

KEEP GOING →

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BESTSELLING
AUTHOR OF
**STEAL LIKE AN
ARTIST**

10 WAYS TO STAY CREATIVE IN GOOD TIMES AND BAD

AUSTIN KLEON

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FOR MEGHAN + OWEN + JULES
(THE REASONS I KEEP GOING)

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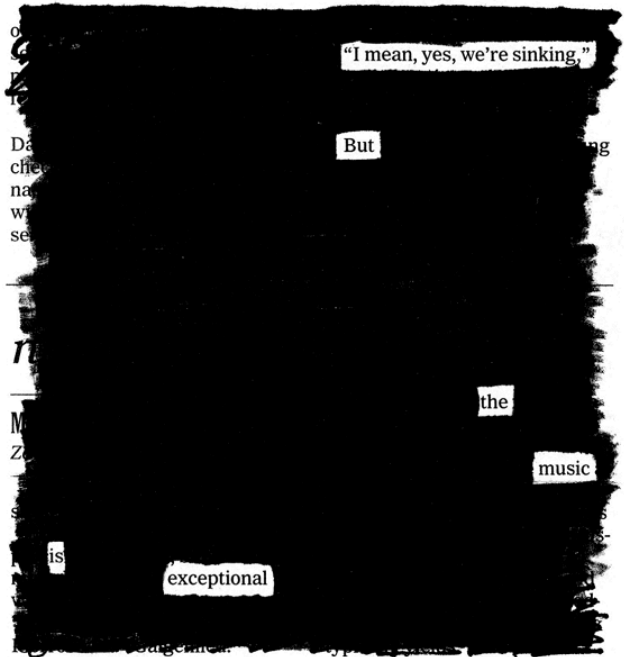
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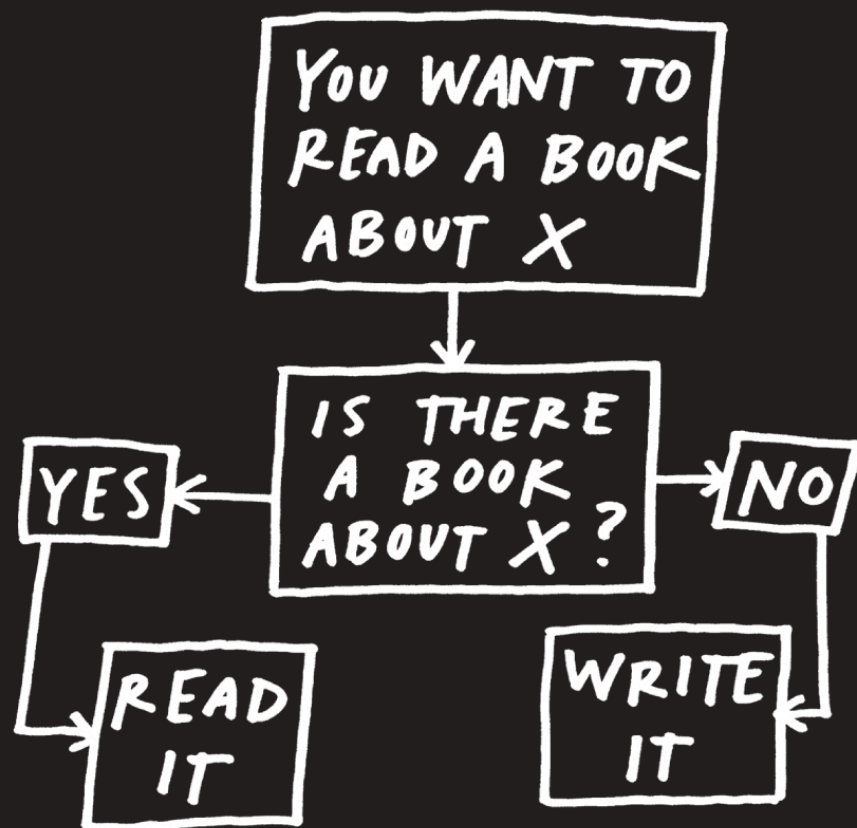
"I think I need to keep being creative, not to prove anything but because it makes me happy just to do it . . . I think trying to be creative, keeping busy, has a lot to do with keeping you alive."

—Willie Nelson

I WROTE THIS BOOK BECAUSE I NEEDED TO READ IT

A few years ago, I'd wake up every morning, check the headlines on my phone, and feel as if the world had gotten dumber and meaner overnight. Meanwhile, I'd been writing and making art for more than a decade, and it didn't seem to be getting any easier. *Isn't it supposed to get easier?*

Everything got better for me when I made peace with the fact that it might not *ever* get easier. The world is crazy. Creative work is hard. Life is short and art is long.



Whether you're burned out, starting out, starting over, or wildly successful, the question is always the same: How to keep going?

This book is a list of ten things that have helped me. I wrote it primarily for writers and artists, but I think the principles apply to anyone trying sustain a meaningful and productive creative life, including entrepreneurs, teachers, students, retirees, and activists. Many of the points are things I've stolen from others. I hope you'll find some things worth stealing, too.

There are no rules, of course. Life is an art, not a science. Your mileage may vary. Take what you need and leave the rest.

Keep going and take care of yourself.

I'll do the same.

① EVERY DAY IS
GROUND HOG DAY.

TAKE ONE DAY AT A TIME.

“None of us know what will happen. Don’t spend time worrying about it. Make the most beautiful thing you can. Try to do that every day. That’s it.”

—Laurie Anderson

Whenever someone starts talking about “the creative journey,” I roll my eyes.

It sounds too lofty to me. Too heroic.

The only creative journey I seem to go on is the ten-foot commute from the back door of my house to the studio in my garage. I sit down at my desk and stare at a blank piece of paper and I think, “Didn’t I just do this yesterday?”

When I’m working on my art, I don’t feel like Odysseus. I feel more like Sisyphus rolling his boulder up the hill. When I’m working, I don’t feel like Luke Skywalker. I feel more like Phil Connors in the movie *Groundhog Day*.

For those of you who haven’t seen it or need your memory refreshed, *Groundhog Day* is a 1993 comedy starring Bill Murray as Phil Connors, a weatherman who gets stuck in a time loop and wakes up every morning on February 2nd—Groundhog Day—in Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania, home of

Punxsutawney Phil, the famous groundhog who, depending on if he sees his shadow or not, predicts whether there will be six more weeks of winter. Phil, the weatherman, hates Punxsutawney, and the town becomes a kind of purgatory for him. He tries everything he can think of, but he can't make it out of town, and he can't get to February 3rd. Winter, for Phil, is endless. No matter what he does, he still wakes up in the same bed every morning to face the same day.

In a moment of despair, Phil turns to a couple drunks at a bowling alley bar and asks them, "What would you do if you were stuck in one place, and every day was exactly the same, and nothing that you did mattered?"

It's the question Phil has to answer to advance the plot of the movie, but it's also the question we have to answer to advance the plot of our lives.

I think how you answer this question is your art.

every

Day

is

created
from scratch

Now, I'm not the first person to suggest that *Groundhog Day* is perhaps *the* great parable of our time. Harold Ramis, the movie's director and cowriter, said he got endless letters from priests, rabbis, and monks, all praising the movie's spiritual message and claiming it for their own religion. But I think the movie has particular relevance for people who want to do creative work.

The reason is this: The creative life is *not* linear. It's not a straight line from point A to point B. It's more like a loop, or a spiral, in which you keep coming back to a new starting point after every project. No matter how successful you get, no matter what level of achievement you reach, you will never really "arrive." Other than death, there is no finish line or retirement for the creative person. "Even after you have achieved greatness," writes musician Ian Svenonius, "the infinitesimal cadre who even noticed will ask, 'What next?'"

The truly prolific artists I know always have that question answered, because they have figured out a *daily practice*—a repeatable way of working that insulates them from success, failure, and the chaos of the outside world. They have all identified what they want to spend their time on, and they work at it every day, no matter what. Whether their latest thing is universally rejected, ignored, or acclaimed, they know they'll still get up tomorrow and do their work.

We have so little control over our lives. The only thing we can really control is what we spend our days on. What we work on and how hard we work on it. It might seem like a stretch, but I really think the best thing you can do if you want to make art is to pretend you're starring in your own remake of *Groundhog Day*: Yesterday's over, tomorrow may never come, there's just today and what you can do with it.

"Any man can fight the battles of just one day," begins a passage collected in Richmond Walker's book of meditations for recovering alcoholics, *Twenty-Four Hours a Day*. "It is only when you and I add the burden of those two awful eternities, yesterday and tomorrow, that we break down. It is not the experience of today that drives men mad. It is remorse or bitterness for something which happened yesterday or the dread of what tomorrow may bring. Let us therefore do our best to live but one day at a time."



The creative journey is not one in which you're crowned the triumphant hero and live happily ever after. The real creative journey is one in which you wake up every day, like Phil, with more work to do.

"How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives."

—Annie Dillard