



Finding Your Way

Back to Your Creative Identity



by
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STAIGER



For Those Lost Like Me

Though I've been blogging about creativity since 2004, I recently discovered I had lost my own creative identity. You've heard many say, "We're all creative." I also believe we all identify as artists early in life. As the late Gordon MacKenzie demonstrated, when you ask a roomful of kindergartners which of them are artists, they all raise their hands... both of them... high! Yet by sixth grade hardly anyone raises a single hand. Somewhere along the way, we lose that identity.

I want to help you retrace your steps to find where you lost your creative self. I'm sharing some of the lessons that have helped me reconnect with my first love. I hope they can also serve as a compass back to yours.

The following is a section of my upcoming book *Blame This Book: Your Stolen Creativity Needs A Scapegoat* (working title). Visit BlameThisBook.com to sign up for announcements regarding the release of the book.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gordon MacKenzie', written in a cursive style.

Acknowledgements

I realize this is an e-book, so I'll keep this short.

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To my high school art teacher, Terry Chenoweth (Mr. Chen!) and my Illustration instructor from college, Carey Hissey. You both believed in me and encouraged me to pursue my dream of being an artist. Thank you for keeping the artistic fire alive in me. I hope this honors you.

WATCH
TV
Take one



ART
LESSONS
Take one

BE
CRITICIZED
Take one

MUSIC
LESSONS
Take one

Quirk

Losing Our Religion

That's me in the corner
That's me in the spotlight
Losing my religion
Trying to keep up with you
And I don't know if I can do it
Oh no, I've said too much
I haven't said enough

- Lyrics from REM's Losing My Religion

I could give you all kinds of examples or results from studies that show the benefits of creativity. But do I really have to twist your arm and persuade you that using your creativity is a good thing?

We know this already, don't we? Yet why is it so hard to identify as an artist?

If you ever watched soap operas (I saw plenty growing up thanks to my mom and two sisters) you inevitably saw a character inflicted with amnesia. It seemed the condition was as common as catching a cold. Often, the memory-loss would be used by another character to manipulate them into believing they were someone else. They would wander through each day living a phony life.

If we don't reconnect with our creative identity, we risk living a phony life. We wander through each day with this creative amnesia. We accept the lies about our identity and start telling them to others.

In the soap operas, amnesia was caused by a hit to the head. So, what gets into our heads to cause "creative amnesia?"

It's a combination of what others think about us, and what we say about ourselves.

You wouldn't
worry about
what people
think of you
if you could
know how
seldom
they do!

— Olin Miller



Who's Watching?

One of the lies we believe is people will see what we're doing and they will criticize us, ridicule us, and/or kick us out of the tribe.

In 2000, researchers at Cornell University ran an experiment where a random student was selected to wear an embarrassing t-shirt (with Barry Manilow on it). Researchers asked the student to estimate how many classmates would recognize the shirt. They would estimate close to 50%, but only 25% actually remembered the Manilow shirt.

They labeled this misperception as the Spotlight Effect.

We are hyper-aware of our embarrassments, our shortcomings, and our failures. We expect many others recognize these attributes. We fail to realize they're usually too consumed with their own embarrassments, shortcomings, and failures to even notice ours.

In other words, "Go for it! Nobody's watching."

WHEN CAN I SAY I'M A RUNNER?



Dustin

Runners Run

Why is it so hard to call yourself an artist?

Or a writer?

A dancer?

A painter?

A vocalist?

When do you BECOME this title?

Do you have to be paid first? There are plenty of artists who never get paid for their work.

What would you call them?

You're an artist when you create art.

You're a dancer when you dance.

You're a writer when you write.

Doing it daily isn't necessary, but it will help you claim that identity.

Runners run.

So, lace up your shoes and get out there!



INDIVIDUAL BEHAVIOR
**OVER TIME
= HABIT**

GROUP BEHAVIOR
**OVER TIME
= CULTURE**

Quah

Habits & Culture

Individual habits (like running) are great. This is where change starts.

If we want to create a change that spreads, we have to address culture. “Culture” seems like a big, shapeless word sometimes. In reality, culture is a group’s habits.

Group behavior over time equals culture.

So, we don’t necessarily CREATE culture, but we can BEND it.

Joining a running club reinforces the habit you want to instill.

Starting a running club at your workplace bends the culture.

Part of finding your way back to your creative identity is more than developing creative habits. It’s also about finding your creative leadership. The kind that bends the culture toward greater creativity.

What can you do to lead out of your creative identity? Leading creates greater accountability which can help make creative habits stickier.

STARVE OR STAR ARE NOT THE ONLY OPTIONS



The Binary Lie

When it comes to embracing a creative identity, we believe that path is bifurcated between mega-success and devastating failure. This keeps us from pursuing creative endeavors because—honestly—both of these paths scare us.

But the truth is there are many variations on those themes.

Consider the following:

- You can find success without selling your soul. : Tom Hanks.
- You can create art without starving. This may mean doing art on the side.
- You can incorporate creativity into your current work to make it something new and unique.

So, don't let the fear of devastating failure keep you from experimenting with your creativity or embracing your creative genius. Likewise, do not let the intimidation of rockstar success keep you from flying higher.

TO BE OR NOT TO BE IS RARELY THE QUESTION



Artist's signature

Life or Death Situations Are Overrated

Choosing to be an artist isn't life or death. It just feels like it. The primitive part of our brain reacts to fear of embarrassment, failure, and loss as if an actual predator is attacking.

Times have changed.
Failure is no longer fatal.
It's an ingredient for growth.

Sidenote:

There's no reason to worry so much about life or death situations anyway. They can only go wrong once.

REMEMBER
DOROTHY
HAD THE
SLIPPERS
THE WHOLE
TIME.



*You are
enough!*

Adri

Follow, Follow, Follow, LEAD!

It's very valuable to be a lifelong learner. You can take courses, read books, and watch webinars... but what are you learning for?

At some point, you will need to take a leap.

When that moment comes, you need to realize you are enough. Don't hide by burying yourself in research or seeking credentials.

In *The Wizard of Oz*, Dorothy sought help from everyone else. Glenda the Good Witch, the Munchkins, the Tin Man, the Scarecrow, the Lion, and finally from the Wizard. In the end, she discovered she had what she needed all along.

While in Oz, they sang, "Follow, follow, follow, follow. Follow the yellow brick road!"

What Dorothy finally discovered was how to lead.

This is what the world is waiting for you to discover. The beautiful thing is this... you have what you need right now. It's been with you the whole time. Take the leap!

Jog Your Memory

Now that you've reached the end of this e-book, you may be wondering, "What do I do now?"

Remember these points and realize there is a way back from our creative amnesia.

1. Stop worrying about what others think of you (they seldom do anyway)
2. Accept your creative title (writer, artist, creator, etc.)
3. Build habits for yourself, then shape culture for others
4. Remember success is a spectrum...
5. ... decisions are rarely life or death...
6. ... and you have everything you need!

Print out the illustrated pages in this e-book as a reminder, if it helps. Put them somewhere you will see them.

For #3, feel free to start small. Find a habit you can do each day. Choose something that fits the identity you're pursuing. But, small is good. Runners don't start with ultramarathons. A daily jog becomes a daily run, becomes training for a 5k, then a 10k, etc. Find your "daily jog" and commit to doing it every day, rain or shine.

One day you'll discover this daily jog leads somewhere: It's the way back to your creative identity.

More Resources

Books:

Orbiting The Giant Hairball by Gordon MacKenzie

The Art of Possibility by Benjamin Zander & Rosamund Stone Zander

Creative Confidence by Tom Kelley & David Kelley

The Icarus Deception by Seth Godin

Steal Like An Artist by Austin Kleon

The War of Art by Steven Pressfield

The Accidental Creative by Todd Henry

What To Do When It's Your Turn by Seth Godin



For additional inspiration, you can subscribe to [my blog](#) to get new illustrations and posts by email. Posts are also available on [LinkedIn](#), [Twitter](#), and [Instagram](#).

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TRAVELERS
THE GREAT
PATHS MADE
BY WALKING

Antonio

Antonio Machado