

## **A CREATIVE PROCESS: BY CHRIS SMITH**

I by no means want to say I'm an expert at creating- far from it! I'm still figuring it all out and trying my best to make big leaps forward in a creative career that's still fledging. That said, Ira Glass' quote on the creative process really inspired me to invest in these beginning years: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PbC4gqZGPSY>

He basically urges creative people to "do a lot of work" and that your taste will eventually match your creations. As a result, I've taken a year to focus fully on my creative process and try to hone a way to create consistently amid all of the "life stuff" that's an easy distraction. Here's what this year has taught me so far:

### **UNPLUG.**

Put your phone into airplane mode, turn off your WIFI, and find a space that you can be in for two hours at a time that's uninterrupted: An office, a bedroom, a treehouse, an ice cave. Someplace that is yours- and that you're free from that small nag to "just check something". It's the hardest. But most important I think.

### **PERSONALIZE YOUR SPACE.**

When you find that "zone" where you decide to create, nest a bit. Make it your own to remind yourself that this is the place for creativity. I have a small lamp that I picked out just for my writing space. I have a set of juggling balls close by to keep my brain active if I'm hitting a wall. I have a chair that actually sucks pretty bad, but for whatever reason has a certain charm that I like. It's my "scrappy" chair that's all about function. Like I'm trying to be. And for the actual writing/ creating I surround myself with a computer, a notepad, and a whiteboard. This tri-fecta ensures that I've always got a way to map out an idea as it comes to me. I also keep a small moleskin in my car with a pen so when I'm stuck in traffic and ideas come, I can jot them down. Plus, it isn't texting so that's legal, right? I also sometimes get struck by ideas in the shower, so I'm considering going putting a little white board in there. Haven't gone quite that far yet... ☺

### **CARVE OUT TWO HOURS.**

I watched an interview with John Cleese (which has since been pulled down from Youtube- go figure) who said two hours is the amount of time to maximize your creativity. Anything above that can taper, and below that isn't enough to get you into a "groove". This can depend on the person or the day, but I think it rings pretty true.

### **SET GOALS. ALWAYS.**

Depending on what you're hoping to accomplish long-term, break your goals down into their smallest parts. Like silly-small. Veery achievably small. What ends as "Finish a feature screenplay" can start with something like "Pick up your favorite coffee." Then, "Get a little caffeine buzz", then "set a timer for fifteen minutes", then "Brainstorm on character names", then "Write a half page monologue as that character" then...etc. etc. etc.

I like to get very specific with my goals such that when I sit down, I've set myself up for success- and not floundering. This is also really hard. It requires a lot of trial-and-error to see just how much you can accomplish in a small amount of time. But doing it will get you more and more efficient at tricking your own brain and chipping away slowly at that behemoth of a project your going to gift the world!

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5y\\_0094dGDU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5y_0094dGDU)

### **SEEK OUT INSPIRATION.**

I was really inspired by Elizabeth Gilbert's TED Talk on inspiration. As part of my "nest" in my office, I have a piece of art hanging on the wall that, for whatever reason, feels like it represents my "Muse". When I unplug, lay out my environment, and have my cup of tea, I'll put my fingers on the keyboard and look up to it and say, "Okay. I showed up. Will you?" This only makes you feel like a crazy person for the first couple weeks, but then gets more and more fun/ effective as you do it.

[http://www.ted.com/talks/elizabeth\\_gilbert\\_on\\_genius?language=en](http://www.ted.com/talks/elizabeth_gilbert_on_genius?language=en)

*"You can't wait for inspiration. You have to go after it with a club."* – Jack London

### **KEEP THE BALANCE.**

I think one of the other major lessons I've learned in this year has been that creativity can't be forced 100% of your day. Believe me. I've tried. I can write much longer as I get closer to a big goal and start "sprinting to the finish"- but in the time leading up to that, it's important to take steps away. Be with friends, go to the movies, change diapers. It helps separate this time from the rest of your life, which makes it easier and easier to "drop in" when you come back to it.

### **JUST DO THE THING.**

Even if you're unsure of what can come from an idea or a project. Do it anyway. Not doing it already seals the deal that nothing's gonna happen. But when you create your baby, it'll find a home someday.

And remember:

*“Draw a crazy picture,  
Write a nutty poem,  
Sing a mumble-gumble song,  
Whistle through your comb.  
Do a loony-goony dance  
'Cross the kitchen floor,  
Put something silly in the world  
That ain't been there before.”*

-Shel Silverstein

CREATIVITY BOOKS:

“THE HERO WITH A THOUSAND FACES” – Joseph Campbell

“THE ARTIST’S WAY” – by Julia Cameron

“THE ART OF HAPPINESS” – by The Dalai Lama and Howard C. Cutler

WRITING BOOKS:

“SCREENWRITER’S WORKBOOK” – by Sid Field

“SAVE THE CAT” and “SAVE THE CAT STRIKES BACK” – by Blake Snyder

“THE WRITER’S JOURNEY” – by Christopher Vogler

“YOUR SCREENPLAY SUCKS” – by William M. Akers