

“The Practice: Shipping Creative Work” (Seth Godin)

Review and highlights

Seth Godin’s most recent book, “*The Practice: Shipping Creative Work*” captures a central theme in all his writings, podcasts, presentations, and blogs. The professional becomes a professional only when consistently putting themselves on the line by creating consistent content and sharing it regularly with ship dates.

This is a helpful guide, reminder, and motivator to anyone looking to start a practice in creating their own art. When re-reading my highlighted sections I was quite inspired to do “something”. It is a call to action like many of his works.

Seth breaks his work into 219 specific thoughts, each its own point but all supporting the overall credo.

Some of my highlights and thoughts:

- **Shipping**, because it doesn’t count if you don’t share it.
- **Creative**, because you’re not a cog in the system. You’re a creator, a problem solver, a generous leader who is making things better by producing a new way forward.

Seth is clearly calling EVERYONE to action and making us accountable to the lives we have been gifted and the responsibility we have to make our work matter.

I think the following is the most crucial reminder for anyone embarking on creative work:

- *The practice is not the means to the output, **the practice is the output**, because the practice is all we can control.*
- *The practice demands that we approach our process with commitment. It acknowledges that **creativity is not an event, it’s simply what we do, whether or not we’re in the mood.***

We are all conditioned to only focus on the outcome. That defines our success and the drives us to hide and supports our fear. This way of thinking is very freeing. Seth is reminding us of the freedom we have to not worry about the outcome. Our commitment, consistency, and sharing are all drivers of our true impact.

- *For the work we’d like to do, the reward comes from the fact that there is no guarantee, that the path isn’t well lit, that we cannot possibly be sure it’s going to work.*

This is Art

- *Not painting, but art: **the act of doing something that might not work, simply because it’s a generous thing to do.***
- *Artists make change happen. You’re an artist as soon as you announce you are.*
- *Art is what we call it when we’re able to create something new that changes someone.*
- *If you want to change your story, change your actions first.*

Another key to understanding Seth's work is to understand that we are all "artists". He refines the definition by explaining that art is about creating anything that can change someone. If we think of our work, our passion, our voice as "art" we can be free to be more generous in being our natural selves. It is not something forced, it not something of perfection. It is something we create because our voice needs to create and share ourselves in some small way.

Finding Your Passion

- *Our passion is simply the work we've trusted ourselves to do.*
- *The strategy of "seeking your calling" gives you a marvelous place to hide.*
- *"Do what you love" is for amateurs. "Love what you do" is the mantra for professionals.*

Passion is an excuse, something we do to delay doing the work or "practice". This is revealing of human nature. It is so easy to wait for your passion to find you. We are obligated to start the work and passion will follow. This can be really counterintuitive and not something we were naturally made to practice in formal education settings.

- *The practice has nothing at all to do with being sure the work is going to be successful. That's a trap.*

Start Where You Are

- *The only choice we have is to begin. And the only place to begin is where we are. Simply begin. But begin.*
- *Effective goals aren't based on the end result: they are commitments to the process.*
- *Instead of planning, simply become.*
- *Trust earns you patience, because once you trust yourself, you can stick with a practice that most people can't handle.*
- *The world conspires to hold us back, but it can't do that without our permission.*

The first take-away from this book is "just start". It reminds me of a book I read of the same title. Many "overnight" successes are people who started small with experiments. They got feedback from these small starts and adjusted their journey. Too much planning, trying to minimize risk holds us back from doing anything. Seth suggests that by just committing to one small practice will ensure we eventually hit a consistent stride.

Hoarding Is Toxic

- *Abundance multiplies. Scarcity subtracts.*

The Best Reason to Say "No"

- *It might be that the most generous thing to do is to disappoint someone in the short run.*
- *Generous doesn't always mean saying yes to the urgent or failing to prioritize.*

Practical Empathy

- *It's impossible to be appropriately generous to everyone. Change someone. And, as Hugh MacLeod said, "Ignore everyone."*

Shun the Nonbelievers

- *Choose to make work that matters a great deal to someone.*

Selling Is Difficult

- *But what if you recast your profession as a chance to actually solve someone's problem?*

Where Is Your Hour?

- *The difficult part is becoming the kind of person who goes to the gym every day.*
- *You manage to find an hour every day to bathe, to eat, to commute, to watch Netflix, to check your email, to hang out, to swipe at your phone, to read the news, to clean the kitchen.*
- *At least once you've said or done something insightful, generous, and original.*
- *At least once you've solved a problem or given someone a hand by shining a light.*
- *The practice simply asks you to do it more than once, to do it often enough that it becomes your practice.*

Setting a time is the key to starting a practice. Put it on your calendar and keep it sacred. If you miss once, don't miss twice.

Generous Doesn't Mean Free

- *Too often, we come to believe that giving it away, removing money from the interaction, is the most generous thing we can do. But that's not the case.*
- *Money supports our commitment to the practice.*
- *Money is how our society signifies enrollment.*
- *The person who has paid for your scarce time and scarce output is more likely to value it, to share it, and to take it seriously.*

Choose Your Clients, Choose Your Future

- *To please the masses, you must pander to average.*
- *Better clients demand better work.*
- *Better clients want you to push the envelope, win awards, and challenge their expectations.*
- *Better clients pay on time.*
- *Better clients talk about you and your work.*

I could not agree with this more. No matter who your clients are, what your product is, or what your market is, people are people. Choosing who you want to serve will help drive your art. Great clients give you more than stable cash flow. They can challenge you, teach you, and help make your work even more powerful.

Who Can You Reach?

- *First, find ten. Ten people who care enough about your work to enroll in the journey and then to bring others along.*

You Can't Reach Everyone

More and More Specific, Please

What's It for?

Consistency Is the Way Forward

- *Not sameness. Not repetition. Simply work that rhymes.*
- *That sounds like you.*
- *We make a promise and we keep it.*

Where Do We Put the Tired?

- *The only difference between the tens of thousands of people who finish the marathon and those that don't is that the finishers figured out where to put their tired. And the same goes for our art.*
- *Forward motion is the only sort of motion that we're interested in.*
- *When we stop worrying about whether we've done it perfectly, we can focus on the process instead.*
- *We don't write because we feel like it. We feel like it because we write.*

Write until You're No Longer Afraid to Write

- *Write about your audience, your craft, your challenges.*
- *Write about the trade-offs, the industry, and your genre.*
- *Write about your dreams and your fears.*
- *Write about what's funny and what's not.*
- *Write to clarify.*
- *Write to challenge yourself.*
- *Write on a regular schedule.*
- *Writing isn't the same as talking, because writing is organized and permanent.*
- *Writing puts you on the hook. Don't you want to be on the hook?*

This is a great place to start! Take one bullet above each day and start writing daily, at a given time, and share everything. These are great prompts and will help keep you going.

Chop Wood and Carry Water

- *Merely do the work without commentary. Chop wood, carry water. Anchor up. "Yes, and."*
- *Ignore the parts you can't control.*

You Don't Need More Good Ideas, You Need More Bad Ideas

- *First, focus on making something worth sharing. How small can you make it and still do something you're proud of?*
- *People who will draw up plans. People who will go first.*
- ***We promise to ship, we don't promise the result.***
- ***What will I tell my friends? Begin with genre. Understand it. Master it. Then change it.***

A Roundup of Tips and Tricks for Creators

- *Build streaks.*
 - *Do the work every single day.*
 - *Blog daily. Write daily. Ship daily. Show up daily.*
 - *Find your streak and maintain it.*
 - *Talk about your streaks to keep honest.*
 - *Seek the smallest viable audience. Make it for someone, not everyone.*
 - *Avoid shortcuts. Seek the most direct path instead.*
 - *Find and embrace genre.*
 - *Seek out desirable difficulty.*
 - *Don't talk about your dreams with people who want to protect you from heartache.*
 - *Make Assertions*
- *Attitude. The best swimmers bring a different attitude to their training. They choose to find delight in the parts that other swimmers avoid. This is their practice.*
- *In the powerful, horizontal organization, each of us decides what to learn next, who to talk with next, and what to move up on the agenda.*
- *This new freedom requires us to find a habit that will lead us to share our voices, even when it's inconvenient or frightening.*

Overall, this book is a calling for everyone and anyone. Setting the practice consistently without excuses and providing a structure for success. Seth is an inspiration not because he writes about his success or others. He is an inspiration because he looks at the world in a unique way and reminds us that we are all humans who have a responsibility to be generous with our true selves.