as I've said before, is a matter of editing. But it's also true in the area of productivity and creativity in your life's work.

Abraham Lincoln is quoted as saying *"Give me six hours to chop down a tree, and I will spend the first four sharpening the axe."*

This principle applies to the area of planning and preparing. Again, small hinges swing big doors. So...

- Never underestimate the power of incremental change, the cumulative effect, the compound effect.
- Learn how to work in blocks of time without distraction.
- Learn how to apply laser-lock focus.
- Learn how to take routine breaks.
- Put into practice what we've discussed concerning goal setting.

I'm reiterating these principles because they deserve to be repeated and stated in slightly different ways. This will help them lock into your mind.

Groucho Marx said, *"We should learn from the mistakes of others. We don't have time to make them all ourselves."*

Another person said *"To know the road ahead, ask those coming back."*

And so one of the things that marks my life's work is to pass on to others what I've learned through trial, error, mistake, experimentation and serendipitous discoveries. And also what I have processed, tested, proven and reframed from others, distilling it down to a program like this.

The tragedy I see is that the world is full of people who have something to say, but they don't know how to say it. They don't know how to explain it well.

Then there are others who know how to say it, but they don't know how to spread it.

So the purpose of programs like *PROLIFIC* and *The Buzz Seminar Course* are designed to teach you and train you how to accomplish both of those things.

Learn to write stories. Learn to write first-person stories. Learn from the stories of others.

Really good writing is verbal painting.

Maya Angelou said *"The idea is to write it so that people hear it, and it slides through the brain and goes straight to the heart."*

That is a powerful way to describe my own intention when I write something. I think that's something you should aim for as well, especially if you want to make an impact on people and see their lives changed.

One author said, *"I try to leave out the parts that people tend to skip."*

This is a great principle, especially when it comes to books. Authors who write a 300-page book can say what they want to say in only 30 pages. The rest of the book is just padding.

I try to be not only clear and compelling in what I'm writing, but I try to remove the padding and leave out the parts that people tend to skip.

At least that's my goal. And it's the reason why I skim through most books and try to get to the bottom line.

There are other books, however, where I read every word. There are certain authors whom I read every word from because I don't want to miss a thing.

One person said, *"Anybody can make the simple complicated. Creativity is making the complicated simple."*

Exactly true when it comes to this business of writing.

But I still have more to share about writing, productivity, and creativity.

20: WRITING TIPS – Part II

I started blogging in 2008 at FrankViola.org. But I really became intentional about it in 2011 and 2012. At that time, I began blogging five days a week to try to build an audience. I gave content away constantly.

My goal was to spread ideas, to put some liveliness in people's spiritual and mental diets, to challenge, to instruct, to encourage, to get feedback, and ultimately, to help people.

Over the years, I cut it back my blogging routine to three times a week. Then I dialed it back to two times a week. And at the time of this audio program, I'm only writing one blog post a month, typically, and I'm putting out an unfiltered update to my email list once a month.

So essentially, I write to my subscribers only twice a month. If someone is on a waiting list for a course or another resource, that's a different story. When a course or resource opens and they're on the waiting list, they will receive an email notification informing them about it.

In terms of blog preparation, I have a blog queue that I created. I will have a pretty regular flow of blog ideas.

The queue is simply made up of a Word document. I used to be a WordPerfect person for many years, and then I shifted over to MS Word because my publishers all use it. If I get blog ideas if I'm away from my computer, I'll write them in my notebook which I carry with me everywhere in my pocket. Then I will transfer them to the blog queue.

Sometimes I will print out articles that I want to blog about, and I'll put them in physical bin called "Blog Queue." So I have a blog queue on my computer and a physical one.

I have scores of blog ideas in those queues, and when I'm getting ready to write a blog post, I write whatever is on my heart, which usually appears in the queue.

I want to give you the process I use to create a blog post.

This process would also apply to writing an article. It would even apply to writing a chapter in a book.

It's helped me to generate high-quality content on a regular basis. It's helped me to become productive which, again, does not come by accident.

It comes as a result of purpose and deliberation. A blog post is never perfect. If you're going to wait for perfection, you're opening the door to procrastination.

Try to get it as good as you can, but you've got to kill the perfectionist tendency in yourself. You also have to kill the fear of rejection, which is the great motivator behind non-productivity and non-creativity.

Many people I talk to who have a book inside of them, or they want to start a blog, never get around to either because there is an underlying subterranean fear that what they will write is not going to be received. It will be rejected out of hand.

Offentimes, the person is not in touch with this fear. But if you pull back the layers of the onion, and the individual receives insight and clarity on their lack of productivity, fear is often at the root of it.

Eventually, if you're going to get your ideas out, you've got to pull the trigger. I'm not suggesting you do that in a hasty way. But at some point you've got to ship. You've got to send. You've got to hit publish.

So let's walk through the process.

1. The first thing I do is look at the upcoming blog post, article, or chapter that I'm going to write. And I begin to write a rough draft of it. Then I simply leave it alone and sleep on it.

What that does is it allows the article to simmer and marinate in the crock pot of my brain. It allows my subconscious to work on it. It plants the idea in my brain while I'm not actively thinking upon it. This is a truism that many writers and authors have discovered.

2. The next thing I do, as is the case with all of my writing and creative work, I free myself from distractions.

This is not the time to check email or social media or answer the phone. All of that is in the background or turned off. As I've said before, on the [Resource Page](#) there are a number of tools that actually turn all that off for you if you struggle with it.

The only thing I have running is Pandora with the background music I use and my Word document. I will also have my browser open for the purposes of using a Thesaurus, a Bible program, or to search for a quote, if needed.

But the music puts me in the zone. It's a great creative trigger.

3. I then starting writing, throwing the paint on the canvas, without any editing.

I take the idea that I've already put down and I begin to develop it. I don't try to fix anything. I'm not concerned with spelling or grammar or phrasing.

It's a total brain dump. I'm throwing the clay on the wheel. Most of my blog posts are anywhere between 600 words and 1,500 words. Occasionally, they'll be 2,000 words or more if the content is substantive and I really have to make some arguments that I can't afford to leave out. Especially if I'm trying to persuade readers of a certain viewpoint.

4. The next stage is editing.

It's been pointed out by a number of people that writing is a right-brain activity, while editing is a left-brain activity. If that's true, the theory goes that if you're writing as you edit and you edit as you write, you're switching between brain hemispheres.

And you're going to be less productive. It's going to hinder the flow of your writing. Whether that's true or not, I have found that writing while you edit does hinder your pace and flow. So I write first and edit later.

5. I then try to read my blog posts and articles off line.

At the time of this audio program, I publish my posts and unfiltered updates on Thursdays. I try to print them out and read them offline first. Using my red pen, I make edits and import the edits into the document before publishing it.

You will spot things that you will never see if you're looking at the screen compared to when you print the documents out. There's something about printing out a document and reading it offline that attunes you to perspectives that you would otherwise miss regarding grammar, wording, typos, etc.

I'm not someone who uses photos or images in my blog posts. I think that's a great thing to do, but for me it's a time vampire, so I don't do it. There have been rare exceptions when I did. But as far as I can tell, the lack of photos has never influenced the effectiveness of my blogging.

I have noticed that certain times of the day are especially conducive for focused creativity. A lot of this has to do with your bodily rhythms and your mental alertness. Some people have more energy in the mornings. I know I do. Others have more energy in the evenings or afternoons.

But over the long haul, the unglamorous habit of frequency through a daily routine will foster productivity and creativity, so you want to align your workday habits as closely as you can to the natural rhythms of your body.

There is something called the **Focus Block Method**. This is where you block off a substantial chunk of time during the day and apply sustained focus and concentration to your most creative tasks. It can also apply to certain days of the week.

As I've said before, Tuesdays and Thursdays are heavy writing days for me. Mondays are for writing also (blog posts, articles, and updates), but they're not as grueling as Tuesdays and Thursdays.

So you'll want to experiment with the days of the week that work best for you, and the time during the day when you're at your most energetic and creative.

When we talk about productivity, we have to get into the whole issue of multitasking which I only mentioned before.

I have found that multitasking is a myth. Many experts have concluded this as well. The fact is that the human mind can only truly multitask when it comes to highly-automatic behaviors like walking or driving. But for activities that require constant attention, there's no such thing as multitasking.

However, there is something called *tasks switching* where you are working on one project and then switch to another. But even that is not recommended. I locate my productivity groove when I focus intensely on one project for a sustained period of time and then move over to another project and focus on that for a sustained period of time. This is like unleashing all of your creative energies and mental abilities to that one task for a focused block of time.

Now when it comes to multitasking, I certainly do this. On my walks or if I'm exercising with an elliptical, I will often listen to an audio or I will have a phone conversation. And when it comes to driving my car, my automobile is a mobile university.

I put three things in my car. One is gasoline, another is oil, and the other is a library of audio CDs, Mp3 conference talks, seminars, audio books, etc.

So I would encourage you also to enroll in Drive-U (Drive University) and turn your automobile into a series of college courses. This is one of the best uses of your time while driving. You can it with the audios from PROLIFIC or *The Buzz*.

With respect to writing, I stick to the same tools, the same environment, and the same background music that puts me into the creative zone.

The great writer Stephen King made this comment, *“There are certain things I do if I sit down to write. I have a glass of water or a cup of tea. There’s a certain time I sit down. From 8:00 o’clock to 8:30, somewhere within that half hour every morning. I have my vitamin pill and my music. sit in the same seat, and the papers are all arranged in the same places. The cumulative purpose of doing these things the same way every day seems to be a way of saying to the mind you’re going to be dreaming soon.”*

I have found this to be true in my own writing experience.

21: MORE STRATEGIES

And so we continue.

Let me say a few words about failure. Failure is designed to educate us. A mistake is simply a learning experience. Regrettably, there are some things that we only learn by failure.

Consequently, some of us (myself included) are highly educated because we've made many mistakes and have often experienced failure.

That's one of the reasons why I'm putting out this program. Not only because so many of you have asked me about my productivity hacks and creative strategies, but I've learned a lot by experimentation and have discovered what doesn't work.

So to be successful in any endeavor, you have to risk failure. But as long as you learn from your mistakes and failures, they are golden opportunities. They are lighthouses and guideposts in your life.

The fact of the matter is that if we're not making mistakes, we're simply not growing. We're intentionally staying within our comfort zones. So fear of failure is actually a paralyzing thing that will inhibit progress. It will inhibit productivity. It will inhibit creativity, and it will stand as an obstacle to impact.

So freedom from the fear of failure is essentially freedom to grow. And as a person of faith, I believe that God uses our failures to teach and train us. He has a habit of writing straight with crooked lines.

In this session, I want to give you a list of principles and strategies for being productive and creative. Some of these elements were already mentioned in other sessions; however, I want to crystallize them and add some nuance to them as well as introduce you to some new strategies. So here we go.

- One of the keys to being prolific is to continually fill the well and refill the reservoir. It's important that you have a system for ideas and record them as they're coming to you.
- Another strategy is to outsource everything you can and focus on where you add the most value. You should concentrate on the things that you do best or the things that only you can do and then outsource the rest.

It's best to hire people to do those things that you dislike or that you do not have talent or gifting in. For example, consider hiring a virtual assistant (VA) to handle email, hiring a graphics artist to do your graphics work, someone to set up your blog, and so on.

- Use your calendar well.

Learn how to wield a calendar and record appointments with yourself, appointments with others, and appointments for projects or tasks. Every time you write something down on your calendar, even if it's an appointment with yourself, count it as a previous commitment.

- Create weekly and daily routines. This has been the secret sauce for my own productivity. Also, learn how to adjust your routines when needed.

You can get really ginned up about a routine for a while, and then over time, it may tend to cool or wear out. That's the time to adjust and tweak it.

- When writing, it is okay to be clever, but it's more important to be clear. And very often, less is more.

You want to say what's essential only. Specificity trumps generalities. You don't have to be pounding every nail to build a house so elicit the help of others. If you have an audience, a tribe, a readership, ask for volunteers to help you with various things. I have done this from time to time with editing especially, and it's been wonderful. You can also enlist their help in helping you choose a book cover or a title.

- One of the first things you should do before anything else is look carefully at how you're spending your time.

If you feel overwhelmed, overbooked, and overcommitted, it's because your current load isn't sustainable. You've over committed yourself. You must cut some things out so you can have more discretionary control over your calendar

- Schedule, schedule, schedule.

I come back to this issue of an ideal week and a daily routine. They are hugely important. You don't want to live in reactive mode. So schedule the most important things first each day. This will protect you from being overcommitted and overbooked.

The calendar was made for man, not man for the calendar. Be flexible and legalistic. But also be intentional and deliberate.

It's essential that you protect your morning routine at all cost. Notwithstanding, there are going to be things that happen which will interrupt it. But reset the next day and move forward.

I've given you my recipe for creating energy, boosting your energy levels, and building up your stamina. It's important that you review those strategies and create an action plan to put them into practice.

A few other tips:

- For doing computer work, a good monitor is essential. I have an exquisite Samsung monitor that's 27 inches. I bought it several years ago. It was not cheap, but it does the job. I prefer a very large monitor when I'm working. On my laptop computers, of which I have several, I have 15" to the 17" screen.
- There is a list of outsourcing companies on the [Resource page](#). In terms of delegating and outsourcing, delegate those things that you are not competent at, things that you hate, and things that you have no passion for. Do not delegate the things that you love and the things you're proficient at doing. Focus on the things that you do best.

All told, the calendar, the routines, and your life GPS are a way of architecting and engineering your life, designing your productivity and creativity, designing your work, protecting you from getting derailed, overbooked, overcommitted, and allowing you to focus on what matters most.

They all help you to stay true to your calling.

When you reflect on your goals, a question you ought to be asking yourself is, "What can I do today that will move me further down the line toward fulfilling my goals?" "What's going to push the ball down the field closer to the finish line?"

It's hugely important to track your goals because, again, you cannot improve what you don't measure. Goal setting is the process by which you make the dreams of your heart and the thrust of your calling a reality.

As a creator, you are going to experience discouragement. There's no way around it.

As one author said, *"Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life."*

So don't forget to put together a gratitude list and keep it on hand for times of discouragement.

Vincent van Gogh remarked *"You have to experience what you want to express."*

Remember that every day you live, seek to live in the present. Be aware of your circumstances and what's happening at the present time rather than having your mind in the past or your eye on the future.

There are times both for looking in the rearview mirror and also for looking ahead, but life is about living in the present and being aware of the moment because those moments form the basis of your creative output, especially when it comes to writing.

There's an English proverb that says, *'A hero is a man who is afraid to run away'*.

Since creative life is a lonely life, the resistance is always going to be there to try to discourage you and pressure you to quit. Consequently, it's vital that you recognize the resistance and that you dig in and wrestle with it. You have to learn to fight the resistance.

Steven Pressfield made the statement, *"The artist committing himself to his calling has volunteered for hell, whether he knows it or not. He will be dining for the duration on a diet of isolation, rejection, self-doubt, despair, ridicule, contempt and humiliation."*

Pressfield went on to say, *"The professional cannot allow the actions of others to define his reality. Tomorrow morning the critic will be gone, but the writer will still be there facing the blank page. Nothing matters but that he keep writing."*

William Blake said, *"Eternity is in love with the creations of time."*

Good art, great art, and valuable creative works are simply the timeless communicating to the time-bound. Pressfield uses the illustration that the 5th Symphony already existed in a higher sphere before Beethoven sat down to play it on his piano.

The muse whispered in Beethoven's ear. The 5th Symphony is a creation of time which eternity could be in love with. And as a person of faith, as one who believes in the Ultimate Creator (God), I believe that all creative work, especially work that's dedicated to Him, has his fingerprints on it. And it's the fruit of eternity being in love with the creations of time, to use Blake's words.

It's a humbling thing to recognize that the things which you create have come from a source that you cannot physically see, hear, touch or smell. Pressfield says of creators, *"These souls are awakening to a call, and that call comes from a plane nobler than the material one and from a source deeper and more powerful than the physical."*

One of the things that I appreciate about Pressfield is that in his effort to fight the resistance in creators and artists, he shows vividly that to hold back your work from the world is really an act of selfishness.

On that score he says, *"If you were meant to cure cancer or write a symphony and you don't do it, you not only hurt yourself, even destroy yourself, you hurt your children, you hurt me, and you hurt the planet. You shame the angels who watch over you, and you spite the Almighty who created you and only you with your unique gifts for the sole purpose of nudging the human race one millimeter farther along its path back to God. Creative work is not a selfish act or a bid for attention on the part of the actor. It's a gift to the world and every being in it. Don't cheat us of your contribution. Give us what you've got."*

John F. Kennedy said, *"Once you say you're going to settle for second, that's what happens to you in life."*

My words to you regarding your calling, your life's vision, what you were put on the planet to do, your one big thing, is not to settle for second.

One person said, *"I can't give you a surefire formula for success, but I can give you a formula for failure. Try to please everybody all the time."*

Oscar Wilde said *"Everything popular is wrong."*

That may not be exactly true, but the fact of the matter is that if you're going to be a creative it implicitly means breaking with the status quo. And procrastination is your chief enemy.

The word 'someday' is a disease. It will take your dreams to the grave with you. The traffic lights of life are never all green at the same time nor do the stars always align. You've got to take action. It's been said that *"many a false step was made by standing still."*

The author of *The Little Prince* said, *"Perfection is not when there is no more to add, but no more to take away."*

Another person said *"It is vain to do with more what can be done with less."*

One of the secret sauces of my work and why I've been able to be so prolific is that I create deadlines on things that already have a deadline. But the deadline I put on them come before the actual deadline. I create my own deadlines when it concerns my self-published work.

There is a law known as **Parkinson's Law**, which dictates that a task will swell in perceived importance and complexity in relation to the time allotted for its completion.

In other words, the longer you have to meet a deadline, the more you will procrastinate. So if I give you a project that's due in a year, you are more inclined to procrastinate on that project and start working on it closer to the deadline than if I said I need it in a week or even 24 hours.

Publishers usually want you to turn in your book a year after you sign the contract. So what I've learned to do is create shorter deadlines for different parts of the book, and plod and plod rather than to wait until the heels of the deadline arrive.

I've talked about this elsewhere, but I've had problems with some of my co-authors because some were bingers and not chippers like me. Chippers chip away at the book. They plod over a period of time. Bingers wait until the very last minute and start cramming. They do all the work at the midnight hour, sometimes within the last two weeks before the deadline.

So I would encourage you with this. When it comes to a deadline, break it up into chunks and set shorter deadlines for each part of the project. That will kill procrastination, which is your enemy when it comes to creativity.

Let me now share some concluding thoughts.

22: CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

We come now to the last session of this program.

One famed author made the statement, *“As a rule, the purchase of books is mistaken for the appropriation of their content.”*

In the same way, buying this program, listening to it and/or reading it is neither a substitute nor a replacement for having put it into practice.

One Nobel Prize Winner said, *“An expert is a person who has made all the mistakes that can be made in a very narrow field.”*

I would never claim to be an expert, but I can tell you this. Much of what I’ve shared in this program has come out of my own mistakes and the things I’ve learned along the way to remedy them.

General George Patton said, *“A good plan violently executed today is better than a perfect plan next week.”*

Another person said *“You will be the same person five years from today, except for the people you meet and the books that you read.”*

I would add to this comment to that statement ... *“and the programs and courses you listen to and execute.”*

All of that to say that your success in the areas of productivity in this business of being prolific comes down to executing. It comes down to putting into action the insights, the strategies, and the methods we’ve discussed in this program.

The [Resource Page](#) will help you go deeper. The tools are on it, the various apps that I’ve mentioned, the supplemental articles, books, etc.

I would strongly encourage you to put together an action plan to implement all of the strategies that we’ve discussed. And not wait on it.

Remember this. What you think defines who you are. Your thought life sets the tone and the character of your actions. It also adjusts your attitudes, and attitudes flow from your thoughts.

One business man would record his own voice and listen to it every night before he went to bed to feed proactive affirmations into his subconscious. He did this for 12 years. He’d listen to a tape of his own voice telling him what his calling was, the truth about who he was, what he was called to accomplish, what his gifts were, what he was destined to accomplish, etc.

In his own life vision, he created 27 lifetime goals and posted them on the inside of his medicine cabinet so that every time he reached for the toothpaste he would see his goals.

Whether you want to use the technique of posting your goals in the medicine cabinet or in your study or on your computer screensaver, you’ll want to make sure they’re visible. All of what

we've said gets back to this matter of having a life GPS, having goals every year, and making both visible and *keeping* them visible.

I believe that the actionable advice that I've given you in this program will create more margin in your life. The fact is, many people today are suffering from the epidemic of overwhelm and overload. It's not just that they're besieged with stress, fatigue, and anxiety. They have little time for relationships, which is one of the most important things in life. They have little time to make connections that will prove to be life-changing.

If you're one of those people who deals with stress, you've got two options. Stress reduction or stress management. Stress management is combined of things like diet and exercise, deep breathing, learning how to relax in the midst of strife, learning how to slow down your heart rate, etc.

Stress reduction has to do with rearranging your life and learning how to say *no* to opportunities that don't fit into your life GPS, learning how to cut out those things that are not really aligned with your life vision, removing toxic and draining people from your life, setting aside time for recess, recharge, and resetting, creating appropriate boundaries in your workspace and in your personal life, etc.

Most of the problems that we face are due to lifestyle choices as well as habits that we can break and replace with new one. I know this from my own experience.

As I've shared with you before, I am not wired to be a disciplined person. But I know the profound power of incremental change, of setting your intention, of being deliberate and strategic, of using your willpower when it's at its strongest, of learning how to extend your willpower, of how to boost your energy levels so that you can be more productive and more creative. And in all of these things, relying on the Ultimate Creator.

But the idea that says that if you're not always active you're being slothful is a myth. It leads to unnecessary guilt. That myth must be excised from your thinking.

We were never designed for constant activity. We have got to have rest in all areas: physical, emotional and spiritual. This is necessary if we're going to be productive, creative, and have prolific output.

When I use the word *margin*, I'm talking about the space between ourselves and our limitations. Essentially, the place of rest. Again, multitasking is a myth that you'd do well to discard.

As the Russian proverb says, *'If you chase two rabbits you will not catch either one.'*

In the area of discipline, you have just enough discipline for a habit to form and takeover because willpower has a limited battery life. It can't be recharged. Yes, it does renew in the morning, but throughout the day it leaks. It has no endurance.

You, in effect, have the willpower to do one or two big things each day prior to rising. Your daily action list is hugely important for being productive because the tyranny of the urgent will crowd out the important and the critical if you aren't intentional.

The task list is the secret of highly-productive people. Such people schedule what is most important, and they do those things first so that they're not sidetracked by lesser and trivial pursuits.

One man said *"We are kept from our goal, not by obstacles, but by a clear path to a lesser goal."*

That's incredibly true. This is the issue of being sidetracked. It's the issue of chasing things that don't align with your life vision, your personal GPS, and your calling.

We've talked about **why power** and the power of the question *why*, which is the motivation behind your goals.

It's what will get you through the grueling, the laborious, the mundane, the plateaus, and the obstacles that will come your way. The *hows* will be ineffective if the *whys* aren't powerful enough.

So give time to the question of motivation, the motivation behind each goal that you set.

One of the reasons why people don't make progress in their lives and why they're not productive is because their goals are not clearly defined. When it comes to the issue of breaking old habits and creating new ones, remember the word *patience*.

If you've spent many years developing an old habit, you can't expect to begin a new one overnight.

Most of our days are simply the repetition of various habit loops that we go through from morning to evening. Scientists have shown that there is a neurological signature known as a brain groove which basically is a thought pattern that creates a particular habit.

The good thing is that our brains can be trained. If we stop giving attention to bad habits, those brain grooves weaken. And when we form new habits, we drive new grooves deeper into our brains with every repetition, eventually overpowering our previous habits.

So new habit creation is the burning of new grooves into your brain. This takes time. But remember the compound effect. Remember the cumulative effect. I know in my own personal experience that I've been able to develop brand new habits in my routines by being patient and consistent. And I believe you can as well. (Again, I'm not a disciplined person by nature.)

I will close by listing a number of things that people who are prolific do in their own lives, people who are highly creative, people who are impressively productive. They...

- **Get up early**
- **Prepare their day**
- **Exercise**
- **Finish ahead of deadlines**
- **Set goals**
- **Take chances**
- **Dream big**
- **Have a hobby**
- **Have learned to say no**

- **Defend their personal time**
- **Defend their time with others**
- **Help others**
- **Learn from their mistakes**
- **Invest in resources that will cause them to grow**
- **Make connections with other people and are willing to invest in those connections**
- **Listen to advice**
- **Do their work**
- **Don't quit**

On the [Resource Page](#) there is a comment section where you can ask me questions about the program.

There are so many threads that are woven into this program that can be unraveled and expanded. Consequently, if you have a question, feel free to ask it in the comment section on the [Resource Page](#).

I am accessible there. If I can be of help to you beyond what I've shared in this program, I'm more than happy to do so.

And know this, I'm still in school. I'm still learning, and I hope the same is true for you.

Let me end the program by saying that learning and training without execution and application is useless. You have the transcript for this entire program so you can not only listen to it again and again through audio means, but you can read it repeatedly also.

You can even print it out and highlight the various parts that you want to take action on.

I've put my best ideas and practices into this program, and my hope is that you will implement them into your own life, experimenting with various ideas, tweaking them to suit your personality and lifestyle. And in the end, my desire is that you too will become prolific in that which you were called to create.

Now go do the work!