

## THE BIG IDEAS

### Shadow Callings

Are tricky little things.

### Habits

An amateur's vs. a professional's.

### Our Days

Change when we turn pro.

### Ecstatic Hell

Epiphanies, good and bad.

### What Is a Practice

The key aspects.

### You Are That Hero

Give us what you've got.

# Turning Pro

Tap Your Inner Power and Create Your Life's Work

BY STEVEN PRESSFIELD · BLACK IRISH BOOKS © 2012 · 132 PAGES

"The thesis of this book is that what ails you and me has nothing to do with being sick or being wrong. What ails us is that we are living our lives as amateurs.

The solution, this book suggests, is that we turn pro.

Turning pro is free, but it's not easy. You don't need to take a course or buy a product. All you have to do is change your mind.

Turning pro is free, but not without cost. When we turn pro, we give up a life with which we may have become extremely comfortable. We give up a self that we have come to identify with and to call our own...

Turning pro is not for everyone. We have to be a little crazy to do it, or even to want to. In many ways the passage chooses us; we don't choose it. We simply have no alternative.

What we get when we turn pro is, we find our power. We find our will and our voice and we find our self-respect. We become who we always were but had, until then, been afraid to embrace and to live out.

Do you remember where you were on 9/11? You'll remember where you were when you turn pro."

~ Steven Pressfield from *Turning Pro*

*"I wrote in 'The War of Art' that I could divide my life neatly into two parts: before turning pro and after. After is better."*

~ Steven Pressfield

In *The War of Art* ([see those Notes](#) and get the book if you haven't already!), Steven Pressfield tells us that the word *amateur* comes from the Latin root meaning "to love."

But he tells us that we've got it wrong.

If we *really* loved something, we wouldn't be an amateur. We wouldn't be a weekend warrior, a hobbyist who puts his or her spare time into something.

We'd go all in. We'd commit full-time. We'd become a Professional and show the proper level of commitment to something we love so deeply.

In short, we'd turn pro.

Written in Steve's ineffable style, this book is a mini-manifesto on how we go about Turning Pro. There are three sections: *Book One: The Amateur Life* + *Book Two: Self-Inflicted Wounds* + *Book Three: The Professional Mindset*.

I'm excited to share a handful of my favorite Big Ideas (along with my own process of Turning Pro) and hope you dig it.

Let's jump straight in!

## SHADOW CALLINGS

*"When we're living as amateurs, we're running away from our calling—meaning our work, our destiny, the obligation to become our truest and highest selves."*

~ Steven Pressfield

"Sometimes, when we're terrified of embracing our true calling, we'll pursue a shadow calling instead. That shadow career is a metaphor for our real career. Its shape is similar, its contours feel tantalizing the same. But a shadow career entails no real risk. If we fail at a shadow career, the consequences are meaningless to us.

Are you pursuing a shadow career?

Are you getting your Ph.D. in Elizabethan studies because you're afraid to write the tragedies and comedies that you know you have inside of you? Are you living the drugs-and-booze half of the musician's life, without actually writing the music? Are you working in support capacity for an innovator because you're afraid to risk becoming an innovator yourself?

If you're dissatisfied with your current life, ask yourself what your current life is a metaphor for.

This metaphor will point you toward your true calling."

Shadow callings.

Let me tell you a little story about mine. (Laughing.)

It goes a little like this: One fine May morning in 2011 (nearly four years ago as I write this), Mr. Pressfield and I were having breakfast at a charming little place in Santa Monica. (Thanks again to [Tripp Lanier](#) of *The New Man* for connecting us.)

We were each enjoying a nice, warm bowl of oatmeal with strawberries (I was still vegan at the time), chatting about classic Greek virtue (Steve wrote an amazing epic novel about the Spartan warrior ethic called *Gates of Fire*; and, get this, he's an honorary Spartan citizen <—What?!).

Steve knew that I had playfully given myself a Ph.D. in Optimal Living as a lover of wisdom (aka Philosopher), integrating ancient wisdom + modern science + common sense + virtue + mastery + fun and he asked me a question that set a choir of angels off in my head.

This was the question: "*Have you ever considered creating a modern-day Plato's Academy?*"

Wow. Hm...mmmm...

A modern-day Plato's Academy?

Now THAT would be cool.

I got all fired up, bought a URL that night and \*immediately\* started hustling to create what I conceived to be a modern-day Plato's Academy.

The idea was simple: clearly, a modern-day Plato's Academy would be virtual. We'd get all the best teachers across all the domains of optimal living—from leading doctors teaching about health, fitness and nutrition to Positive Psychologists sharing the science of happiness. Leadership and creativity experts doing their thing side-by-side with parenting and relationship experts.

I recruited my friends and favorite teachers to share their wisdom. We produced 100 classes in year 1. Then, as I turned forty a couple years later, I really leaned into it, raising more money and leading our team in recruiting 250 teachers and producing 500+ classes en route to our big goals of 1,000+ teachers and 10,000+. (Go us!)

Then... It dawned on me that I got it COMPLETELY wrong. And, I mean *completely* when I say completely. (Laughing some more.)

I was living a shadow calling. It looked pretty good. It was pretty exciting.

And it wasn't my *true* calling.

*"What you and I are really seeking is our own voice, our own truth, our own authenticity."*

~ Steven Pressfield

While I was hustling to get everybody else's wisdom out there, I conveniently created a life where I could avoid getting MY work out there.

Here's the funny part: Plato's Academy? Well, Plato's Academy featured ONE teacher, Plato, teaching a morning class to beginning students and an afternoon class to advanced students.

In a big \*facepalm\* moment, it dawned on me that Plato didn't travel to Asia, Europe, Africa and the Middle East to find the best teachers and recruit them to join him at his Academy in Athens. That would have made him an *administrator*, not a Philosopher.

D'oh. Exhale.

Soooo... It was time to turn pro. And, that's what I did—essentially blowing up the other parts of our business and committing myself full-time to my work. And, here we are. :)

Back to *you*.

Are you living your true calling or a shadow version of it?

Let's turn pro.

... And, let's look at a few Big Ideas on what that means, shall we?

## ECSTATIC MOMENTS OF HELL

"We usually think of breakthroughs as ecstatic moments that elevate us from a lower level to a higher. And they do. But there's a paradox. In the moment, an epiphany feels like hell. Like Rosanne Cash's dream, an epiphany trashes us. It exposes us and leaves us naked. We see ourselves plain, and it's not a pretty picture.

The essence of epiphanies is the stripping away of self-delusion. We thought we were X. Now suddenly we see we're minus-X. We're X divided by infinity.

There is great power in this moment. We've lost something, yes. A cherished self-delusion must be abandoned, and this hurts.

But what we have gained is the truth. Our bullshit falls away. The scales drop from our eyes. In that moment, we have two options:

We can reconstitute our bullshit.

Or we can turn pro."

Epiphanies.

They're awesome. And they suck.

Nietzsche tells us the snake that cannot shed its skin must perish.

Campbell says we can't have a resurrection without a crucifixion. And, last time I checked, crucifixions aren't the most pleasant experiences on the planet. To say the least.

But, alas, that's how it works. You want a resurrection, you need a crucifixion. We need to die to the old self to be born to the new.

Or, of course, we can just reconstitute our bullshit post-epiphany. Always up to us. :)

I say we move thru the pain and courageously turn pro.

P.S. Although ultimately liberating, my epiphany and the resulting post-epiphany action steps were not fun. Letting pretty much our entire team go (gah!) while letting a lot of investors, hundreds (!) of partners and thousands of customers know we were no longer going to pursue the vision we were so excited about sucked. And, it was an essential part of the process.

*"The amateur spends his time in the past and the future. He permits himself to fear and to hope. The professional has taught himself to banish these distractions."*

~ Steven Pressfield

*"I didn't talk to anybody during my year of turning pro. I didn't hang out. I just worked. I had a book in mind and I had decided I would finish it or kill myself. I could not run away again, or let people down again, or let myself down again. This was it, do or die."*

~ Steven Pressfield

P.P.S. Campbell tells us: "There is an important idea in Nietzsche, of *Amor fati*, the 'love of your fate,' which is in fact your life. As he says, if you say no to a single factor in your life, you have unraveled the whole thing. Furthermore, the more challenging or threatening the situation or context to be assimilated and affirmed, the greater the stature of the person who can achieve it. The demon that you can swallow gives you its power, and the greater life's pain, the greater life's reply."

## HABITS

"This book is about habits.

The difference between an amateur and a professional is in their habits. An amateur has amateur habits. A professional has professional habits.

We can never free ourselves from habits. The human being is a creature of habit. But we can replace bad habits with good ones. We can trade in the habits of the amateur and the addict for the practice of the professional and the committed artist or entrepreneur."

Habits.

They are the bedrock of turning pro.

We come back to this fact again and again throughout these Notes. We \*know\* that self-mastery is the key to actualizing our potential and giving our greatest gifts in greatest service to the world.

Leading researchers (see Notes on [Willpower](#) by Baumeister, [The Willpower Instinct](#) by McGonigal, [The Power of Habit](#) by Duhigg) tell us unequivocally that willpower is the driving force that creates all the goodness we want in our lives.

Using that willpower wisely helps us create Professional habits.

How are yours?

## HOW OUR DAY CHANGES WHEN WE TURN PRO

*"The amateur tweets. The pro works."*

~ Steven Pressfield

"When we turn pro, everything becomes very simple. Our aim centers on the ordering of our days in such a way that we overcome the fears that have paralyzed us in the past.

We now structure our hours not to flee from fear, but to confront it and overcome it. We plan our activities in order to accomplish an aim. And we bring our will to bear so that we stick to this resolution.

This changes our days completely.

It changes what time we get up and it changes what time we go to bed. It changes what we do and what we don't do. It changes the activities we engage in and with what attitude we engage in them. It changes what we read and what we eat. It changes the shape of our bodies.

When we are amateurs, our life was about drama, about denial, about distraction. Our days were simultaneously full to the bursting point and aching, heartbreakingly empty.

But we are not amateurs any more. We are different, and everyone in our lives sees it."

How's your day structured these days?

You kinda-sorta going through your days or do you bring the ruthless focus of a Pro—heading straight at your fears with a focus on making today a masterpiece as you challenge and give yourself most fully?

Steve talks about how powerfully—and surprisingly effortlessly—the re-ordering of our days occurs when we truly turn pro. We get up earlier. We go to bed earlier. There's simply no time

*"The payoff of living in the past or the future is you never have to do your work in the present."*

~ Steven Pressfield

for the distractions. Period.

Everything becomes very simple.

I used to have to discipline myself to go to bed early so I could wake up early. These days you couldn't pay me to stay up late. I'm way too committed to getting up early so I can knock out a couple/few hours of work before the family gets up. I used to distract myself with ESPN or email. Not an option as I turn pro. And, not even a struggle anymore. It just doesn't fit.

You know what I'm talking about if you're on the other side of the amateur/pro distinction.

If not, you will. :)

P.S. John Wooden's idea of making each day a masterpiece is my driving force now. I have a clearly defined sense of what a "masterpiece" day looks like for me and my sole focus is to see how close I can get to that. Day in. And day out.

Here's how Wooden (the consummate pro and greatest coach \*ever\* according to ESPN) puts it (see Notes on [Wooden](#)): *"When I was teaching basketball, I urged my players to try their hardest to improve on that very day, to make that practice a masterpiece."*

*Too often we get distracted by what is outside our control. You can't do anything about yesterday. The door to the past has been shut and the key thrown away. You can do nothing about tomorrow. It is yet to come. However, tomorrow is in large part determined by what you do today. So make today a masterpiece. You have control over that.*

*This rule is even more important in life than basketball. You have to apply yourself each day to become a little better. By applying yourself to the task of becoming a little better each and every day over a period of time, you will become a lot better. Only then will you be able to approach being the best you can be. It begins by trying to make each day count and knowing you can never make up for a lost day."*

What's *your* masterpiece day look like?

Today a good day to create it?

## WHAT IS A PRACTICE ANYWAY?

**"What is a practice anyway?"**

To "have a practice" in yoga, say, or tai chi, or calligraphy, is to follow a rigorous, prescribed regimen with the intention of elevating the mind and the spirit to a higher level.

A practice implies engagement in a ritual. A practice may be defined as the dedicated, daily exercise of commitment, will, and focused intention aimed, on one level, at the achievement of mastery in a field but, on a loftier level, intended to produce a communion with a power greater than ourselves—call it whatever you like: God, mind, soul, Self, the Muse, the superconscious."

What a fantastic description of a practice.

Steve then proceeds to walk us through each of the aspects of any practice in a series of mini-chapters. Check out the book for more.

In short, a practice has a space, a time, and an intention.

We come to a practice as warriors, in humility, and as students.

And, a practice is lifelong.

How's *your* practice?

## YOU ARE THAT HERO

“In the hero’s journey, the wanderer returns home after years of exile, struggle, and suffering. He brings a gift for the people. That gift arises from what the hero has seen, what he has endured, and what he has learned. But the gift is not that raw material alone. It is the ore refined into gold by the hero/wanderer/artist’s skilled and loving hands.

You are that artist.

I will gladly shell out \$24.95 or \$9.99 or 99 cents on iTunes to read or see or listen to the 24-karat treasure that you have refined from your pain and your vision and your imagination. I need it. We all do. We’re struggling here in the trenches. That beauty, that wisdom, those thrills and chills, even that mindless escape on a rainy October afternoon—I want it. Put me down for it.

The hero wanders. The hero suffers. The hero returns.

You are that hero.”

The hero wanders. The hero suffers. The hero returns.

YOU ARE THAT HERO.

(<— = Incredibly inspiring.)

Here’s to turning pro, creating new habits as we navigate our ecstatic hell of an epiphany, cultivate our practices and give our gifts to the world!



**Brian Johnson,**  
*Heroic Philosopher CEO*

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## About the Author of This Note

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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](http://heroic.us).