



GRACEFUL

*Making a difference
in a world that needs you*

by Seth Godin

Thirty ideas.

Excerpts from *Linchpin* and a few new riffs about gracefulness. Created for the leaders. To be read in any order.

Don't operate heavy machinery for a while afterward.

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Thanks for doing the hard work of emotional labor.

Graceful?

There's a never-ending worldwide shortage.

Graceful is artistic, elegant, subtle and effective. Graceful makes things happen and brings light but not heat.

Graceful doesn't mean invisible, hiding, fearful or by the book. And graceful certainly doesn't include hectoring, lecturing or bullying.

Audrey Hepburn was graceful. Wayne Gretzky too.

A graceful person gets things done, but does it in a way you'd be happy to have repeated.

A graceful person raises the game of everyone nearby, causing a race to the top, not the bottom.

Graceful is the person we can't live without, the one who makes a difference. The linchpin. Everywhere I turn, I see people bringing grace to their families, their communities and their work.

The thing is, no one is born graceful. It's not a gift, it's a choice.

Every day, we get a chance to give others the benefit of the doubt. Every day, we get the opportunity to give others our support, our confidence and our trust. And yet most days, we hesitate.

There are so many things on our agenda, so many people who want a piece of us, so many things to do, so many

obligations—of course it's tempting to merely get it done, to phone it in.

None of those shortcuts will make the impact you're capable of making, and none of those approaches will bring you closer to those you're here to serve.

The industrial age is ending, and a new one is beginning. It produces art instead of stuff and it rewards gracefulness.

Cupcakes

The first time you bake cupcakes, you will certainly follow the recipe with rigor.

The third time, you might improvise and screw up.

Learning your lesson, you will follow the recipe again and again as closely as you can.

At this point, by the fifth time, some people actually learn to bake. They improvise successfully. They understand the science and the outcomes. They develop a kind of gracefulness in the kitchen.

Others merely plod along. They're cooks, not chefs.

We have too many cooks. The world is begging for chefs.

Choices

Jeff Bezos, founder of Amazon.com, spoke at Princeton's graduation this year. He asked some difficult questions:

*Will inertia be your guide, or will you follow your passions?
Will you follow dogma, or will you be original?*

*Will you choose a life of ease, or a life of service and
adventure? Will you wilt under criticism, or will you follow
your convictions?*

*Will you bluff it out when you're wrong, or will you
apologize? Will you guard your heart against rejection, or
will you act when you fall in love?*

*Will you play it safe, or will you be a little bit
swashbuckling? When it's tough, will you give up or will you
be relentless?*

*Will you be a cynic, or will you be a builder? Will you be
clever at the expense of others, or will you be kind?*

These are the choices the linchpin makes every day.
When you choose to stop being a compliant cog in a
blameless machine, it sets you up to be graceful instead.

Tell the truth

First, of course, you have to be able to see the truth. This
takes experience and expertise and, most of all, a
willingness to look.

Most people who see the truth refuse to acknowledge it.
We can notice an unhappy customer, a shoddy product
or a decaying industry, but we don't want to be aware of
it. Our attachment is to a future that looks like the past,

and so we ignore the data or diminish its importance. We don't mean to lie; we're just in denial.

Those who can see the truth often hesitate to speak up. We don't want to upset the status quo. We fear the wrath of our peers if we call the emperor naked. This is not the time to be a team player; it's the chance to be an artist.

Smart organizations seek out people with the ability to see the world as it actually is. But that skill is worthless if you don't acknowledge the truth and share it.

Think of the travel agents you know who denied that the industry was in trouble until it disappeared. Or the sales rep with a fading account who stuck it out because momentum was more important than acknowledging the truth. It's human nature to defend our worldview, to construct a narrative that protects us from uncomfortable confessions.

This time it's personal

The system we grew up with is a mess. It's falling apart at the seams and a lot of people are in pain because the things we thought would work don't. Every day I meet people who have so much to give but have been bullied enough or frightened enough to hold it back. They've become victims, pawns in a senseless system that uses them up and undervalues them.

This is a personal manifesto, a plea from me to you. Right now, I'm not focused on the external, on the tactics organizations use to make great products or spread important ideas. This time it's different. It's about a

choice and it's about your life. This choice doesn't require you to quit your job, though it challenges you to rethink how you do your job.

It's time to stop complying with the system and draw your own map.

Stop settling for what's good enough and start creating art that matters. Stop asking what's in it for you and start giving gifts that change people. Then, and only then, will you have achieved your potential.

They want you to fit in so they can ignore you. They want you to buy what they sell. They want you to follow instructions and work cheap. They want you to do what your peers do so it's easier. They want you to be dissatisfied with what you have so you'll buy something new. They want you to embrace what they make and tell your friends. They want you to obey.

And in return, they (used to be willing to) pay you. Or give you satisfaction. Or a steady job.

No longer.

For hundreds of years, the population has been seduced, scammed and brainwashed into fitting in, following instructions and exchanging a day's work for a day's pay. That era has come to an end, and just in time.

You have brilliance in you, your contribution is valuable and the art you create is precious. Only you can do it, and you must. I'm hoping you'll stand up and choose to make a difference.

Virtuous until proven otherwise

Richard Stengel's biography of Nelson Mandela gives us a shortcut to graceful: "Some call it a blind spot, others naïveté, but Mandela sees almost everyone as virtuous until proven otherwise. He starts with an assumption you are dealing with him in good faith. He believes that, just as pretending to be brave can lead to acts of real bravery, seeing the good in other people improves the chances that they will reveal their better selves."

Because we're not seeking compliance, our goal is growth. And that demands leadership, not authority.

Leading, not following

The commitments you make determine who you can become . . . and the commitments you honor define who you are.

If you exist in the corporate mindset of following instructions, it's impossible to make new commitments. Why would you? Do as you're told and go home.

Once you see the revolutionary nature of the freedom that's been handed to us, though, the freedom to carve a new path, then compliance and obedience become antiquated when compared to the power of authentic leadership, of the ability to make commitments and honor them.

The opportunity today is see where our tribes can go and to make genuine personal connections that help us get there.

A spectrum of generous

Fear. It creates anger and selfishness. They sit together, supporting each other, as inseparable as red, orange and yellow on the spectrum.

Generosity, creativity and gracefulness are at the other end in a similar cluster. If you seek to be creative, start by being generous. Like blue, indigo and violet, they live together.

You are a genius

If a genius is someone with exceptional abilities and the insight to find the nonobvious solution to a problem, you don't need to win a Nobel Prize to be one. A genius looks at something that others are stuck on and gets the world unstuck.

So the question is: Have you ever done that?

Have you ever found a shortcut that others couldn't find?

Solved a problem that confounded your family?

Seen a way to make something work that wasn't working before?

Made a personal connection with someone who was out of reach to everyone else?

Even once?

No one is a genius all the time. Einstein had trouble finding his house when he walked home from work every day. But all of us are geniuses sometimes.

The tragedy is that society (your school, your boss, your government, your family) keeps drumming the genius part out. The problem is that our culture has engaged in a Faustian bargain in which we trade our genius and artistry for stability.

Labor means difficult

Apparently, we don't have a lot of trouble understanding that work might involve physical labor, heavy lifting or long periods of fatigue. But, for some reason we hesitate to invest a more important sort of labor into work that really matters. Emotional labor is the task of doing important work, even when it isn't easy.

Emotional labor is difficult and easy to avoid. But when we avoid it, we don't do much worth seeking out. Showing up unwilling to do emotional labor is a short-term strategy now, because over time, organizations won't pay extra for someone who merely does the easy stuff.

We're not at all surprised when a craftsman sharpens his saw or an athlete trains hard. But when an information worker develops her skills at confronting fear (whether it's in making connections, speaking, inventing, selling or dealing with difficult situations) we roll our eyes.

It turns out that digging into the difficult work of emotional labor is exactly what we're expected (and

needed) to do. Work is nothing but a platform for art and the emotional labor that goes with it.

The gift of emotional labor

“The gift is to the giver, and comes back to him . . .”

Walt Whitman

When you do emotional labor, you benefit.

Not just the people you’re working with, not just your boss, but you.

The act of giving someone a smile, of connecting to a human, of taking initiative, of being creative, of putting on a show—these are things that we do for free all our lives. And then we get to work and we expect to merely do what we’re told and get paid for it.

This gulf creates tension. If you reserve your emotional labor for when you are off duty (and are happy to give this as a gift to the people in your life), but you work all the time, you are deprived of the joy you get when you do this labor. Spend eight or ten or twelve hours a day at work (not just in the office, but online or on the phone or in your dreams), and there’s not a lot of time left for the very human acts that make you who you are and who you want to be.

So bring that gift to work.

And what do you get in return?

In most cases, you get little in return. At least, little in terms of formal entries in your permanent file or bonuses in your year-end pay. But you do benefit. First, you benefit from the making and the giving. The act of the gift is in itself a reward. And second, you benefit from the response of those around you. When you develop the habit of contributing this gift, your co-workers become more open, your boss becomes more flexible and your customers become more loyal.

The essence of any gift, including the gift of emotional labor, is that you don't do it for a tangible, guaranteed reward. If you do, it's no longer a gift; it's a job. The hybrid economy we're living in today is blending the idea of capitalism (do it and I won't fire you) and the gift economy (wow, this is amazing). It takes a graceful person to make this happen.

Mediocre obedience

We've been taught to be a replaceable cog in a giant machine.

We've been taught to consume as a shortcut to happiness.

We've been taught not to care about our job or our customers.

And we've been taught to fit in.

None of these things helps you get what you deserve.

We've bought into a model that taught us to embrace the system, to spend for pleasure and to separate ourselves

from our work. We've been taught that this approach works, but it doesn't (not anymore). And this disconnect keeps us from succeeding, cripples the growth of our society and makes us really stressed.

It seems “natural” to live the life so many of us live but, in fact, it's quite recent and totally manmade. We exist in a corporate manufacturing mindset, one so complete that anyone off the grid seems like an oddity. In the last few years, though, it's becoming clear that people who reject the worst of the current system are actually *more* likely to succeed.

Evolutionary biologist Stephen Jay Gould wrote, “Violence, sexism, and general nastiness are biological since they represent one subset of a possible range of behaviors. But peacefulness, equality and kindness are just as biological—and we may see their influence increase if we can create social structures that permit them to flourish.”

To his thoughts I'd add that mediocre obedience is certainly something we're capable of, but if we take initiative and add a little bravery, artistic leadership is something that's equally (or more) possible and productive. We've been trained to believe that mediocre obedience is a genetic fact for most of the population, but it's interesting to note that this trait doesn't show up until *after* a few years of schooling.

Where is the fear?

If there is no sale, look for the fear.

If a marketing meeting ends in a stalemate, look for the fear.

If someone has a tantrum, breaks a promise or won't cooperate . . . there's fear involved.

Fear is the most important emotion we have. It kept our ancestors alive, after all. Fear dominates the other emotions, because without our ability to avoid death, the other ones don't matter very much.

Our sanitized, corporatized society hasn't figured out how to get rid of the fear, so instead we channel it into bizarre corners of our life. We check Twitter because of our fear of being left out. We buy expensive handbags for the same reason. We take a mundane follow-the-manual job because of our fear of failing as a mapmaker, and we make bad financial decisions because of our fear of taking responsibility for our money.

It turns out that we're even afraid to talk about fear, as if that somehow makes it more real.

Fear of living without a map is the main reason people are so insistent that we tell them what to do.

The reasons are pretty obvious: if it's someone else's map, it's not your fault if it doesn't work out. If you're reading my script and you don't make the sale, who's in trouble now? Not only does the map insulate us from responsibility, but it's also a social talisman. We can tell our friends and family that we've found a good map, a safe map, a map worthy of respect.

Creating a culture of connection

Think about business-to-business sales. The key point of distinction between vendors calling on a company is rarely price. It's the perceived connection between the prospect and the organization.

Now, consider job satisfaction. The key point of distinction between places to work is rarely the work you'll be asking the employee to do. It's the perceived connection between the employee and the people she works with.

Thus, the individual in the organization who collects, connects and nurtures relationships is indispensable. This isn't about recording the information in a database somewhere. This is about holding the relationships as sacred as they deserve to be.

Only a human being can nurture relationships. It has to be done with flair and transparency, and it can't be done from a script. The memories and connections and experiences of the person in the center of this culture are difficult to scale and hard to replace. Which makes this person indispensable. Not anyone who has that job—only the people who have that job and act like linchpins.



The resistance: Your lizard brain

The lizard brain is hungry, scared and angry.

The lizard brain only wants to eat and be safe.

The lizard brain will fight (to the death) if it has to, but would rather run away. It likes a vendetta and has no trouble getting angry.

The lizard brain cares what everyone else thinks, because status in the tribe is essential to its survival.

A squirrel runs around looking for nuts, hiding from foxes, listening for predators and watching for other squirrels. The squirrel does this because that's all it can do. All the squirrel has is a lizard brain.

The only correct answer to “Why did the chicken cross the road?” is “Because its lizard brain told it to.” Wild animals are wild because the only brain they possess is a lizard brain.

The lizard brain is not merely a concept. It's real, and it's living on the top of your spine, fighting for your survival. But, of course, survival and success are not the same thing.

The lizard brain is the reason you're afraid, the reason you don't do all the art you can, the reason you don't ship when you can. The lizard brain is the source of the resistance.

Giving, receiving, giving

In the beginning, there was the culture of potlatch and gifts. Caveman culture has a long tradition of reciprocity, and as Marcel Mauss has written, this reciprocity was used to build relationships and power. In the Pacific Northwest, Native American tribe leaders established their power by giving *everything* away. They could afford to give everyone a gift, because they were so powerful and the gifts were a symbol of that power. Any leader who hoarded saw his power quickly diminish. Mauss argued that there is no such thing as a free gift. Everyone who gives a gift, he asserts, wants something in return.

Then, quite suddenly, this ancient tradition changed. Money and structured society flipped the system, and now you get, you don't give. Author Lewis Hyde reminds us that for the last few centuries, our society has said that the winner was the person who *received* the most gifts. To receive a gift made you a king, a rich person, someone worth currying favor with. It feels totally appropriate that people in power are pandered to. It turns out, though, that this is a fairly recent behavior. Power used to be about giving, not getting.

In the linchpin economy, the winners are once again the artists who *give* gifts. Giving a gift makes you indispensable. Inventing a gift, creating art—that is what the market searches for, and the givers are the ones who earn our respect and attention. Shepard Fairey didn't seek to monetize the Obama Hope poster. He gave it away with a single-minded obsession. The more copies he gave away, the closer he came to achieving his political, personal and professional goals.

Part of the reason for this flip is the digital nature of our new gift system. If I create an idea, the Internet makes it possible for that gift to spread everywhere, quite quickly, at no cost to me. Digital gifts, ideas that spread—these allow the artist to be far more generous than he could ever be in an analog world.

Thomas Hawk is the most successful digital photographer in the world. He has taken tens of thousands of pictures, on his way to his goal of taking a million in his lifetime. The remarkable thing about Hawk's rise is that his pictures are licensed under the Creative Commons license and are freely shared with anyone, with no permission required for personal use. Thomas is both an artist and a giver of gifts. The result is that he leads a tribe, he has plenty of paid work and he is known for his talents. In short, he is indispensable.

When users of the online review site Yelp ganged up on a pizzeria in San Francisco, management didn't sue. Instead, they got creative and gave generously. Pizzeria Delfina outfitted its servers with T-shirts emblazoned with the most ridiculous one-star criticisms the place had received. The idea spread, and the T-shirts have shown up online around the world. They cost next to nothing, but millions got a smile. Delfina gave a gift to its loyal customers by making fun of itself.

Delivering unique creativity

Three fairly simple words, very difficult to combine in a meaningful way. Let's go backward:

Creativity is personal, original, unexpected and useful.

Unique creativity requires domain knowledge, a position of trust as well as the generosity to actually contribute. Unique implies that the creativity is focused and insightful.

Delivering unique creativity is hardest of all, because not only do you have to have insight, but you also need to be passionate enough to risk the rejection that delivering a solution can bring.

Who sets your agenda?

Who is your boss? What is your work for? Whom are you trying to please?

If you are working only for the person you report to according to the org chart, you may be sacrificing your future. Pleasing him may cause you to alienate customers, hide your best work, fit in and become merely a cog in the system. The system wants you to fit in, but pleasing the system may not be your real work.

The typical big college in the United States today has a binge culture. The agenda is to get by in class, party a lot, become popular and drink when you can. It's not so difficult to adopt this agenda, not so difficult to fit in. But where does it get you?

The typical nonprofit has embraced its status quo. If you embrace it, too, you'll get no pushback. Your anxieties will be minimized and your fears will not be aroused. But what will it lead to?

Your hard-charging boss wants to look good, and he's going to do this by cutting short-term costs. You can help him by doing nothing all day, spending no money and making no noise. Then what happens?

If your agenda is set by someone else and it doesn't lead you where you want to go, why is it your agenda?

How big is your badge?

I gave a talk to one hundred of the top people at the Food and Drug Administration. If you think that the ideas in this booklet are only for small startups and that big companies are exempt, consider the vast bureaucracy that we call the Federal Government.

The best people in government are working desperately to find and challenge and leverage their linchpins. They understand that the FDA's slow-approval, bureaucratic, non-genomic map is long gone, that innovation is desperately needed and they have to hurry.

During the Q&A after my talk, an enforcement officer raised his hand and said, "They want us to invent a new future and to lead tribes and to make a difference, but we don't have any authority. I can't get anything done without authority."

This from a man who wears a uniform and carries a badge.

I said, "How much bigger do you need your badge to be?"

The fact is, a bigger badge isn't going to help at all. People aren't going to follow you because you order them to. They're not going to seek out a new path because you tell them that they must.

Linchpins don't need authority. It's not part of the deal. Authority lives in the factory, not in your world.

Real change rarely comes from the front of the line. It happens from the middle or even the back. Real change happens when someone who cares steps up and takes what feels like a risk. People follow because they want to, not because you can order them to.

Artists who can't draw

Roy Simmons coined that phrase and I like it a lot. "Most artists can't draw."

We need to add something: "But all artists can see."

We can see what's right and what's wrong. We can see opportunities and we can see around corners. Most of all, we can see art.

Art isn't only a painting. Art is anything that's creative, passionate and personal. And great art resonates with the viewer, not only with the creator.

What makes someone an artist? I don't think it has anything to do with a paintbrush. There are painters who follow the numbers, or paint billboards or work in a small village in China, painting reproductions. These

folks, while swell people, aren't artists. On the other hand, Charlie Chaplin was an artist, beyond a doubt. So is Jonathan Ive, who designed the iPod. You can be an artist who works with oil paints or marble, sure. But there are artists who work with numbers, business models and customer conversations. Art is about intent and communication, not substances.

An artist is someone who uses bravery, insight, creativity and boldness to challenge the status quo. And an artist takes it personally.

That's why Bob Dylan is an artist, but an anonymous corporate hack who dreams up Pop 40 hits on the other side of the glass is merely a marketer. That's why Tony Hsieh, founder of Zappos, is an artist, while a boiler room of telemarketers is simply a scam.

Tom Peters, corporate gadfly and writer, is an artist, even though his readers are businesspeople. He's an artist because he takes a stand, he takes the work personally and he doesn't care if someone disagrees. His art is part of him, and he feels compelled to share it with you because it's important, not because he expects you to pay him for it.

Art is a personal gift that changes the recipient. The medium doesn't matter. The intent does.

Art is a personal act of courage, something one human does that creates change in another.

If Jackson Pollock is art and Andy Warhol is art and performance art is art . . . then what is art? It's not about

the craft, certainly. If Shakespeare is art and Sam Shepard is art, and Eric Bogosian is art, then Jerry Seinfeld must be art, too, right?

Is it art when Harvard scientist Jill Bolte Taylor holds us spellbound for eighteen minutes talking about her near-fatal stroke? Certainly.

And I think it's art when a great customer service person uses a conversation to convert an angry person into a raving fan. And it's art when Craig Newmark invents a new business model that uses the Internet to revolutionize the classifieds. Or when Ed Sutt invents a better nail, one that saves lives and money.

The semantics matter here, because we're going to explore what it is to make art, and we need to decide what art is before we can determine if that's useful to you. So, back to my definition:

Art is a personal gift that changes the recipient.

An artist is an individual who creates art. The more people you change, the more you change them, the more effective your art is.

Art is not related to craft, except to the extent that the craft helps deliver the change. Technical skill might be a helpful component in making art, but it's certainly not required. Art doesn't have to be decorative; it can be useful as long as the use causes change.

Art is certainly not limited to painting or sculpture or songwriting. If there is no change, there is no art. If no one experiences it, there can be no change.

By definition, art is human. A machine can't create art, because the intent matters. It's much more likely to be art if you do it on purpose.

A cook is not an artist. A cook follows a recipe, and he's a good cook if he follows the recipe correctly. A chef is an artist. She's an artist when she invents a new way of cooking or a new type of dish that creates surprise or joy or pleasure for the person she created it for.

Art is original. Marcel Duchamp was an artist when he pioneered Dadaism and installed a urinal in a museum. The second person to install a urinal wasn't an artist; he was a plumber.

Art is the product of emotional labor. If it's easy and risk free, it's unlikely that it's art.

The last element that makes it art is that it's a gift. You cannot create a piece of art merely for money. Doing it as part of commerce so denudes art of wonder that it ceases to be art. There's always a gift intent on the part of the artist.

Organizations use human-created art all the time. The design of the iPhone is art. It changes the way some people feel. It changes the way they use the device. It changes the way they communicate. And there is a gift as well. People who see the iPhone but don't buy one still receive the gift. An ugly iPhone would cost as much as the beautiful one. The beautiful part is the free prize inside, the bonus, the gift to us from the artist who designed it.

Give and get

Please don't forget that the way we engage with others is a reflection of the way industry engages with us. We hire people to work on good causes because industry hires people to work there. We issue newsletters and have a website and make announcements and run for office in precisely the same way that industry does what it does.

Industry may be the economic engine of our lives, but it also changes the way we walk, talk and engage.

Industry understands give and get. I do this, you do that. I give this, you do that in return. Tit for tat.

Industry is changing. The race to the bottom is ending, the search for cheaper, cheaper, cheaper is coming to a close. And as a result, consumers (what a great word that is) are realizing that they can't find more pleasure so easily, that buying more stuff might not be the best plan. We've always been lonely, everyone is lonely, but now the loneliness is harder to mask in a life of manipulation (doing what the boss says) and consumption (doing what the marketer says).

People seek meaning.

Will you offer it to them?

The printing press forced us to think for ourselves

This simple invention caused upheaval and panic and it changed the world. When you give someone a book (instead of instructions *about* the book), things change.

Many of us seek a place to stand. We seek a king, a pope, a factory, a boss, a process and perhaps a Dummies book.

What happens when the factory system becomes so mechanized that there are no good jobs left in it? What happens when the very best alternative is to opt out and do art and make connections and yes, think for ourselves?

The linchpin era will cause ever more to panic, but if you can do more emotional labor now, you can learn to make an impact that lasts. This won't happen because you're mimicking the industrial system. It will happen because you're doing precisely the opposite.

Getting a new job without leaving

One day, my friend Blair stood up.

She stood up, spoke up and started doing a new job. She didn't leave her organization, didn't even get a new title or new responsibilities. Instead, she started doing her old job in a new way.

Suddenly, Blair was inspired. She was looking for opportunities instead of hiding from blame. She was

putting herself on the line, pushing through the dip and making things happen.

Six weeks later, she got a huge promotion and another, even better new job. All it took was a choice. Blair didn't ask for permission to do her job better, she merely decided to.

Creating forward motion

Imagine an organization with an employee who can accurately see the truth, understand the situation and understand the outcome of various decisions. And now imagine that this person is also able to make something happen.

Why on earth would you ever begin to consider the possibility of firing her?

Every organization, every nonprofit, every political body, every corporation desperately seeks this person. This is our leader, our marketer, our linchpin. She creates forward motion.

Doesn't matter if you're always right. It matters that you're always moving.

The endless emergency of fitting in

It's never possible to fit all the way in. Never possible for everything to be all right.

How can it ever be?

And so we're trapped, always seeking to fit in a little more, always looking for one more signal that we haven't gotten it just right, that the system is about to be disrupted, that the rules will change again and that we'll have to adjust (again).

The problem with being outwardly focused is that we have no center, nothing to return to. The problem with outward is that there is no compass, no normal, no way to tell if we're in balance.

Without a map, how can we know what's next?

In *The Lonely Crowd*, David Riesman writes, "Americans were ready for the mass media even before the mass media were ready for them." We needed the cues and instructions, and yes, the map, in order to figure out who we should be.

Where do you hide your brilliance?

Where do you hide your insight? You have plenty of big ideas, no shortage of breakthroughs. A friend of mine says something really smart every day, something earth shattering once a week. And that's it. At the end of the year, he has some great blog posts and a pile of Twitter tweets to show for it. What if he harnessed just one of those ideas and fought the resistance hard enough to actually make something of it?

At the end of the year, he could show us a multimillion-dollar company, or a movement that changed the world. At the end of the year he could have leveraged a few of

those ideas into a promotion, a corner office, a parking space . . .

The only difference between my friend and someone who changes everything is the resistance, the voice of the lizard.

Fit in or stand out

There are countless people just waiting to tell you how to fit in, waiting to correct you, advise you, show you what you are doing wrong.

And just about no one pushing you to stand out.

If you add up all the books, scolds, back benchers, bosses, teachers, parents, cops, co-workers, employees, religious zealots, politicians and friends who can show you how to fit in just so, it's sort of overwhelming. It's clear to me that we're really good at establishing and reinforcing the status quo.

Fit in too much, though, and nothing much happens. Where are the self-appointed agitators and firebrands, the people who will egg you on and push you to stand for something?

They seem to be missing.

Be the linchpin once

If you can do brilliantly once, just once, then of course you can do it again.

I'm not proposing you play a perfect round of golf or conduct a symphony. Instead, success lies in being generous or understanding someone or seeing a route that others don't see. You've done this already, done it brilliantly.

You've calmed yourself in the face of anxiety, or done something for no compensation or solved a problem with an insight. Then, most of the time, the world steps in and relentlessly unteaches us how to do it again.

If you've done it once, you can do it again. Every day.

Mastery, connection and then grace

The compliant era of the factory encouraged us to be focused on following instructions and fitting in. Some used this as an opportunity to achieve mastery, to get good at our craft, to understand the nature of what we did.

Now we have an opportunity to go beyond that. To connect with one another. To bring surprise and delight and love to the interactions that make up our day.

That will make you graceful. And the work you do when you are graceful is what we need, now more than ever.

Go.

Make something happen.

SETH GODIN is the author of 17 bestsellers that have been translated into thirty-five languages. He is the founder of two successful Internet companies and the author of one of the most popular solo blogs in the world.



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