WHAT WE’VE LEARNED

85 Practical Solutions For:
getting your shit together, improving your relationships,
figuring out your career, boosting your self-confidence,
overcoming self-doubt, getting out of your comfort zone,
and living a better life.

WRITTEN BY:
A bunch of people who happen to read Nate Green’s blog

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What We’ve Learned

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Edited and compiled by Nate Green.

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Let’s Start Here

Here are two things I know for sure: It feels good to create things and it feels good to help people.

Bonus points if the thing you create helps people; when those two things meet, it’s like magic. (It’s also, occasionally, a business.)

But creating things – especially good things – is difficult. It takes time, focus, and courage. Maybe even a little masochism.

Helping people is easier. There are a million ways to do it: You can hold the door open for the guy whose arms are full of groceries; you can help an old woman across the street (that’s still a thing, right?); you can share your life experience and hope that someone will read it and find it applicable to their own life.

That last one – sharing life experience – is my favorite.

I’ve had a blog for a little over 10 years now, and thousands of people have found their way to my little corner of the internet to read what I have to say. I hear from lots of them. Some write to tell me I’ve changed their life. Others write to tell me to go straight to hell.
I like getting both kinds of messages. They remind me that not everyone will love what you do – but some will. (Those are the ones who matter.)

But as rewarding as creating things that help people can be, most of us don’t do it often enough. Maybe we don’t have an outlet (though, honestly, that argument doesn’t mean shit now that anyone can start a blog or a Youtube channel); maybe we don’t have an idea; or maybe we’re just waiting for someone else to ask for our help before we give it.

A couple months ago I sent out an email to my readers. I told them I needed their help to create something new. I posted some questions on my blog – questions about relationships, work, self-confidence, and more – and I invited them to answer those questions.

Hundreds of people answered. Thousands more people, like Charlie here, decided to wait and read what other people had to say. Fair enough.

Thank you for this valuable project. I left the questions blank because they are issues I struggle with. I look forward to reading other people’s responses.

– Charlie

At the beginning, I had this grand idea of creating a huge book full of stories, advice, strategies, and photos. As you can see, that quickly fell apart. (I’ve learned it’s always better to start with a grand vision and scale down from there.)

What we created instead is the thing you’re reading right now. It’s much more manageable, and because of its size, much more readable.

With a nod to Esquire Magazine’s “What I Learned” interview series – a format where the interviewer’s questions are removed and only the subject’s answers remains – this is a collection of quotes, artwork
(from my good friend Jason Lengstorf), and general good advice from some of the people who read my blog.

So, just who are these people? I’ve never met 99.9% of them in person, but I can tell you that most of them (90%) are male, and most (75%) are between the ages of 25-35. (My blog started as a fitness blog for guys; so this makes sense.)

There are, however, some outliers: A 53-year-old woman; a 61-year old guy; one dude named Ryan Andrews; another dude named Andrew Ryan. (Seriously.)

But really, these are just people. People who have lives, families, responsibilities, hopes, dreams, and fears. People who helped me create this thing in order to help other people. Like you.

Here’s what they’ve learned.

- Nate Green

PS – It should probably go without saying, but I’ll say it any way: The following are opinions from other people and don’t necessarily reflect my views. I’m just the curator. That said, I found myself nodding along as I read.

________________________________________


- ANONYMOUS

________________________________________
I asked people to write their name however they wanted it published. Some people gave me their full name. Others just their first name. Lots of people wanted to be Anonymous. Here’s a list of the people who contributed, in no particular order. Not every submission made it into the book, but I’m grateful for every person who took the time to contribute.

Björn
Joe
Ian Wallace
Felipe
Mark Pappas
Matt
Brian Williamson
Paige Edmiston
Jordan Herman
Tim Keenan
Michelle LaGreca
Newfel
John Cammish
Jenna Kuzma
Omar Aslam
Mario
Sharon Friedman
Imran Chaudhry
Daniel Welsch
Heyward Boyce
Anthony Avila
Rich Perry  
Matthew Hunter  
Rudy Kirkhope  
Seth A. Spivey  
Josh Burrell  
Jim Whiting  
Arash Haile  
Stephanie Burke  
German Godoy  
Chris Clancey  
Mathew Chan  
Pheelyp Aytona  
Austin  
Matt Raisch  
Satish NL  
Drasko Raicevic  
Atif Safder Ahmed  
John  
Craig Welch  
Jacob  
anal Lyons  
Russell  
Jason Manwell  
Ben Peck  
Brian Thornburn  
Daniel Tiller  
Jason Doggett  
Zach Leger  
Shawn Guiney  
Julian Cavazos  
Hamish  
Travis  
Christopher Perry  
Jade  
Philip Taylor  
Baron Robertson  
Robert Milligan  
Jared Schaab  
Tyler Watkins  
Diane Tilley  
Marc  
Matthew Gilfellon  
Jonas Fechner  
Tim Schwab  
Sarah Ryder  
Harry Lewis  
Nick Roumbakis  
Anna Lynch  
Laurent  
Ryan Andrews  
Matt Wypijewski  
Ric Rabourn  
Jenrry  
Ferdinando  
Troy Schwartz  
Mac Thomas  
Tyler  
Bret Smith  
Ben Matlak  
David M Harper  
Don Garnier  
Dan Howell  
Brandon K Cole  
Jon Howard  
Cody “Boom-Boom” McBroom  
Tommy  
Luis Miguel Peña Hernández  
Darrel Philion  
Zac  
MJ Tamondong  
Brian Kinslow
THE FEAR WILL ALWAYS BE THERE. YOU CAN’T LET THAT CONTROL YOU.
- SETH A. SPIVEY
WHAT WE’VE LEARNED ABOUT COMFORT ZONES

A note from Nate: My girlfriend Richelle has developed an amazing reflex: whenever she feels afraid or apprehensive about trying something new, she leans into it and does it as soon as possible. I admire the hell out of that. I’m trying to develop that same reflex in myself, but sometimes it’s slow-going. Luckily, I have a good role model.

If I go out of my comfort zone, my comfort zone expands.
— Juan Salas

The fear will always be there. You can’t let that control you. Want a raise at work? Ask for it. Want to start a new relationships? Walk up and introduce yourself. It’s not life or death.
— Seth A Spivey.

Scared of getting out of your comfort zone? Then just imagine the worst possible scenario then work your way back to reality.

Will I die? No, good.

Will I be physically incapacitated? No, good.
Will I be homeless? No, good.

Will I be able to feed myself? Yes, good.


Will I learn something? Yes, good.

– DAN TRAPP

I recently signed up for a four-day fighting course. From 9AM to 5PM we were given instructions and went hand-to-hand with other people to reinforce the skill. I had no prior self-defense training and no military or law-enforcement background. What I learned was that my “limits” – both physical and mental – were far beyond what I expected. I learned to think through fear. That’s a pretty valuable skill.

– RIC RABOURN

For as long as I can remember, I have wanted to be a writer. I founded a newspaper at my elementary school, wrote for the paper in high school, entered and won multiple essay contests and now work as a copywriter for a tech company. Over the years, I had thought many times about starting a blog but had never had the courage to go through with it. I was concerned that I would be exposed as the impostor I feared myself to be – a wannabe writer lacking a unique voice and story.

But last November, my dad was diagnosed with leukemia. His treatment has taken many twists and turns and there is still a long road ahead. My mom wanted to start a family blog about our experience in hopes that the personal reflection would be cathartic and that others may find solace and solidarity in our story. When my mom asked me to contribute, I realized this was my chance: I had a story I was deeply invested in and I’d been presented with an opportunity to create some goodness out of a tough situation. My impostor syndrome seemed so small in contrast to the day-to-day challenges my family faced.
So we started the blog.

While it’s still in its infancy, this project has already opened my eyes to two new theories that I sincerely hope to be true. The first is best stated by Albert Einstein: ‘In the middle of difficulty lies opportunity.’ And the second is that strength lies in vulnerability. By stepping out of my comfort zone and taking an opportunity when it presented itself, I have develop confidence in my voice and found support in a small but strong community of readers.

– PAIGE EDMISTON

The fear will always be there. You can’t let that control you. Want a raise at work? Ask for it. Want to start a new relationships? Walk up and introduce yourself. It’s not life or death.

– SETH A SPIVEY.

My dream is create music that people will love. I used to record videos and upload them to YouTube only to delete them because I felt like I wasn’t good enough. Then one day, after being asked multiple times, I joined an open mic night with my friend. I was so nervous. I got up on stage and felt sick.

But all the time I had spent practicing in my room alone was worth it. Soon, I was playing, getting in the groove, and my nerves were replaced with an overwhelming sense of achievement. If you’re like me and you’re not a confident person, you have to realize that you can do it. You just have to take that first step. As I sit here and write this, I want you to know I have just finished playing at my first ever festival. There were over 100 people there, clapping and enjoying the music.

– DAN HOWELL

I’ve had to start cold-calling people for my job. I hated it at first but by lunging forward into it, I’ve found that I’m actually good
at it. You can’t build a business or do much of anything else if you’re afraid to reach out to others.

– ZACH LEGER

I’ve stepped out of my comfort zone so often, but it has come with a price: three nervous breakdowns, two different heart conditions, being flat broke so often I’ve lost count. I do things that scare people, and I’m not sure it was worth the price.

– ALEX GORDON

I recently replaced the water pump on my truck. I chose to do it myself because I’ve always wanted to do something like that. I enjoy working with my hands, it saves money, and it teaches some self reliance. What did I learn? If you do a little research beforehand, pay attention to what you’re doing, take your time, and track where everything goes, it’s challenging – but not that hard. I think that’s true of pretty much any part of life.

– BRIAN WILLIAMSON
I STOPPED LETTING ONE SETBACK OR FAILURE DEFINE ME. WE ALL FAIL. A LOT.
- JORDAN HERMAN

WHAT A GREAT IDEA I HAVE!

REALITY:

SUCCESS

WHAT A GREAT IDEA I HAVE!

DAMMIT

DAMMIT

DAMMIT
WHAT WE’VE LEARNED ABOUT CONFIDENCE (AND DOUBT)

All this “love yourself” stuff going around lately is crap. If you’re not feeling confident, realize that real confidence is earned. You have to do something. Also: clean your house, do the dishes, toss the trash. If you can’t keep the dishes clean then how can you possibly handle real life problems?

– GERMAN GODOY

Stop thinking that other people are looking at and judging you. They aren’t. They’re all busy worrying if people are looking at and judging them.

– NICOLE WRIGHT

Want to improve your self-confidence? I’ve found it helpful to do the following:

Prepare. There’s that saying, “The more you sweat in training, the less you bleed in battle.” There’s confidence that comes
with the knowledge that you gave the situation the respect it deserves.

Detach. There’s power in having the option to walk away.

Find Humor. Someone who is ready to be ridiculed and mocked can hardly be offended. They have security in their self-esteem.

Improvise. You can’t prepare for everything. Some things in life are like jazz or stand-up comedy. They’re best done on the spot, adapting to what’s happening in the moment.

Remember. When all things fail, we can go back to good times when we did really great, a past victory, a breathtaking moment. We will be reminded: We have done this before. And we can do it once more.  

– MARIO

You make the decisions you make when you make them. It’s easy to go over decisions – particularly bad ones – months or years later. Just in the same way that an armchair critic shouldn’t judge or point blame at the people in the arena, we should give ourselves a break. Because at that time, under those circumstances, with that exact mindset (which we’ll never be in again), we made a decision. And if it was bad, well, it probably seemed good at the time.

– SIMON CLARKE

I stopped letting one setback or failure define me. We all fail. A lot. It’s important that we don’t internalize these failures.

– JORDAN HERMAN

At some point I stopped looking at situations that made me uncomfortable as failures and instead as another opportunity to grow. You can read all the books, subscribe to all the podcasts,
and watch all the videos, but until you start facing the very thing you’re afraid of, the fear will remain.

– ANONYMOUS

I remember something my dad always used to tell me when I was worried: He said, “Look, they can’t eat you.”

– BEN PECK
There is always someone more fit, better looking, with more hair. But there’s always someone looking at you & thinking those same thoughts.
— Ben
WHAT WE’VE LEARNED ABOUT COMPARING YOURSELF TO OTHERS

This still happens, because I’m a human. When it does, I think about the office toilet. No matter how inferior or superior I feel to someone, the fact remains: we all sit naked on the same chair.

– HEYWARD BOYCE

Do I compare myself to other people? Always and all the time about everything. But one phrase I find useful when I’m feeling envious or inferior is this: “Don’t compare your experience inside to someone else’s appearance outside.”

– ZACK BECKER

The way I’ve come to look at this is that there is always someone more fit, better looking, with more hair. But there’s always someone who is looking at you and thinking those same thoughts.

– BEN
I constantly struggle with comparing myself to others. There is one girl in particular who I think lives the perfect life. She’s married, lives in a nice area, has a great job, amazing friends, and great style. Of course, this is all based on social media. Instead of feeling bad for myself when I see her pictures and her (supposedly) amazing life, I remind myself of two things. 1) What is put out on social media isn’t always real life. 2) I have a whole lot to be thankful for.

– STEPHANIE BURKE

It’s natural to compare yourself and get jealous. But realize that most times, the other person didn’t have whatever they’re doing “fall into their lap”. They put in blood, sweat, and tears. So be happy for them and realize that they’ve sacrificed to get there. And realize this: There are some things you do easily that would be hard for them to accomplish.

– IMRAN CHAUDHRY

I find myself doing this when I’m unhappy with my situation or my journey. So when I start comparing myself to others, it points to a red flag in other departments of my life. When I catch myself here, I remind myself of my unique skills. I won’t be able to be exactly like someone else, ever, so I need to direct that energy into making myself the best version of “me” possible.

– JOHN MILEY

Yep, the dude has a bigger house, the thicker stock portfolio. But I have a few things in my tool box that he wishes he had.

– DAVID HARPER
REACHING OUT IS A LOST ART.
- ANTHONY AVILA
A note from Nate: Life is better when you have someone around to call you on your shit and tell you when you’re being an idiot. (Luckily, I have my best friend Jason.)

Complacency is a motherfucker. Just going through the motions can corrode a relationship.

– JARED SCHAAB

You only get so many chances before the other person stops trying to hang out. If a friend asks to meet up, figure out a time and do it. Even if it’s just a half hour. Anyone can spare half an hour. You’re not that important. If something happens to come up that day and you really, really, REALLY can’t make it, then reschedule immediately. Don’t just cancel.

– GREG MCCARTHY

I’ve always been a sort of lonely guy. But there is a time in your life where you need others. At the beginning of this year, I felt
so alone. I remember lying in my bed, watching the ceiling, and thinking of going to a movie or to the pool or having a beer with someone else. But I didn’t have someone else.

I decided I wanted new friends. But...how? I thought about things I enjoyed, like social research and genre studies, and I realized that maybe my University had groups that met about these topics. I searched and found a couple. I filled out an application to attend and was accepted shortly after. I felt proud of myself.

I remember the first meeting. It was really hard to get along with others. Being a lonely guy for so long I had lost my social skills. That first meeting I didn’t speak at all. I remember going back to my apartment and feeling stupid.

I decided to change that. The next week, I tried talking with others, about anything – the changing weather in Bogota, authors I liked, jobs, the peace process between the government and the FARC. And slowly I started making friends. Every week was a little easier to talk and laugh and express my opinions.

After a while, a group of us were hanging out, having beers, talking. I don’t feel alone any more.

– LUIS MIGUEL PENA HERNANDEZ.

We’re all making decisions based on incomplete information. No one has read every book, talked to every expert, and seen every documentary. I could learn something next week that completely changes my view of the world. Accepting this can help to prevent us from getting overly attached to certain beliefs.

– RYAN ANDREWS

Reaching out is a lost art.

– ANTHONY AVILA
In a relationship, you WANT someone who is fundamentally different than you. They give you perspective on life that you wouldn’t have otherwise.

– BARON ROBERTSON

My wife and I are very different people. I’m the analytical Type-A, while she’s the artistic free-spirit. I’m a loner. She’s an extremely social person. I’m clean and tidy. She’s messy. These things are in direct opposition to each other. Which is why we have to compromise. That can mean doing what the other person wants – even if you don’t want to – because it will make them happy. Compromise can mean doing something they want, but in a way that’s more acceptable to you. And it can mean not doing the thing they want – and being OK with them still doing it.

– JUAN MARTINEZ.

The shit you think matters doesn’t. It sounds glib, but your vibe attracts your tribe. If you present yourself as a positive, interesting person you will be surrounded by quality humans that love you because you’re you.

– JOSH BURRELL

For me, group texts have been a life saver. I talk to my group of seven friends, and we’ve all known each other for 30 years. 200+ messages back and forth every day. Joking, talking about life, sports, politics, everything. We see each other in person more because of it.

– CHRIS COLUCCI

Forget texting. If you really want to keep in touch with someone, you need to go old school and use your phone as a phone. The personal touch behind an actual phone call goes a long way toward maintaining those relationships.

– JORIS
I’m bad at keeping in touch. I feel like it’s because I’m evolving and my old friends are not. Are these friendships worth maintaining? I ask myself this all the time.

– RUDY KIRKHOPE

You can learn something from every person you come into contact with. Even if that lesson is not to do something.

– CHARLIE RETTBERG
Too many of us go into conversations like we’re going into battle.

- Chris Clancey
I broke up my first marriage (after 25 years) because I wouldn’t have the deep emotional conversations a relationship requires. Biggest mistake I’ve ever made.

– HARRY LEWIS

Rule Number 1: Never say anything, email anything, or text anything when you’re angry. This requires tremendous discipline. The very moment when every cell in your body is telling you to scream is the very moment you must hold your tongue.

– THEO

In the past, I’ve dwelled on ideas of how I thought the conversation would go. In reality, they were never accurate. I could nail done some of the conversation topics beforehand, but there would always be surprises that caught me off guard. When they came up, I focused on trying to predict what their next thought would be. I don’t have to tell you, but that’s very unfair to the other person. Instead of having a conversation with someone,
I was just playing a game with myself and focusing on fictional stories I made up in my head. Too many of us go into conversations like we’re going into battle. But in reality, these conversations are trying to build something new without an instruction manual.

– CHRISS CLANCEY

Think of a tube of toothpaste. If you squeeze too much out, there’s nothing you can do to put it back in. This is analogous to going overboard with your emotions when you’re speaking with another person. If you overdo it, you can’t just put the paste back in the tube and make things better.

– AARON HARRIS

I hate arguments. But we have them from time to time. Sometimes we disagree severely. We used to go at it for hours and both walk away in a silent, hateful huff. Now we acknowledge that other person just wants to be understood – even if we don’t think they’re correct. We’ve learned not to abruptly walk away from an argument until we both have a “are we done here?” moment. It’s best to not leave things unfinished.

– BRAD MCENTIRE

Stay calm. Use a level tone. Keep it factual. Be honest and authentic. Don’t make anything personal. Be willing to have your mind changed. Be willing to admit you’re wrong. Most important, be willing to say I’m sorry.

– CRAIG WELCH

We’re different people with different views. Sometimes we get overtired and overworked and drop the ball. We try to put the egos aside and just talk things through with as much understanding as possible. It takes a lot of work.

– DANIEL O’NEIL
Sometimes I write my feelings down to get them out of my head and on paper. I take a walk or sleep on them and then address them in the morning. When I come back, I often find a completely different approach to the solution with less anger. This has helped me to raise my children.

– DEBI GINETTI

I remember my parents telling me as a kid that sometimes being nice is bad, because it focuses too much on the short-term feelings of the other person. It lets you rationalize lying to someone in order to make them feel better, which is creating a bigger issue in the long-term. So I try to act with kindness and consideration, but not so much of it that I do the wrong thing. In other words, I try to make sure I do the right thing – not the easy thing.

– SHANE DUQUETTE
I’M NOT CERTAIN WHAT MY FUTURE LOOKS LIKE. BUT I’M OK WITH THAT.
- JAMES WONG
A note from Nate: My number one piece of advice (especially if you’re just starting out in a new industry): Find a way to help someone important accomplish something big – and don’t take any public credit for it. Some of my best work has been done behind-the-scenes and has led to more opportunities than if I’d selfishly tried to “get ahead” on my own. Also, save six months of living expenses before you quit your job, especially if you have people who depend on you financially.

I got fired from my job yesterday. And my wife is due with our first child in nine days. Good timing, right? I told my wife and parents I got fired. I sent a group text to my closest friends. (I love them, trust them, and refuse to let my ego get in the way of asking for help.) This morning I woke up, shaved, showered, and started my new full-time job search. With the help of my friends and family, I have two interviews lined up already. Sometimes having your back up against the wall is a good thing. We’ll be OK.

– CHRISTOPHER PERRY
Getting fired is often the best thing that can happen because if you really wanted to be there, you would have done what you needed to stay.

– RUDY KIRKHOPE

Ask yourself: Do I want my boss’s job? If you don’t, you might want to consider another line of work.

– MATT

Just a few months ago I quit my job to go back to school and become an EMT/Firefighter. It was scary at first because I’m making less money now as I focus on school. Plus, I’m 31 and have a case of the ‘shoulds’. I should be at this stage of my life, I should be making more money, I should have these things. But I had to ask myself what was more important in the long run. I had to ask what made me happy: making more money doing something that didn’t interest me; or finding something that was actually fulfilling.

– MATT RAISSCH

I started working in an international engineering company at age 18, simply because I didn’t know what else I wanted to do. After a while, I had a great career, a new car, no debt, and I almost bought my first house. All my friends were buying houses and my family was telling me it was the smart thing to do. But instead, I quit my job and decided to travel. People were shocked. My dad disapproved and didn’t understand why I would give up something many people would love to have. My mum told me to do what made me happy.

I traveled around Asia for nine months. I ate foods I’ve never dreamed of, learned to ride a scooter in Vietnam, and lived in a Kung Fu school in northern China for a week. After that I took a job teaching English to children in a school in Taiwan. I’ve been here for almost a year. I’m almost 28 now and I’m not certain what my future looks like. But I’m OK with that. I plan to start
studying Mandarin full time. I figure if all else fails, I can still be an engineer again.

– JAMES WONG

You can learn how to be a better leader and mentor by asking the right questions. I found that the best question to ask anyone who requests your time is: “What’s the one item holding you up that you would like my help with?”

Once the conversation begins, make sure to ask two follow-up questions:

1. What does success [with this project] look like?
2. What are your next steps?”

– BILL DAGIANTIS

You’re too old to be trying to please your parents. The money doesn’t matter. Status is a joke.

– TYLER WATKINS

I’m in the middle of training for a new career. I got a degree in Exercise Science and assumed my job picks would HAVE to somehow remain under the umbrella of my undergrad. I spent a year and a half in a job that barely used my knowledge and didn’t challenge me. After crashing and burning during another interview, I needed a change.

So I committed myself to a job in vehicle reconditioning. It’s a trade skill I’ll have the rest of my life and it’ll pay great. I know my wife and I will be better able to support ourselves and our future family and actually pay back our loans. I’m not throwing away my hopes for a job in the health industry. But I was at a point where I had to make a decision: keep spinning my wheels or take a chance and do something different.

– MATT WILLIAMS
I’m 36 with three kids. I find myself working a stressful corporate job in an industry I have no interest in, surrounded by petty ego-driven, power-hungry people I have very little in common with. Every day it’s difficult to get out of bed and drag myself to the office. And every evening when I get home it takes me at least an hour to relax enough to enjoy being there. I find myself thinking about work when my kids are trying to tell me about their day. I’m guilty of creating the need for me to work a job I don’t like. Now I realize this, and it’s not too late. I can untangle myself, but it’s going to be difficult and it’s going to take time. It’s not too late for you.

– CRAIG WELCH

Life ebbs and flows. You can’t be straight killing it every day of the week, every week of the year. So just go with it. Persevere. Learn. Before you know it, you’ll be back on top. For a bit.

– ELLIOT

AND TWO LONGER CONTRIBUTIONS ABOUT WORK THAT ARE WORTH READING.

I pulled into the parking garage and parked my car. I turned off the engine and let out a deep sigh. I looked at the door handle, but I couldn’t pull it. I physically could not get out of the car.

The thought of going up the elevator and into that office one more time was physically paralyzing. So I sat there.
It was September 2013, and I was working as a video editor in Beverly Hills. I’d been in LA for a couple of years. I moved from Texas the day after graduating film school to start a career. It seemed like the logical thing to do. I started as an intern and got to know the studios by being a background actor on bullshit TV shows. Work was scarce at first. Even when I got work in production or post-production, it was still freelance work.

Most gigs were only a few days or a week at most. So I was always looking. I had relatively little experience and skills, so I didn’t have much to offer. I was applying for 50 jobs a week, and not getting any callbacks. I had some friends that were taking part time gigs in the service industry to make ends meet, but I didn’t want to do that. Eventually, I got a call from a friend that knew of an opening at his work. So I took it.

A few months passed, and I was thankful for regular work, but I felt like I was breaking down. There I was, sitting alone in a cold, dark room, staring at a computer screen for 12-16 hours a day. Is this what I really wanted? Is this what I signed up for? I kept telling myself that this is what I came to LA for. I chose work over friends. I chose work over relationships. I chose work over my own physical well-being.

I was new to the game and already burning out. When one gig was coming to a close, I started looking for something else. I was working 9-5 in Santa Monica, then driving to Burbank in rush hour traffic and working a night gig from 7-3am. The fear of unemployment was real.

One day I came to a realization while working on a completely soulless piece of shit show. I looked around the office and realized I didn’t want anyone’s else’s job.

I’m in my twenties. I’m paying my dues. I don’t have the skills or experience to work on anything else. But what about those guys? They’ve worked on some great projects with some really talented people. They are passionate about their work. But
they’re in their thirties, forties, fifties even, and they’re still working on this garbage. Is work really that scarce?

I saw the path that I was on. I saw what people with my skills and experience were doing ten, twenty, thirty years later. And I didn’t want to be them. I had to get out of there. I had to do something else.

So there I am. Sitting in my car in the parking garage. I try to distract myself by listening to some old voicemails. I play one from my ex girlfriend. “Hi Matty!” her voice chirps. “This is literally the best day of my life! Thank you so much for telling me to quit my job, and do something I actually care about. I just turned in my resignation, and I feel incredible!”

I was stunned. I had forgotten. It’s easy to offer advice when you hear about someone else struggles, but sometimes it’s difficult to have the perspective to make the same decisions for yourself.

After hearing that message, I felt a rush of positive energy. I called her. I don’t remember much of what she said other than this:

“You’ve been saying these same things [about your job] for over a year. What makes you think it’s is going to change?”

She was right.

That was my last day.

I walked into the office, told my boss I was done, got back in my car, drove away, and never looked back.

After about a month of being broke and doing some soul searching, I realized that a career in hospitality was right for me. I wanted to do something social. I wanted to create experiences and tell stories in different ways. Whether I realized it or not, it’s what I had been passionate about all along. The pay was low. I had to start all over. But my enthusiasm could not be restrained. I looked forward to work everyday, and I kicked ass.
That was a few years ago. Since then, I have climbed the ranks, started some side projects, been promoted, and had a great time doing it. I work at one of the best restaurants in Los Angeles, and I make more than double the money I was making in television. I take pride in my work, and there are new challenges everyday.

I wouldn’t trade it for anything.

– Matt

In 2002, I was 25 years old. I had a BA and was going to teach but lost my passion for it. I ended up as an IT recruiter. Decent job and I had $10,000 in the bank and no debt. But I wasn’t happy. I had a lot of personal problems to resolve (fighting with my family, not sure what I wanted to do with my life, etc.) Meanwhile a lot of my friends had gotten pretty deep into the party scene, a place I couldn’t see myself going.

So I took off to Europe and promised myself to not come back until I had sorted out my career and personal life. One way ticket.

I wrote in a red and black journal, every day. I ended up working at a local pub. I stayed up late and pondered everything. I’d take day trips into London and I spent a few weeks in Italy and Greece.

After a few months I realized that everything in the job market is super-competitive. No matter what you do, from plumbing, to acting, to sailing instructor, to garbage man. So you might as well do what you love. And if you do that, you’ll have the passion to beat out the competition.

I didn’t want to end up like my Dad who sacrificed his mental health for his job the last 10 years of his career.

So I got to work. To figure out what I wanted to do, I started with the most ridiculous and idealized: Rock star or actor. I could totally do those things. I showed skills in those things throughout
my life. Ah, but the rejection. You have to face a lot of that before you get good. I don’t do well with rejection.

Next was sailing instructor. Too seasonal.

Next was nutritionist. I was fascinated by that subject. It seemed realistic but I had no education in the subject. I circled back to my original theory about passion and how that can overcome any odds.

So I took on a six-figure debt, went back home, and got another degree, this time in nutrition.

It’s been 10 years, and I’m still paying that debt off. But only a few days have ever truly felt like work. Soon, that debt will be gone and I’ll still be doing exactly what I love.

– KYLE BYRON
FORGET ABOUT PASSION. FOLLOW YOUR CURiosity INSTEAD. FOR EXAMPLE: DO YOU EVER FIND YOURSELF WONDERING WHAT THE FUCKING DEAL IS WITH THE PLATYPUS?

– CAROLINA BELMARES
Drugs will help.

– MARC

Basic “shit-togetherness”:
• Not living paycheck to paycheck
• Not abusing drugs, alcohol, or food
• Building skills and doing fulfilling work

Ideal “shit-togetherness”:
• Eating healthy food
• Regular exercise
• Reading every day
• Having a financial safety net
• Voting in every election
• Caring about the broader community

– DAN TRAPP

I don’t have a ton of money but I can always pay my bills. I own my home. I’m married. My wife and I are expecting our first child. My yard is fenced in so my dog can run and play. Some people look at me and say I have my shit together. I feel like my life is a wreck most days.

– DANIEL

I went through a crisis and found some answers by asking myself these questions:

• What gives you energy? Doesn’t matter if it’s people, ideas, or certain activities.

• What type of people do you enjoy being around?

• What personality traits do you admire in others – and how can you develop them?

• What are your core principles and beliefs? The things that piss you off when they’re violated.

I took some time and wrote my answers. For some of them, I was more honest than I wanted to be. But I was able to see the difference between what I was doing and what I wanted to be doing. That helped me create a path.

– JIM WHITING

Overthinking kills. We’re becoming this generation who has a compulsive need to figure everything out, without any space in our mind to slow down and appreciate uncertainty.

– JENRRY
Talk to people who are doing what you think you want to do. People are willing to give advice if you just ask. If you can, follow them around for a day or two, and see what the job entails. Gather info. Send emails. Then make the best decision you can.

– JASON TRAXON

Get started doing SOMETHING. From there, see what you like the most about it and start focusing more on that. When I started a graphic design business we worked with anyone we could find and did anything graphic design related. We eventually realized that we preferred working with young entrepreneurs and musicians, and we preferred doing web stuff over print stuff.

So we put that stuff in our portfolio, started seeking those clients and projects, and started slowly dropping the corporate and print work. After working with the entrepreneurs for a while, we decided to create our own products. Most of the musicians we were working with were too poor to afford a custom website, so our first product was affordable web templates for musicians.

Over time we learned what we liked to do and what we were best at. But we had to start with something.

– SHANE DUQUETTE

I could go on on about trying to strike a balance with food, exercise, alcohol, drugs, sex, relationships, health, self-care, finances, learning, professional development, socializing, happiness, depression…the thing is, it’s all connected. We only have so much time and energy to dedicate to all the different parts of our life. Someone who is at least recognizing this and attempting to strike that balance is someone who has their shit together in my opinion.

– SARAH RYDER

If you have your shit together, you are your biggest fan in the most humble of ways. You realize that beating yourself up is
counterproductive. Instead, you train yourself to be as kind to yourself as you are of others.

– DRASKO RAICEVIC

The only people I know who have their shit together are my girlfriend’s parents. They’re Spanish middle-class workers. The wife is a nurse. The husband works some administrative job. They don’t have much, but they do have routine and rhythm. Every day has the same basic structure: Breakfast, lunch, dinner, working in the family garden, a siesta, falling asleep in front of the TV before heading to bed. They meet friends and family every day. They eat good food. If that’s not having your shit together, I don’t know what is.

– JONAS FECHTNER

Someone who has their shit together is consistent. They’re the same person on Monday as they are on Friday.

– IAN WALLACE

It’s cliche, but think of your dream day. Where are you in the world? What time do you wake up? Who are you with? Then work forward from there, detailing what you have for breakfast, what time you start work, what you do to make a living, how you spend your free time and so on.

Now, can that exact paradise be possible? Maybe, maybe not. But it gives you an idea of what really matters to you in life. If your dream day involves you waking up next to a beach and your evenings are spent playing cards and watching the sunset, that’s probably not nearly as hard to achieve you might think.

– MIKE SAMUELS
We have to fight to get so much in life, just to get anything done. It’s nice when you realize that you get to pick what you want to struggle against.

– BRAD MCENTIRE


– ANNA LYNCH

Forget about “passion”. Follow your curiosity instead. It can be the most ridiculous thing. For example, do you ever find yourself wondering what the fucking deal is with the platypus? Like, is it a duck? Or an otter? And it lays eggs? But it breastfeeds its young? Is this shit for real? Follow that twinge of curiosity and – this is key – allow it to lead you nowhere.

Because maybe in the process of connecting with the freedom of the irrational, the nonsensical, the utterly absurd you might find what your heart has been yearning for. This is how people become experts, invent things, and how market needs are discovered and fulfilled. Curiosity is all it takes. So, future platypus conservationists of the world: You. Are. Welcome.

– CAROLINA BELMARES

No one really has their shit together! Some of us have less piles of shit! Others have large piles of shit! We all just manage around shit! Life is working around shit as it comes up!

– DEBI GANNETT
WHEN SOMEONE IS ROUGHLY 40 YEARS OLD, YOU CAN TELL WHETHER OR NOT THEY’VE SMILED FOR MOST OF THEIR LIFE.
- MATT BONA
FINALLY, LET’S ALL JUST BE GRATEFUL FOR WHAT WE HAVE AND TAKE CARE OF OURSELVES


If, like many people, you tend to be vaguely unhappy much of the time, it can be very helpful to manufacture a feeling of gratitude by simply contemplating all the terrible things that have not happened to you, or to think of how many people would consider their prayers answered if they could only live as you are now. The mere fact that you have the leisure to read this book puts you in very rarefied company. Many people on earth at this moment can’t even imagine the freedom that you currently take for granted.

– SAM HARRIS, WAKING UP
When someone is roughly 40 years old, you can tell whether or not they’ve smiled for most of their life.

– MATT BONA

Every damn day I try to remind myself to be grateful. There were points in the last few years where I was grateful for the toilet paper in the closet, a can of beans in the pantry, the fact that I had money to pay a bill. I’m grateful for my wife, my daughter, my family, my friends. I’m grateful I have a job, an income, and three square meals a day. I’m grateful I don’t work in a sweat shop for slave wages. I’m grateful my car runs.

– DAVID HARPER

Last month I had a medical emergency that led to a couple weeks in the hospital, mostly in the ICU. At 29, I had contracted an unknown virus that lead to severe pneumonia, pulmonary failure, and actually caused a heart attack. Me, a strength and conditioning coach, having a heart attack at age 29. Not something I saw coming.

I couldn’t talk or sit up; I was breathing through tubes. I was faced with the reality that this might be the extent of my existence. I was conscious for a good portion of my ICU stay and didn’t sleep, so I had plenty of time to reflect.

I thought, “Have I had a positive impact on people? Did people walk away from an interaction with me and feel good?” I also thought: “Have I done cool things? Have I gotten out of my comfort zone and explored? Have I really actually lived?”

It was a powerful experience reflecting on these things. I don’t feel I would have got to that level of thinking unless faced with such an uncertain outcome. But coming out the other side, I feel a stronger sense of how I’d like to approach the rest of my life.

– BEN MATLAK
If you feel pressured to do more, produce more, work more, but you know it’s time for you-time, put your blinders on, turn off your phone, and give a middle finger to the world for a minute while you take yourself out to dinner and a movie or a walk in the park.

– MAC THOMAS

Choosing to lose sleep = choosing sub-optimal performance.

– ROBERT MILLIGAN

Don’t spend money while hungry or drunk.

– AJ

Just do the thing you want to do daily. Touch it every day. Work on it. Only then will you continue to get better at it.

– ARASH HAILE

Don’t seek to escape boredom through a screen. Just be there. Breathe. Savor the moment. Be available to the people around you.

– MATTHEW HUNTER

I live a simple life. I traveled, partied, and was a paratrooper in the army. I fought in a cage, I’m married, and I have loving friends and parents. Life is good, man.

– CHAD ELLIS
LET’S END THERE

A note from Nate: Thanks for reading.

Have fun with life. People take things too seriously and don’t know how to enjoy things anymore. There’s a time and a place for everything but in the grand scheme, have fun and be comfortable with yourself. People who want to be serious and conservative all the time can take the back seat. We don’t want that shit over here.

– CHRISTIAN ZABALA

…if I don’t call this to a halt, I’m going to find myself writing a book. I hope it’s not as confusing as it looks at first glance. Keep in mind, of course, that this is my way of looking at things. I happen to think it’s pretty generally applicable, but you may not. Each of us has to create our own credo. This merely happens to be mine.

– MASON BRESETT
Nate Green is a writer, fitness expert, and coach.

He helps ambitious people hone their focus and follow through with all the shit they say they want to do – especially when it comes to health, fitness, productivity, and business.

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