

On Becoming an Individual

or

# **HOW TO SAVE THE WORLD**



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*All that is valuable in human society depends upon the opportunity for development accorded the individual.*

-Albert Einstein

# What is this book about?

Human beings emulate the people around them because it makes them feel safe. This is a basic instinct and we're usually not aware we're doing it. Being unusual or abnormal makes a person feel exposed and nervous.

In the modern world, most of us live with very little true danger in our lives, yet we remain viscerally afraid of taking unusual approaches to work and personal fulfillment, even if they're better approaches.

As we leave childhood, we unwittingly dial down our imagination and our ambition, because an ancient and out-of-touch part of our minds tells us they are dangerous. Creativity suffers, and so do our prospects for personal greatness and happiness.

That is the great cost of our ironclad survival instinct: we tend to get most of our values from others. While these values may suit the herd very well, they often don't fit the individual. We are all in great danger of living lives conceived by others.

There is a small but growing proportion of the population that recognizes these pressures and their danger to the world. They are responsible for most of our moral and cultural progress, because they don't gravitate towards norms. They find better ways to live and work, and often the norms begin to gravitate towards them.

They are freer and better at being happy, because they understand that the standard prescribed by the norm is very low compared to what is possible for a fully engaged human being. I'm convinced it is these people who will save the human world from its current trend of self-destruction.

The purpose of this book is to illustrate this great discrepancy -- between what is normal and what is possible -- and give you some stepping stones to begin crossing the rift.

There are two sections, **Knowing** and **Acting**.

Knowing exposes the playing field and the wealth of advantages available to the self-directed individual. Acting is about how to turn this insight into actual changes in your life.

A wide-angle, low-light photograph of a city street at night. The scene is dominated by the long exposure effect of vehicle headlights and taillights, creating bright, streaking lights against the dark asphalt. A prominent yellow crosswalk with thick stripes stretches across the middle ground. In the background, a large, classical-style building with multiple windows and a pedimented entrance is visible. To the left, a multi-story building with illuminated windows and a fire hydrant on the sidewalk are partially visible. The overall atmosphere is one of urban energy and motion.

*“Nobody realizes that some people expend tremendous energy merely to be normal.”*

-Albert Camus

**KNOWING**

## Raise your standards, a lot

To be normal is to leave a fortune on the table. The status quo for a first-world human being is to die with most of one's gifts unwrapped.

You will live this low standard by default if you don't make an active, conscious effort of finding your own way in every area of life. Doing that takes a persistent spirit of defiance and eccentricity. On the physical level this often means temporarily upsetting family members, taking on a less conventional career, exposing yourself to criticism and misunderstanding, or otherwise allowing there to be a certain friction with norms.

These acts of self-loyalty may be make you apprehensive at first. But that fear quickly gives way and becomes exhilaration, as you begin to recognize that fear is what keeps you in the herd, not what confronts you once you leave.

In the areas of career, personal goals and lifestyle, there is precious little encouragement to follow your own values unless they happen to mirror the status quo.

Be wary of norms and their indiscriminate magnetism. Be careful never to do something simply because it's normal.

## Individuality defies gravity

To become truly ourselves, we need to recognize that most of the impulses that commonly drive people are not their own will. More than anything, social and biological forces are what move you, despite their having no interest in making you happy or fulfilling your potential as an individual.

As a human being, Mother Nature and Mother Culture aren't your enemies, but their interests are not necessarily related to your own.

Employers want your life to be anything at all, as long as you earn for them more than you cost.

Marketers want your life to be anything at all, as long as it contains the habit of giving them your money.

Mother nature wants your life to be anything at all, as long as someone is carrying your genes by the time you're dead.

Your life can be anything at all, and few parties have any interest in making it fulfilling for you. Real individuality is encouraged by very few institutions in this world. It doesn't happen by accident, and you may be the only one who wants you to have it.

## We're not good at what we're trying to do

*"The human being is not structured to understand itself, it's structured to act effectively... quickly." -Unknown*

What we all want, beneath all of our moment-to-moment desires, is well-being. That is the individual's goal, always. It is True North on the individual's compass.

Your well-being is often in competition with the goals of the other two players: Mother Nature and society.

That's how you know whether you're acting in your own true interest or in the interest of one of the other parties. Does this really bring me well-being? There's your compass.

Well-being comes when we do what truly resonates with us as individuals. When the painter paints. When the writer writes. When the lover loves. When the friend is being a friend.

Human well-being is remarkably delicate and we are generally bad at making it, because we're so strongly conditioned to letting our social and natural impulses tell us what to do with ourselves. But we can learn.





## Well-being is not selfish

True well-being creates well-being in others as a side effect. A human experiencing well-being cannot resist feelings of generosity, sensitivity to others, and creativity.

Well-being is infectious and ultimately inexhaustible. It's not like a finite resource, where finding more of it for yourself means someone else will have less of it. Your well-being cannot reduce the well-being of another.

Still, many people confuse well-being with self-pleasure, and are therefore suspicious of anybody focusing on their own well-being.

The more your life generates well-being for yourself, the greater the contribution you are making to the world. It will be what allows you to do your best work and to be at your most generous.

## You will naturally tend toward security and conformity

Mother Nature wants you to live long enough to have healthy babies. That's all she wants from you, and although she gives you vast physical and mental powers to help to do that, there is not really anything else she's interested in helping you do. She's interested in your happiness only insofar as it relates to reproducing.

A dead or ostracized human does not have babies, and so she'll make security and conformity your chief preoccupations in life. These preoccupations are what creates the resistance toward becoming an individual.

As a human being you come with a natural inclination to overvalue feelings of safety from two great fears:

The loss of your resources, and the judgment of others.

In the modern world, both loss and judgment are far less dangerous than your mind says they are. Be prepared to compensate for this -- to regularly act in spite of both fears, if you want to explore your potential as a human being.

A black and white photograph taken from a low angle, looking up at a dense cluster of tall, multi-story buildings. The buildings have numerous windows and some decorative architectural details. In the foreground, two streetlights on poles are visible, one on each side of the frame. The sky is bright and filled with soft, scattered clouds.

*"I think the reward for conformity is that everyone likes you except yourself."*

-Rita Mae Brown



## You are being trained by big business

Small businesses create products and seek customers to buy them. Big businesses create customers who will buy the products they already create, or can easily and cheaply create.

You are a part of many high-level business models and have been since you got your first allowance.

If you live in a free market economy it's a safe bet they've been training you for years.

To buy disposable things rather than lasting things. To replace rather than fix.

To respond to cravings, bad moods or inconveniences by going to a store.

To feel inadequate when someone owns something you don't.

To expect treatments and never cures -- not because there are no cures but because they are not on offer.

To buy and do things that gratify but do not fulfill.

To be tired, out of shape and vaguely dissatisfied with the course of your life, and to see that as normal and acceptable.

To absorb hours of advertising daily without noticing.

To believe that enduring a boring job is simply "being practical," that vacations ought to be scarce, and that entrepreneurship is exclusive to the brilliant and lucky.

Your lifestyle has been designed -- not to suit you, but to suit the minority of the population that controls most of its wealth.

## **Day-to-day life changes as you become an individual**

Self-consciousness shrinks away. Creative pursuits become more compelling.

Soft skills develop. Other people become more interesting. They open to you more easily.

What felt scarce now feels abundant. Options. Affection. Fun. Love. Talent. Capability.

Time slows down. Life begins to settle around you. Fear goes from a chronic condition to an occasional visitor.

A natural human optimism and gratitude reappears. It feels familiar because it was always there in the background.



## You are going to die

If you can be promised anything, it's that your body will break down.

Embrace whatever beliefs you must regarding what happens after that, but accept the reality that your wonderful body will gradually stop working.

Another stretch of daylight with its powers at your disposal is an inexplicable, mysterious gift. Ordinarily, such an opportunity probably doesn't seem so special, because so far you have received this gift every day.



*"The average man does not know what to do with his life, yet wants another one which will last forever."*

-Anatole France



## Most people have already died

The great, vivid coral reefs you see in National Geographic are mostly dead. The bulk of the coral is made of the skeletons of dead generations. Only the surface is alive.

The same is true for humankind. Most people have lived their lives through and their chance to influence the world is over.

Look out the window. You are perched on what millions of lives have built, sitting higher than any of your ancestors. You'll be dead for a lot longer than you're alive, but right at this moment you happen to belong to this critical living part of civilization.

You are that vital living edge, but only for now.



## Never before has the common citizen had so much power

Some people argue that the "The Man" has more power over us than ever. In the Western world this just isn't true. It has never been easier to educate yourself, find the like-minded, and speak your truth to people. You probably don't have to risk imprisonment or exile to do these things.

It has never been so safe, on a social level, to be who you are, wear what you want to wear, love who you want to love, sell what you want to sell, travel where you want to travel, raise the family you want to raise, do the work you want to do, play your music, talk your talk, make your art, design your life.

The system isn't perfect by any means, but if you're reading this you're probably enjoying more freedoms than almost any other ordinary person since the beginning of civilization.

Stop and let the reality of this sink in: chances are you are live in one of the most advantageous positions that's ever been lived in, and if you don't make something great of it, something must be wrong with the way you live.

Never mind that the same thing is wrong with almost everyone else too. Even if you're the only one who does it, make good on these gifts.



## You can have a profound effect on the world but probably won't

It's not as if there's only a small proportion of people who can meaningfully change the course of the human world. But statistically, it's far more likely than anything that you will not make a point of doing it. There are too many other demands on your will -- cultural, biological, commercial -- for it to happen by accident.

I don't know who you are, so it's not that I doubt you personally. The means to change the world isn't rare for the modern human being, but the inclination is. The next twenty, thirty, fifty years will go by no matter what you do after you're done reading this.

## The examined life

The difference between people who grow and people who stagnate is the habit of self-examination. It amounts to little more than asking yourself what your lifestyle is creating and whether you'd like to create something else instead.

Living without self-examination means you will be simply following incentives as they pop up in your life, like a trail of little cookies, without knowing why you're doing it, who is placing this trail, or where it's likely to lead.

Essentially this means your circumstances will always be doing the steering. Your life will be what happens to you.

To self-examine doesn't mean to self-scrutinize or self-obsess, it means to take an interest in how your life got to where it is, and to take responsibility for where it is going. You recognize the limiting nature of standing beliefs, and so you keep your collection sparse and clean and relevant.

No need to sit in a cave and ponder the course of humankind for a decade. A bus stop bench and a few lucid minutes now and then will do.





*“There are three deaths. The first is when the body ceases to function. The second is when the body is consigned to the grave. The third is that moment, sometime in the future, when your name is spoken for the last time.”*

-David Eagleman, Sum: Forty Tales from the Afterlives



## We default to "something's a little off"

We're set up psychologically to return regularly to a state of "not quite happy." In order to ensure your survival, Mother Nature has you constantly thinking about how to improve your position. To do that, she puts a pea under every mattress.

Every situation will eventually present something that seems to be wrong with it, something that needs adjusting, something that can't be accepted as it is. It's meant to get you moving, get you on with the business of procreating and shoring up your insecurities.

We should not be alarmed by this persistent nudge, but we often are. We usually interpret it as life having gone wrong.

It's okay. Allow the pea under the mattress be there, and there is surprisingly little left to worry about.

## Pop culture has love all wrong

Love is not what the movies and hit songs tell us it is. Love doesn't hurt. If it hurts it is something else. Infatuation. Fear. Neediness.

Love is all selflessness. To love something is to disappear in its favor -- to die to your own interests so that it can be what it is.

Love is subtle and delicate, and has a soft voice. It can be drowned out by attachment, lust and fear. It grows when it has space.

Love reveals itself when you release your fixation on owning the object of your affection, and see that it remains with you anyway.

Love permeates the human world, but it is not always what we think.



## Happiness has simple ingredients

Connection with others

Personal freedom

Creative expression

Health

Openness to the present

We spend a lot of time pursuing other things.  
Happiness is always what we want but that doesn't  
mean it's always what we're chasing.



*"You can best serve civilization by being against what usually passes for it."*

-Wendell Barry

## Every person builds their own "outside world" inside themselves

From the first time you open your eyes, you must begin to make sense of what you see around you. What you come up with is yours. The past isn't actually there yet, it's something you add to the immediate here and now, in the form of thoughts and mental images. You get these images and dates and events from books and other people, then you map them out in your mind and call it The World.

You are here -- now and always -- and your whole notion of the past, future and the whole world out there is something built here, in the present, by you alone.

This world-building is an enormous responsibility. It feels like others have done it already for you, this work of understanding the world. We're taught that other people figured out The World and roughly how it works long before we were born.

This is backwards. Whoever you are, you are always building an idea of The World all by yourself. You can build it out of what you learn in school, what you hear in church, what your friends tell you, what the television tells you, and what you observe first-hand.

Err towards the last one. Take with a grain of salt whatever the loudest outside voices in your life have to say about the world at large, whether in your life that's about science or religion or commerce. Your own personal experience is the only first-hand information on any subject to be found. Value it.





## The ideal customer doesn't grow

Today's consumer business world is designed to suit the extreme upper class, even though they aren't the ones buying the products. To some degree, an entire pyramid of people profits from it, but the general structure is directed by the extremely small and wealthy minority at the top of it, whose interests are unrelated to (and probably incompatible with) yours and the rest of the majority.

You are being urged to live in whatever ways will benefit the personal finances of this minority. They encourage the normalization of beliefs that suit their business model: Consumer debt is unavoidable and acceptable. Forty hours is the minimum number of hours one should expect to work. Personal ambition is appropriate in the workplace only. Art ought to be unprofitable by its nature.

Different sellers are competing to train different behaviors, but what they all have in common is that they discourage personal growth -- because growth leads to increased fulfillment and increased fulfillment leads to decreased sales.



## The softest of soft skills

Ultimately, the only thing we value is overall quality of life, and that amounts to the quality of the moments that make up our lives.

Creating a higher quality moment-to-moment existence is the softest of soft skills. It's possible to learn how to inhabit the present moment calmly, even while you're aware that you'll need to field difficult, uncertain or painful moments in the future.

It takes extraordinary patience to allow adversity to unfold when it will. Without doing the internal work to develop patience, we tend to try to deal with all future adversity in the present, as if we could out-think it by being extra concerned right now. This is not possible. Potentially, we could spoil almost every present moment this way, by entertaining pessimistic mental images and dialogues that do not help us.

With patience we can deal with what's in front of us, while we trust that our best qualities will emerge at those times in the future when they're needed. This particular kind of patience is called grace.

School doesn't teach it, popular culture rarely talks about it, religion addresses it only in the most convoluted ways, but being happy is ultimately always a matter of grace. To have grace is to have the faith to leave it to our present-moment selves to deal with trouble only once it is actually present.

Otherwise, we are endlessly importing insoluble future troubles into our present moments. which are the only kind of moments we have.



## There must be a lot of backdrop we can't see

Humans have been talking about God and spirit as long as we've been capable.

Whatever truths are behind all this talk, they must remain mysterious and incomprehensible if we're going to be careful not to fool ourselves either way.

There's a ridiculous tendency for all parties to talk in certainties on this topic. People are very eager to stuff it into their existing belief system, whether it's a religious or scientific one, and that forces them to make conclusions about what it is and what it can't be.

Considering how certain the disagreeing parties are, conclusions about its nature are completely asinine, at least at this point in our development.

While it should remain unspeakable, It is still experiencable, whether you think of it as something spiritual or something else. It might be psychological, maybe some facet of physical reality we can't comprehend, or maybe can comprehend someday but haven't yet. Our understanding of the universe we live in is probably quite basic, considering our limited angles and senses.

Whether they're a believer or a dismisser or a re-interpreter, if anyone (including you) says they have it nailed down and figured out, that's how you can be sure they don't.



*"Sometimes I can hear my bones straining under the weight of all the lives I'm not living."*

*~ Jonathan Safran Foer, Extremely Loud  
and Incredibly Close*

**ACTING**

## Attention: We are officially on the air.

Everyday life has a way of feeling like a dress rehearsal. Tomorrow always seems to be a cleaner day for action, because today there are unfinished and uncertain things in the way, so your chances are better. Today it's too murky to go ahead with something big. You need more information, more prep.

It's already tomorrow. It was tomorrow a long time ago. Now is the only time for big plans, and this is always true.

However important or unimportant yesterday felt to you, recognize that today, for sure, for real, you are officially on the air.

**We are LIVE** -- for the first time, and the final time.

Film is rolling. This is all going on record.



## Become a free agent

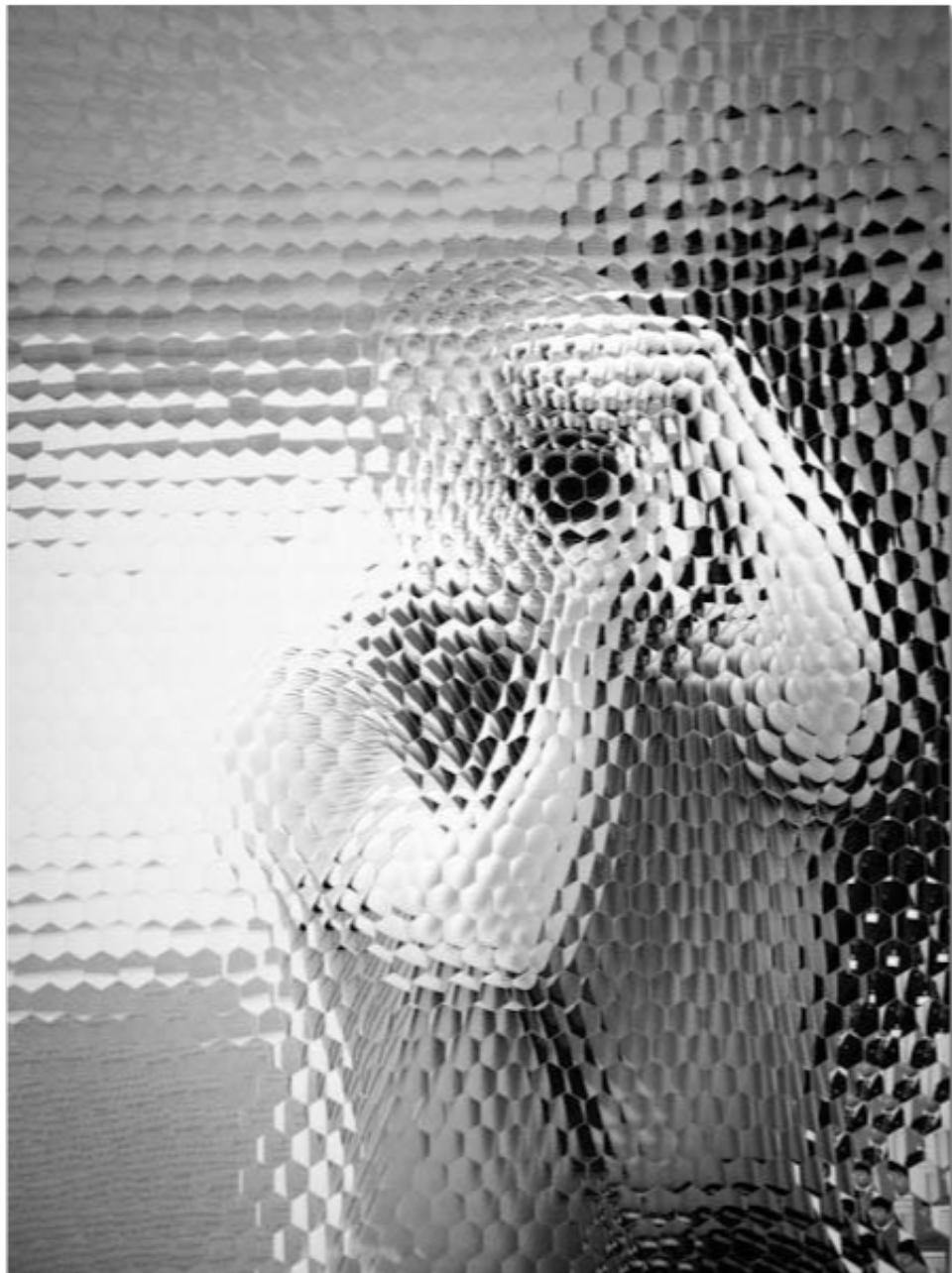
Most people end up serving the values of more focused people. Your servitude to others is inescapable unless you become exceptionally focused on what your own values are.

Do whatever it takes to end your obligations to people and companies whose values do not reflect your own. It will probably mean making a plan to change careers.

Such a change will require you to live on less than you earn, so that you can accumulate time and freedom. You can use this hard-earned space to find a new way to create value for others, and eventually earn a living from it.

If you don't love your job then you're in the wrong line of work, and this is mistake that you ultimately can't get away with. Some part of you will always know you're selling out. It will drain your self-confidence and your gratitude, even if these weary feelings become normal to you. It will follow you every day for as many years as it takes you to do something about it.

No matter how long you expect it to take, make a plan to become a free agent. Free up your money and your time and use them to build a life that creates more of what you think the world needs.



## Find your Thing

We don't come out of the box knowing what we value most. Our values can't be known until they are experienced.

We inherit some values haphazardly from the people we grow up with. Maybe you golf because your dad did, and you like it. That's what you do on Sundays.

But it may not be your Thing. The activity that would stir your soul the most might be something you've never tried.

What's your Thing? You may never have really looked. People tend to find it when they travel, when they meet new people, and when they do things that are out of character for them at the time.

If you aren't consumed by something, if you are merely occupying your time in life, if you are envious of people who seem to have found their passion, then it's safe to say you have not found your Thing.

Believe me, it is worth the time it takes to find this Thing. Your Thing holds the key to finding work you enjoy, finding people you relate to deeply, and finding a lifestyle that generates happiness every day.

*"There are too many of us and we are all too far apart."*

~Kurt Vonnegut



## Find the like-minded

Make human connections on purpose. Two human minds resonating is beautiful. A third quality becomes unlocked which didn't exist before.

This is how jam sessions become albums, how strangers become lovers, how ideas become businesses, how sentiments become movements.

A strange gravity draws the like-minded together when they happen to get close, but most potential connections never fire. Too often it requires an accident.

You can make connections happen. The ability to do this is perhaps the most easily-overlooked human ability. Meet lots of people, and open up. Get good at your Thing and get it out there.

Talk about what moves you. Most people are guarded about what moves them. They're most afraid of whatever's most important to them, because they can't bear the thought that if they let it out it will go nowhere.

So nowhere is where it goes, unless they find the like-minded and make a connection, which proves to them that their big ideas are better off outside.

When you talk to others, look for what moves them. Look for what makes their eyes light up. Go there with them.





## Without creativity you're just hitching a ride

The human being has an intrinsic drive to create what was not already there. Every culture everywhere ended up making art, making music and building things. We are made for it.

Our culture has us thinking that creatives are a "type" -- an artsy minority that overvalues aesthetics, spends its time playing, and leaves actual productivity up to the majority.

This is extremely naive. The "productivity" that money-minded people treasure is nothing but the replication of the work of creative people. There is nothing to produce without creation. Those who don't create are taking a ride on those who do.

Creativity is how you earn a reason to be living at all. Otherwise you're just occupying a few roles temporarily, then disappearing.

The creative mind breaks new ground in all aspects of life, not just in the arts. Creatives are refining the way we govern our societies, raise our children, manage our emotions, maintain our health, educate ourselves and a thousand other things.

You can't create without putting your values into the world, and you can't put your values into the world without creating. Creativity is how we evolve now. It's precisely what individuals need in order to overcome their personal issues, and what our species needs in order to overcome global issues.



## Know what self-love really is

Self-love is not how you feel about yourself. How you feel will change from moment to moment.

Love is an active quality. Self-love is the work ethic behind what you do for yourself.

There are a lot of ways in which you may treat yourself that you would never subject anyone else to. Neglecting your physical, emotional or financial health. Postponing or denying the important. Indulging in what you know is destructive.

Convincing yourself your dreams can wait. These acts are disrespectful, even mean.

Many of us find it easier to be callous and unloving to ourselves than to others. We all know it's wrong to be unfair to others or to harm them needlessly. How you treat yourself is a moral issue too.

The only difference is that if you do it badly, nobody else is going to call you on it.



## Seize the incredible powers at hand

Remind yourself often that wherever you are, you are always only a naked animal, surrounded by a lot of amazing and useful stuff.

You live in the far future, and many of its everyday things offer you incredible powers.

You can summon friends from any distance. You can talk across oceans, or through miles of city noise.

You can use machines to travel hundreds of miles in a day. You can stay dry and comfortable in bad weather.

You can get advice from people who know what they're talking about, on any topic, at any time. You can find instructions on how to do just about anything a human being can do.

You can procure food without having any idea how to hunt it or grow it.

Your body alone lends you incredible powers -- to move, to look, to articulate. Technology gives you superpowers.

Only a fraction of human beings who ever lived had a way of doing these things. You are one of them. Use these superpowers.

## You can't get away with staying comfortable

Regardless of what they tell you, everybody wants growth -- the ability to do easily what is hard today.

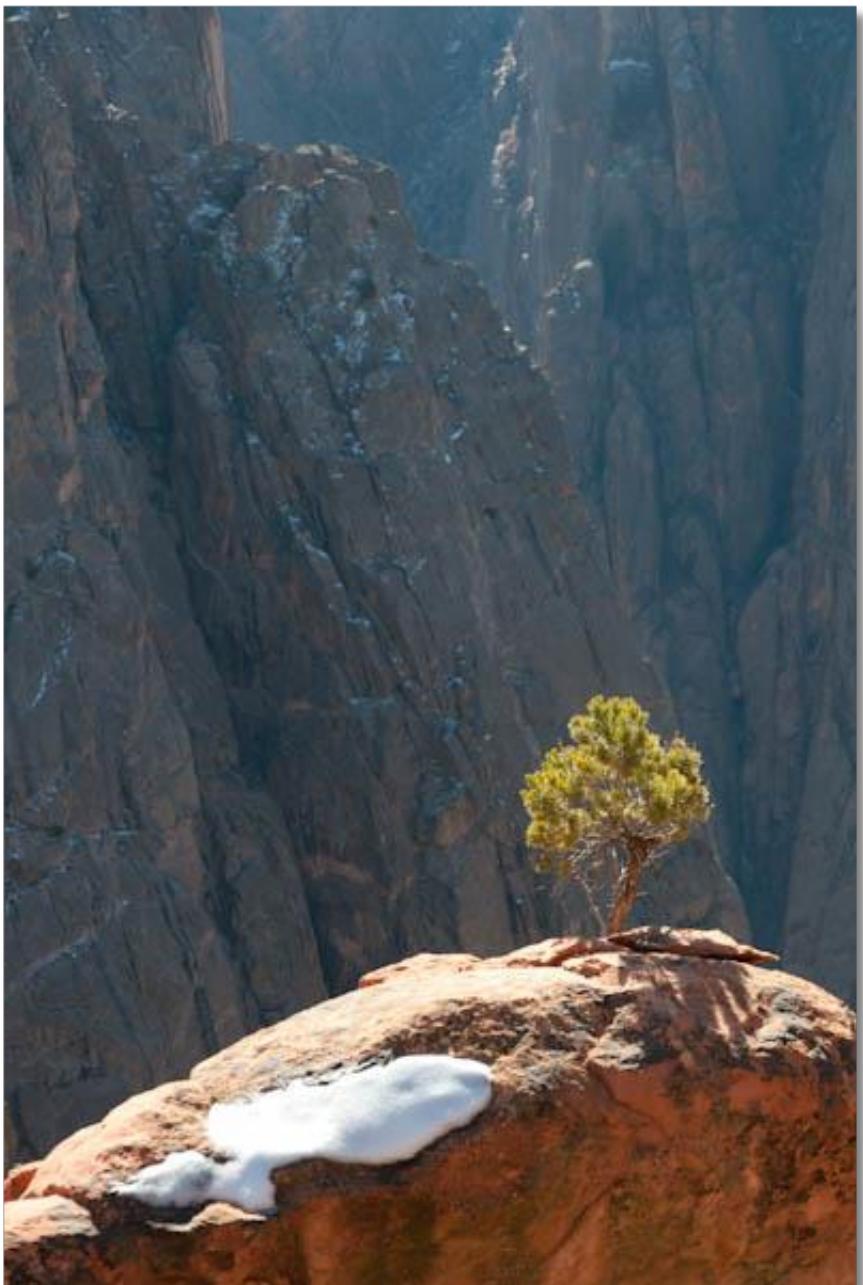
Growth requires discomfort. If you stick with what is comfortable, you're giving up any hope of surprising yourself, of finding greatness, of having the best experiences human life has to offer.

Comfort will never give you that. To a growth-committed person, comfort can only be a temporary respite, a place to retreat to momentarily while you get ready to push again.

As a habit, comfort will get you to roughly the same place you were when you decided to get comfortable, just older.

It will catch up with you. Life takes years to happen. As a long-term strategy, comfort is unsafe.





## Take responsibility

For everything. There is nothing you can do in this life that has any power at all, unless it involves taking responsibility. Taking responsibility is taking power.

Whatever the problem, if something ought to change, it's on you. You can argue all day about who ought to take responsibility, and by the end of it nothing will have changed.

Take responsibility:

For how happy you are.

For how much money you make.

For how many opportunities you have.

For how other people "make" you feel.

For what other people withhold from you.

For the apparent moral failings of others.

For what the next generation will think of yours.

For the state of society and for the fate of your species.

Nothing else will change a thing.



## **Don't accept truths from outside yourself**

Truths don't come from other people -- not from Jesus, not from your holy book, not from your friends, not from your yoga teacher. Not from the Buddha, not from the Beatles, not from your mother, not from me.

All these sources can give you claims -- places to look for the truth. They can be valuable clues. But you are, inescapably, the final arbiter of what is true.

Because everyone builds their own "outside world" independently of each other, different people end up with different convictions. Something can be utterly, irrefutably true to one person, and they won't understand that it isn't necessarily so for you -- because most people believe their notion of the world is the only possibly one.

Be aware of this common error. In a reality where we're each working from a single viewpoint, truth is effectively relative and can't always be shared. This means any truth in your world always requires your approval, independent of all evidence and assurances from others.

## Do something with this

If you feel a surge of excitement right now, good. But don't think that feeling is the feeling of something changing. That's the curse of the self-help junkie: medicating himself on inspiration so that he's no longer upset enough to want to change anything.

Inspiration and insight aren't enough. They're almost worthless unless they move your body to action. Action is enough. It was enough for every great thing that was ever done.

This book isn't about bumping up your level of fulfilment by 10%. It's about waking up and taking ownership of the enormity of the gift of being human.

Inspiration cools rapidly, even if it feels like something permanent has changed. Normalness will descend on you quickly if you don't take some kind of step today. A life-changing couple of years can begin today, or it can begin a few years from now. Or never. Do something with inspiration while you have it.



## Take a few years and change everything

Here's one self-improvement truism that's worth remembering:

People usually overestimate what they can do in a year, but greatly underestimate what they can do in five years.

What's most important to understand is that the time will pass anyway, and you will either have something outstanding to show for it, or life can be pretty much the same as it is today.

A year passes quickly, and truly big plans tend to take 3-5 years to fully take form. But you can still make a night-and-day difference in your quality of life over only a year if you begin building something now.

In a year, an average person can:

- Establish a significant audience for their creative work by building a blog
- Save up a substantial "Quitting my job" fund (or eliminate significant amounts of debt)
- Plan and fund a life-changing trip almost anywhere in the world
- Learn a new skill well enough that people would begin to pay them for it
- Start a side business that pays some of their bills

With five years, you can transform your whole world. Five years is enough time to:

- Build a six- or seven-figure business
- Become exceptionally good at something you have no experience at today
- Reach the expert level at something you're already pretty good at
- Quit your current job and establish yourself in a career you like waking up to
- Set up a your life where you really want to live

## Take a few years and change everything (cont'd)

Five years is not a long time, given the complete transformations that are possible. We're talking about the small distance between a 28 year-old and a 33 year-old, or a 49 year-old and a 54 year-old. You can accomplish more in five years (or even three years) than you have your whole life.

Yet most people will spend the next five years simply getting older. Either way, it will go quickly.

If you do commit to acting on your big plans, the overall timeline doesn't matter that much. Acting with purpose makes life better immediately, and there are rewards all along the way.

You don't require exceptional talents, but you do need to start now. It's crucial that you take a physical step today, before the window of inspiration closes again. This step must be one that takes you through the gate from the wishing phase into the doing phase.

Get into the middle of it before you chicken out. Book something, go get the equipment, or sign up for the next round of classes.

Take a half-hour to type up (or write down) what you want your life to be like in five years. However ambitious it is, you can be sure other ordinary people have pulled off even greater changes, just because they decided it would happen. Get familiar with this vision. You can know what it feels like to be that person even while you become that person. This might be the best way you could ever spend 30 minutes.

Luckily, in the internet age you have superpowers, and there is tons of help available. There are resources on the next page.

# STARTING POINTS

## On learning a skill

Pick something you want to be good at, and decide you will be good at it.

Then find a good teacher. While there's a ton of free-floating information on the web, it is far easier to progress with a structured course that includes regular evaluation. Today, University-level courses are offered online, sometimes for free. Find a ton at [Coursera](#). Even Harvard offers online courses now. The [University of Texas](#) has a renowned first-year French program anyone can take for free.

Writing is a skill that's particularly well-suited to online learning. NYC-based [Gotham Writer's Workshop](#) is excellent, and there are many others.

If you can't find a structured course on what you want to learn, then find a prominent blog covering that topic, and email its author to ask where to look. The online world is overflowing with expertise.

## On starting a small business

Nothing will free you faster from corporate servitude than passive income from a small business. Even paying a few of your bills this way can help you graduate to part-time servitude, and then you scale up from there.

There are a thousand different one-person online businesses you can start, but the principles behind all of them are the same: attract an audience, learn what they want help with, and create products that make it easy for them. The best resource I know of for learning how to do this is [Fizz](#), a small business community with dozens of video courses and case studies. It's cheap, and has over a thousand members now, including me, so you can get questions answered and feedback on everything you do.

If you want a more structured, sequential process, consider Chris Guillebeau's [Empire Building Kit](#). It guides you to build a business in your spare time by giving you one task daily, which together will yield a working business in one year.

## On creating a blog

A blog allows you to find the like-minded, and keeps them reminded of you. There's probably no easier a way to build a loyal congregation of people who understand what you're getting at, support your work and keep you inspired.

Bloggers connect with each other very easily, and you'll eventually develop contacts all over the world. When I travel, in almost any major city I can find people who will meet up with me, give me a local's perspective on the place, and even offer me a place to stay. A blog is also a nearly perfect foundation for a small business, because it attracts the people who are most interested in what you create.

The course I took to get started is no longer available, but Corbett Barr's course [How to Start A Blog That Matters](#) is probably the best one now. It's one of the twenty-plus courses included in [Fizz](#).

## **Tell the others**

Thank you for reading On Becoming an Individual (or HOW TO SAVE THE WORLD).

If you enjoyed it, please email a friend (or two or three) and tell them about it. I want these ideas to grow and I hope you do too.

Tell them this book is free and anyone can get it at [howtosavetheworld.co](http://howtosavetheworld.co)



## **CREDITS**

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