

Turning Pro Summary

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1-Sentence-Summary: *Turning Pro* is an inspiring instruction manual that'll help you create the work you were meant to do by dividing your life into two phases, the amateur and the professional, and getting you from one into the other.

Read in: 4 minutes

Favorite quote from the author:



There are many different ways to frame the fundamental struggle of what it means to be human: trying to fulfill our potential. Science has the therapeutic model, in which some disease or condition must be cured and religion has the moral model, which says we must pay for our sins. According to Steven Pressfield, however, there's a third model, a much simpler one: the model of the amateur and the professional.

Pressfield is a distinguished author, both in fiction and non-fiction. *Turning Pro* is his guide to this model, which'll help you go from one to the other. According to Steve's opening line, this change will make all the difference:

“I wrote in *The War of Art* that I could divide my life neatly into two parts: before turning pro and after. After is better.”

The book is divided into three big parts. The first describes the addictive nature of the amateur, who's lost in his bad habits. The second paints a vision of what it'd like to be a pro, and where the amateur falls short. The third is about cultivating professionalism.

Here are 3 lessons to help your *Turning Pro*:

1. The defining trait of the amateur is the fear of being who she is and getting rejected for it.
2. A central obstacle for the amateur is that he always chases some guru or authority.

3. When you do your work for the sake of its practice and nothing else, that's when you turn pro.

I don't know what you want to create. Maybe it's a museum, maybe a rare breed of frog, maybe a hedge fund. But I do know that turning pro will help you get there. So let's do this!

Lesson 1: An amateur is terrified of being her real self and the consequences that come with it.

None of us are born as pros. We all start as amateurs, addicted to 'shadow careers,' as Steve calls them, which we pursue in lack of the guts to chase our real calling. I have no way of putting it better than Steve, so (emphasis mine):

*"Fear is the primary color of the amateur's interior world. Fear of failure, fear of success, fear of looking foolish, fear of under-achieving and fear of over-achieving, fear of poverty, fear of loneliness, fear of death. **But mostly what we all fear as amateurs is being excluded from the tribe**, i.e., the gang, the posse, mother and father, family, nation, race, religion. The amateur fears that if he turns pro and lives out his calling, he will have to live up to who he really is and what he is truly capable of. The amateur is terrified that if the tribe should discover who he really is, he will be kicked out into the cold to die."*

This was a big issue for me. The idea that the more we become ourselves, the less we'll be understood, and the fewer people will walk, talk, and act like us is paralyzing. Most people never get out of this incapacitated state of ungrounded fear. People do turn on you when you "go rogue," but you'll also find new people who are discovering themselves too.

Nonetheless, for the few who break out of their shell of fear, another roadblock awaits.

Lesson 2: One major roadblock for amateurs is trying to please gurus, mentors, authorities, and teachers.

Once I finally got over the hump of pressing 'Publish' on my first articles, I instantly turned to the gurus whose work I'd read in order to get there. This is as natural a part of the process as it is damaging. You just ventured into new, uncharted, scary territory, and now you realize there's no clear path to go. So you hang on anyone's every word who tells you otherwise.

There's nothing wrong with listening to expert advice, but worshipping a teacher, mentor, even a spouse as an icon takes away our power. It's the singer waiting to be discovered, the blogger hoping for a viral post, the swimmer craving her coach's approval. All of these stand in the way of you doing your work *your way*.

Your mentor's genius will never rub off on you. You must choose yourself. In Steve's words:

“In my experience, when we project a quality or virtue onto another human being, we ourselves almost always already possess that quality, but we’re afraid to embrace (and to live) that truth.”

The moment you take your power back, magical things start to happen.

Lesson 3: Doing your work for its own sake, as a practice, is what being a pro is really about.

Steve published his first book when he was 52, despite writing novels since his late twenties. You’d think by that point, any rational person would’ve quit, which is exactly right. Eventually, the professional must commit herself to her work to an extent that is beyond reason. This, she will do gladly, because like Steve and like me, she at one point realizes she can’t do anything else.

*“In the end I answered the question by realizing that I had no choice. I couldn’t do anything else. When I tried, I got so depressed I couldn’t stand it. So when I wrote yet another novel or screenplay that I couldn’t sell, I had no choice but to write another after that. The truth was, I was enjoying myself. **Maybe nobody else liked the stuff I was doing, but I did.** I was learning. I was getting better.”*

It is at this point that your work will turn into a practice. A self-serving ritual that needs no justification. Steve defines it as *“a rigorous, prescribed regimen with the intention of elevating the mind and the spirit to a higher level.”* **As such, each practice has a time, a place, and an intention. It’s a simple, consistent routine that enables you to let quality do its thing.**

The professional is an eternal student, always ready to learn, always willing to show up, regardless of the weather. This is what allows him to practice his craft as long as he needs to until his craft begins to work for him in return.

Turning Pro Review

There’s no summary for this book on Blinkist yet, but the book is a short read. Technically a follow-up to *The War of Art* and a prequel to *Do The Work*, I think for most, *Turning Pro* is the right place to start. If you know what you want to do deep down, but don’t have the courage to jump in, this is the book for you.

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What else can you learn from the book?

- Why addicts are both boring and fascinating
- What forms shadow careers take
- The epiphanal moment that helped Steve turn pro

- All important qualities of amateurs and pros

Who would I recommend the Turning Pro book to?

The 15 year old writer, who hasn't lost his sense of naive optimism, the 33 year old mom, who reminisces about dancing, and anyone who has a story inside them they can't bear not telling.