

THE BIG IDEAS

Throwing Up

It happens.

Work & Its By-Products

Let results take care of themselves.

True Love

The amateur vs. the professional.

It's 9 O'Clock

Time for inspiration to strike.

Time to Turn Pro

A checklist.

Envy-Based Criticism

= Supreme compliments.

Stop Criticizing Others

And get to work.

Sitting Down & Trying

Is what it's all about.

Our Job in this Lifetime

Becoming who we already are.

Give Us What You Got.

Now, pretty please.

The War of Art

Break Through the Blocks and Win Your Inner Creative Battles

BY STEVEN PRESSFIELD · GRAND CENTRAL PUBLISHING © 2002 · 165 PAGES

“Kabbalists believe that above every blade of grass is an angel crying “Grow! Grow!” I’ll go further. I believe that above the entire human race is one super-angel, crying “Evolve! Evolve!””

~ Steven Pressfield from *The War of Art*

The War of Art.

This is the 109th PhilosophersNote I’ve created.

Up to this point, I’ve made a lot of strong recommendations on books I think you’d love but I’ve never said you *must* read a particular book.

I’m gonna break that streak here.

If you’re a creative person, you need to read this book. It’s that good. And, when I say “creative person” I mean anyone who’s committed to creating an authentically awesome life. (And, given the fact that you’re reading this Note, my hunch is that clearly means YOU!)

I’m not sure how many times I’ve read *The War of Art* over the years but it’s a lot. Each time I pick it up I get a swift kick in the creative butt and my life takes a significant step forward.

As the author of *The Legend of Bagger Vance* and a number of great best-selling novels (my favorite beyond *Bagger Vance* is *Gates of Fire*—an incredible portrayal of the classic Spartan warriors), Steven Pressfield knows what it’s like to create. He has an extraordinary way of capturing the challenges we face in the War of Art—along with the means by which we can overcome those obstacles (or, as he calls it “Resistance”). Powerful stuff.

So, get the book. I *promise* you’ll thank me. :)

The book is essentially one awesome Big Idea after another. Super easy-to-read. Super inspiring. Let’s look at a handful of my favorites, shall we?

THROWING UP AND GETTING TO WORK

“The amateur believes he must first overcome his fear, then he can do his work. The professional knows that fear can never be overcome. He knows there’s no such thing as a fearless warrior or a dread-free artist.”

What Henry Fonda does, after puking into the toilet in his dressing room, is to clean up and march out onstage. He’s still terrified but he forces himself forward in spite of his terror. He knows that once he gets out into the action, his fear will recede and he’ll be okay.”

Pressfield tells us that Henry Fonda was still throwing up before every stage performance *even when he was seventy-five!!*

Fear. It doesn’t go away.

And, altho it still sucks every time I feel fear as I sit down to work (yes, I have fear and yes, I

think it's funny that most people think I don't!), it's incredibly liberating to hear inspiring stories about great peeps throwing up. So, how about another one? :)

John Eliot, in his awesome book *Overachievement* ([see Notes](#)) tells us: “Bill Russell is one of the great names in basketball, an all-American... the only athlete to ever win an NCAA Championship, an Olympic Gold Medal, and a professional championship all in the same year—1956... But Bill Russell had this one problem: He threw up before every game.”

Eliot also tells us: “Butterflies, cotton mouth, and a pounding heart make the finest performers smile—the smile of a person with an ace up their sleeves... They definitely would agree with Tiger Woods, who has often said, ‘The day I’m not nervous stepping onto the first tee— that’s the day I quit.’”

So, REMEMBER: If you have fear as you sit down to create, don't think you're a moron. Know you're a warrior-creator. And, get to work.

WORK AND ITS BY-PRODUCTS

“We must do our work for its own sake, not for fortune or applause.”

~ Steven Pressfield

“The professional has learned that success, like happiness, comes as a by-product of work. The professional concentrates on the work and allows rewards to come or not come, whatever they like.”

Genius.

Reminds me of John Wooden in his classic book, *Wooden* ([see Notes](#)): “I finally coined my definition [of success] in 1934: Success is peace of mind that is the direct result of self-satisfaction in knowing you did your best to become the best that you are capable of becoming.

Furthermore, only one person can ultimately judge the level of your success—you. Think about that for a moment.

I believe that is what true success is. Anything stemming from that success is simply a by-product, whether it be the score, the trophy, a national championship, fame, or fortune. They are all by-products of success rather than success itself, indicators that you perhaps succeeded in the more important contest.

The real contest, of course, is striving to reach your personal best, and that is totally under your control. When you achieve that, you have achieved success. Period! You are a winner and only you fully know if you won.”

In short, full effort = full success.

P.S. *The Bhagavad Gita* ([see Notes](#)) echoes this sentiment as well: “The awakened sages call a person wise when all his undertakings are free from anxiety about results.”

P.P.S. For a modern portrayal of that ancient classic, check out Pressfield's *Legend of Bagger of Vance*. It's essentially the Gita set on a golf course. Great stuff!

TRUE LOVE

“The amateur plays part-time, the professional full-time. The amateur is a weekend warrior. The professional is there seven days a week.

The word *amateur* comes from the Latin root meaning “to love.” The conventional interpretation is that the amateur pursues his calling out of love, while the pro does it for the money. Not the way I see it. In my view, the amateur does not love the game enough. If he did, he would not pursue it as a sideline, distinct from his “real” vocation.

The professional loves it so much he dedicates his life to it. He commits full-time.”

God, that's strong.

So much of this just makes me want to wave and shout and point and say: "What he said!!!!"

So, there ya go.

* Waves and shouts and points and says: "What he said!!!!" *

And... Begs the question: Are you an amateur or a professional?

INSPIRATION STRIKES AT 9 O'CLOCK SHARP

"Someone once asked Somerset Maugham if he wrote on a schedule or only when struck by inspiration. "I write only when inspiration strikes," he replied. "Fortunately it strikes every morning at nine o'clock sharp."

Another point and scream moment.

I remember reading Stephen King's book on how to write (appropriately called *On Writing*) with my jaw dropped open throughout—stunned at the sheer awesomeness of the man's commitment to his craft and the productivity he demanded of himself.

Personally, it's *amazing* what I can create when I force myself to start my day creating rather than hopping online. I'm currently on one of those incredible streaks of creative goodness that comes when I have the discipline to show up and start working whether I feel like it or not. I've been here a few times before but always let it slip after awhile. Excited to make it stick this time.

It's truly stunning to see that, whether I feel inspired when I start or not, if I can fight the little whiny Resistance gremlins long enough to just START, great stuff tends to flow. And, even if it doesn't and the gremlins want to use that as evidence we should call it a day, when I force myself to just write the next line, then the next line, within a matter of minutes I'm usually in flow and can't believe what I just created.

As Pressfield says: "Maugham reckoned another deeper truth: that by performing the mundane act of sitting down and starting to work, he set in motion a mysterious but infallible sequence of events that would produce inspiration, as surely as if the goddess had synchronized her watch with his."

How about you?

You wait for inspiration to strike or have you/are you training her to show up at a certain time?!

(P.S. Check out Elizabeth Gilbert's great TED talk on exactly this. [Click here](#) or Google it.)

"Rule of thumb: The more important a call or action is to our soul's evolution, the more resistance we will feel toward pursuing it."

~ Steven Pressfield

TIME TO TURN PRO

Throughout the book, Pressfield tells us we need to beat Resistance by becoming a Professional. He has an *awesome* chapter where he goes off on how to do it. Here's the overview:

"What exactly are the qualities that define us as professionals?"

1. *We show up every day.*
2. *We show up no matter what.*
3. *We stay on the job all day.*
4. *We are committed over the long haul.*
5. *The stakes for us are high and real.*
6. *We accept remuneration for our labor.*
7. *We do not overidentify with our jobs.*
8. *We master the technique of our jobs.*

9. *We have a sense of humor about our jobs.*

10. *We receive praise or blame in the real world.*”

Here's to turning pro. (And check out the book for the full goods on how to do it!)

CRITICS & SUPREME COMPLIMENTS

“The professional learns to recognize envy-driven criticism and to take it for what it is: the supreme compliment. The critic hates most that which he would have done himself if he had the guts.”

As we know, they don't build too many statues for critics.

I love the way Pressfield captures the essence of envy-based criticism. How about a few more critic-gems?!

First, gotta love Samuel Goldwyn's quip: *“Don't pay attention to the critics. Don't even ignore them.”* (Which, given our mind's tendency to lock onto negative stuff and forget the positive, is a pretty solid idea. :)

And, Paulo Coelho recently blogged a bunch of sweet quotes about critics. This one by John Grisham rocks: *“Critics should find meaningful work.”* Hah.

This anonymous one Coelho shared is my favorite: *“Critics are like eunuchs in a harem; they know how it's done, they've seen it done every day, but they're unable to do it themselves.”*

Here's to working so hard we don't have time to worry about lame critics.

Speaking of people who like to criticize, how about this goodness?

STOP CRITICIZING OTHERS

“If you find yourself criticizing other people, you're probably doing it out of Resistance. When we see others beginning to live their authentic lives, it drives us crazy if we have not lived out our own.

Individuals who are realized in their own lives almost never criticize others. If they speak at all, it is to offer encouragement. Watch yourself. Of all the manifestations of Resistance, most only harm ourselves. Criticism and cruelty harm others as well.”

Do you find yourself criticizing other people?

If so, you might wanna have a nice long look in the mirror, because you're almost definitely projecting some of your nasty old shadow into the world.

It's amazing for me to see when I'm being most pissy with Alexandra. It's ALWAYS, A.L.W.A.Y.S., ALWAYS!, when *I'm* not doing my creative work.

If I sit down and crush it, I'm a joy to be around. If I don't, odds are there's a little unconscious pissy-ness brewing in there that has a chance to come out in the form of criticism.

ALWAYS.

So, if you've been critical or just plain grumpy lately, check in and see if the problem is that you're not creating. And get on it.

On the other side of the dealio, when you DO start to create like the rock star you are, you're bound to get some criticism. Notice that there's a pretty strong inverse correlation between the virulence of the person's criticism and their own creative output. In other words, if they're not showing up and rockin' it, they're likely to be pretty vocal about your shortcomings.

Rather than getting triggered by 'em, see if you can remind yourself that you can also be a weenie

“ We unplug ourselves from the grid by recognizing that we will never cure our restlessness by contributing our disposable income to the bottom line of Bullshit, Inc. but only by doing our work.”

~ Steven Pressfield

when you're not on. Send them some compassion and re-commit to your creative work so you don't fall into the same tendency to criticize!

"The best and only thing one artist can do for another is to serve as an example and an inspiration."

~ Steven Pressfield

SITTING DOWN AND TRYING

"Why have I stressed professionalism so heavily in the preceding chapters? Because the most important thing about art is to work. Nothing else matters except sitting down every day and trying."

Love that.

Reminds me of Mary Elaine-Jacobsen's great book *The Gifted Adult* ([see Notes](#)). She, too, hammers home the importance of showing up and offers this magical line: *"The difference between a creative person and a creative producer is hard work."*

Are you sitting down every day and trying?

Nothing else matters.

OUR JOB IN THIS LIFETIME

"Our job in this lifetime is not to shape ourselves into some ideal we imagine we ought to be, but to find out who we already are and become it.

If we were born to paint, it's our job to become a painter.

If we were born to raise and nurture children, it's our job to become a mother.

If we were born to overthrow the order of ignorance and injustice in the world, it's our job to realize it and get down to business."

Kinda begs the question: What were you born to do?

To echo Pressfield's wisdom, I offer some Maslow and Frankl mojo.

First, Maslow ([see Notes](#) on *Motivation and Personality*): *"Musicians must make music, artists must paint, poets must write if they are to be ultimately at peace with themselves. What human beings can be, they must be. They must be true to their own nature. This need we may call self-actualization... It refers to man's desire for self-fulfillment, namely to the tendency for him to become actually in what he is potentially: to become everything one is capable of becoming."*

And, some Viktor Frankl mojo ([see Notes](#) on *Man's Search for Meaning*): *"Ultimately, man should not ask what the meaning of his life is, but rather must recognize that it is he who is asked. In a word, each man is questioned by life; and he can only answer to life by answering for his own life; to life he can only respond by being responsible."*

So, my friend. For what were you created?

To be a painter? A mother? An entrepreneur?

Please bless us with your gifts as we win this War of Art!!

GIVE US WHAT YOU GOT

"Creative work is not a selfish act or a bid for attention on the part of the actor. It's a gift to the world and every being in it. Don't cheat us of your contribution. Give us what you got."

Those are the final words of the book in what has gotta be the best final page of any book I've read.

Before I send you off to give us what you got, Joseph Campbell and Eknath Easwaran come to mind.

First, Campbell from his *Pathways to Bliss* ([see Notes](#)): “What is it we are questing for? It is the fulfillment of that which is potential in each of us. Questing for it is not an ego trip; it is an adventure to bring into fulfillment your gift to the world, which is yourself. There’s nothing you can do that’s more important than being fulfilled. You become a sign, you become a signal, transparent to transcendence; in this way, you will find, live, and become a realization of your own personal myth.”

And now some Eknath Easwaran mojo (this is from his brilliant book on meditation called *Conquest of Mind* (which we have a Note on; and check out the Notes on *The Dhammapada* and the *Bhagavad Gita*—both of which were translated by Easwaran): “To fail to live up to this challenge, my spiritual teacher used to say, is simply being irresponsible. This is not asking for perfection but merely expecting us to do our best to grow. If we do not do this much, we are depriving life of a contribution that only we can make. Spiritual living is responsible living. I am responsible not only for myself but for all of you, just as all of you are responsible for each other and for me.”

Hope you enjoyed this quick look at an awesome book. If it’s resonating with you, go get it. Like now.

And, please. Give us what you got!!!



Brian Johnson,
Heroic Philosopher CEO

If you liked this Note,
you’ll probably like...

[Pathways to Bliss](#)

[Conquest of Mind](#)

[Wooden](#)

[The Gifted Adult](#)

[Mastery](#)

[Man’s Search for Meaning](#)

About the Author of This Note

BRIAN JOHNSON



Brian Johnson is the Founder + CEO of Heroic. He’s spent half of the last 25 years as a Founder/CEO and the other half as a Philosopher. Brian loves integrating ancient wisdom and modern science to help YOU become the best, most heroic version of yourself so we can create a world in which 51% of humanity is flourishing by 2051. Learn more at heroic.us.