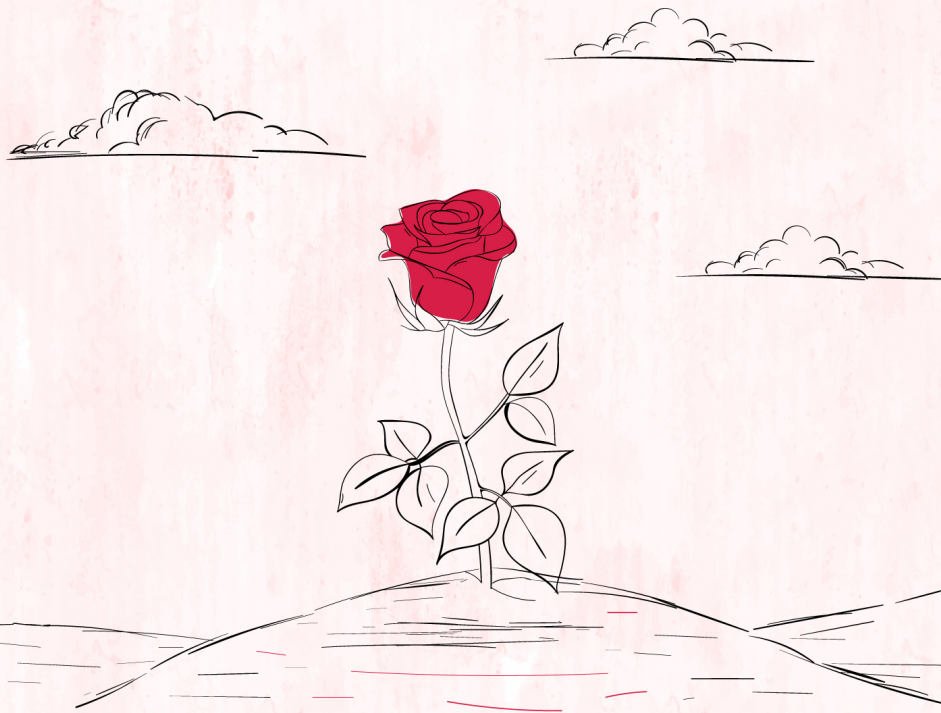


SUMMARY

KEEP GOING →

AUSTIN KLEON



Summary of «Keep Going» by Austin Kleon

Written by Lea Schullery

A simple how-to guide for sparking inspiration during the good and the bad, learn how to ignite your creativity and keep your passion project, just that, a passion.



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Introduction

With ten simple rules for how to stay creative and true to yourself, Austin Kleon introduces how to foster your creativity through the good times and the bad. Creative work is never a linear path, instead, it's a neverending loop that forces you to continue to learn and grow throughout your journey. In today's modern, chaotic world it's important to disconnect from the world around you, create a creative space, and keep your juices flowing by getting your body moving. Even if your creativity ebbs and flows throughout your life, you can apply Kleon's tips to nurture your passion and draw inspiration from the simplest of places. Find inspiration just by tidying your workspace or by stopping to take in your surroundings. You never know when inspiration may strike, but by applying these simple rules, you can learn how to stay creative, focused, and true to yourself.

Establish a Routine

Whether you're using creativity in your personal or professional life, it's no secret that creativity comes and goes. Some days the juices are flowing and you find yourself becoming more productive than ever while other days you stare at a blank canvas wondering how you're possibly going to fill it. And while it seems that these days, months, or even years of the creative block are out of your control, you can learn how to influence it.

For instance, one element you can control is whether or not you show up that day. If you work on a creative project for your personal enjoyment, then you may go long periods without ever picking up that pencil, paintbrush, or laptop. That's okay, every artist, writer, and creator goes through bouts of being uninspired, but if you don't show up, then you certainly can't accomplish anything. Your creativity might be flowing, or maybe it's just a small trickle, regardless, you must show up to harness that creativity as best you can.

So what's the best way to ensure you show up each day? Establish a schedule. Yes, a work schedule. The schedule looks different for everyone. For instance, Sylvia Plath wrote early in the morning before her children woke up while Franz Kafka wrote late at night after his family went to sleep. While some people may balk at the idea of creating a routine for creativity, it's proven to help the success of many creative people. By establishing specific habits and rituals to get you into the mood, you're likely to experience higher levels of creativity versus just waiting for inspiration to hit. Think about when you're in your most creative moods and establish a routine based around that mood. John Steinbeck sharpened a dozen pencils before sitting down to write, and Goethe smelled rotten apples! Whatever your habit or ritual is, do what helps you get in the creative mood. Whether it's drinking coffee or going for a run, do what you need to get your creative juices flowing.

If you aren't quite sure what sparks your creativity, then ask yourself a few questions like "are you a morning person or a night owl?" "What gets you in the creative mood?" By answering these questions, you can tailor your schedule and routine to fit your needs. Everyone's routine will look different, but its purpose is the same: to allow you the freedom to pursue your creative passions.

Embrace Airplane Mode

In the early 2000s, cell phone companies introduced the feature of airplane mode on all devices. To protect from cellular or technological interference, airlines advised that cell phones should be turned off or on airplane mode during takeoff and landing. Similarly, you should protect yourself from cellular interference when working on your creative project. However, it might not be enough to just turn your phone on airplane mode to get yourself into a creative mood. Sure, you won't be distracted by texts and emails, but will simply switching to airplane mode get your creative juices flowing? Probably not. Instead, you should imagine yourself in airplane mode as well. Think about it, when you're on an airplane, you're cut off from the world trapped inside a metal box. Don't trap yourself in a metal box; instead, create what Joseph Campbell calls a Bliss Station.

Life is full of distraction and chaos, but by creating a secluded place to work on your creative project, you'll be more likely to get in the mood. For instance, maybe you have garage space or an extra room in your home that you can transform into your Bliss Station. Having a silent place secluded from the rest of the world can help nurture your productivity. However, Campbell recognizes that not everyone has access to such a room, so your Bliss Station can also become a time of day. Maybe there are a few hours during the workweek where you find yourself home alone, or maybe you can wait for everyone to go to sleep and create your Bliss Station at the dining room table or even on the couch.

No matter where your Bliss Station is, it's important to keep it a sacred place free from distractions. So while you put yourself and your phone in airplane mode, you protect your space and your creativity. Similar to being on an airplane, you distance yourself from what's happening on the ground. The social media, the texts, and more importantly, the news. The author, Austin Kleon, suggests that you limit your exposure to the news and horrible headlines. When you allow yourself to become vulnerable to the atrocities of the world at all times of the day, you find that your mood can

fluctuate. Typically, the news can be depressing and upsetting, so don't expose yourself to the news first thing in the morning. Start your day on a happy note and take a walk, go for a run, or play with your kids. You can catch up on the news later in the evening, or even designate a day in the week where you immerse yourself into the trending news stories.

In the end, your Bliss Station should become your sanctuary where you zone out from the chaos and distractions from the outside world. No matter where your Bliss Station is, embrace airplane mode, pop in some headphones, and let your creative juices start flowing.

Tidy-Up and Take a Nap

As we mentioned in the previous chapter, life is full of chaos and distractions. But creating a Bliss Station and embracing airplane mode might not be enough to help you work productively. In fact, there are more ways you can clean up the chaos of modern life and distractions. The first is through making a list. You don't necessarily need to make a traditional "to-do" list, there are several types of lists you can use that might spark your creativity.

For instance, as you go about your day, you might suddenly be inspired by a song you heard, a scene you saw, or a conversation you had ignited something inside of you. Creators are inspired in all areas of life, but what do you do when these moments arise? Do you just hope you'll remember it later? If you go that route, you'll likely find yourself forgetting that moment of inspiration. Instead, write it down! Make a list for moments like these, that way you can come back to it at a later date when you find yourself struggling to come up with an idea. The writer Steven Johnson keeps his list of ideas and revisits them every couple of months for inspiration. Visual artist David Shrigley follows a similar routine and keeps a list of things he wants to draw, so he's never at a loss for ideas. But your list doesn't have to be a list of "do's," instead, it can simply be a list of "don'ts." You can take a page from the book of the English rock band, The Wire, who listed out the things they would never do like solos or end a song on a chorus.

In addition to making lists, Kloen suggests that you keep a tidy work station. Okay, maybe not too tidy. As many people know, it's the creative ones that tend to be a bit on the messy side. In fact, messiness isn't always a bad thing! A little bit of mess can spark your creativity as you make unusual connections amongst some inspiring objects. But perhaps you're feeling a little creative block, well if you have a somewhat messy space, then you can use your time tidying up to get your body moving. When your body moves, your blood flows, and your mind opens up to new ideas and inspirations.

As you're cleaning your space, be mindful of what you are picking up and putting away. You might find something that ignites an idea! Whether it's a drawing you never finished or a gift you received from someone, you never know what inspiring object you'll find. Additionally, you won't ever be productive if you don't get enough sleep, so if you're feeling uninspired, take a nap! As you sleep, your cerebrospinal fluid washes away the toxins from your brain cells, so when you wake up, you'll feel both refreshed and open to new ideas.

Protect your Creativity

As you grow older, you hear the same line over and over again. Especially when you are at the cusp of adulthood, wondering what you should do with the rest of your life, the main advice you receive is “do what you love.” If you love what you do, you never have to work a day in your life! But is that true? Sure, we may love what we do, but when you begin to make your creative outlet your main source of income, it’ll certainly begin to feel a lot like work.

Many people find themselves wishing to turn their creative projects into their full-time job, and while that’s a great aspiration, it’s too much pressure to turn your creative outlet into your livelihood. Kleon suggests that you keep your creative projects a hobby to avoid falling into the pit of loathing what you once loved. Perhaps you are doing what you love for a living, in that case, he suggests you keep a creative project on the side in addition to your main source of income. Always have something you create that you don’t have to worry about selling.

With a rise in social media, it’s become the norm to turn your creative projects into a side hustle and to do that, you create a social media account. While that’s certainly a good way to meet people with similar interests and spark creativity, you should avoid dwelling on the number of followers, likes, and comments that you receive. Instead, protect yourself by not checking the online metrics if for only just a little while. Once you post something, wait a few days or even a week to check how many likes and comments you received.

Finally, the last way to protect your creativity is through gifting. Complete a project for the sole purpose of giving it to a friend, family member, or even an online follower. When you give a gift, you aren’t worried about money or popularity and you might even find yourself falling in love with your passion all over again. For instance, Kleon tells the story of the times when he felt uninspired so he began to create robot collages out of magazines and

gave them to his son. His son would then create the same in return, and eventually, the two were passing robot collages back and forth. To this day, those collages are some of his favorite creations. Additionally, you never know what a simple gift can turn into. Famous works such as Winnie the Pooh, Pippi Longstocking, and The Hobbit all started as stories the authors created to tell their children.

Avoid Titles

It's easy when you're going through college to label yourself. When people ask what you do, you simply respond, "I'm a student." Even once you graduate, you easily change your title from student to whatever occupation you chose. Whether it's a teacher, doctor, veterinarian, accountant, banker, you have a title. But how do you label your creative passions? Do you ever really "arrive" at a final destination that constitutes you as a writer, painter, actor, or musician?

When you focus on becoming the creative noun that defines you, you might wait for your entire life for someone to honor you with that title you crave. It's more important to focus on the "verbs" of your creative passion like writing, painting, and singing rather than the corresponding nouns. When you focus on the nouns, you focus too much on arriving at your final destination and you fail to do those things that bring you joy in the first place. Additionally, once you receive that title, you begin to restrict the other areas of your creativity. If you become a singer, do you just give up on your other passions like dancing or acting? You might if you simply focus on gaining titles versus doing what you love.

Think of it this way. You'll never arrive at that final destination. Part of being a creative person means that you never stop learning or improving. The life of a creative person doesn't just simply follow a linear path, instead, it's more of a loop that never ends. For instance, if you're a painter, then each day you are met with the same task each day. You have a blank canvas that you must fill with lines and colors that create the image you desire. When you finish that painting, you're inevitably met with the question, "now what?" and you will likely start coming up with ideas for your next project. No matter your creative outlet, there's always a blank canvas that needs to be painted. It's a never-ending cycle, all you need to do is show up.

Reconnect With Your Inner Child

One of the great things about children is their apparent apathy towards their creative projects. Watch a child draw, paint, or color, and you'll see that they don't care about the outcome! It's both refreshing and freeing that children do what they love without a care in the world, and it's time that you reconnect with your inner child.

Think about it, if you're a parent and your child comes home with their art project from the day, what do you do with them? Many might hang them up somewhere in the house, but what happens to the rest? They fall into the recycling bin. However, like Kleon's son, he didn't care either way. Whether the drawing was framed and hung in the hallway or flung into the trash, it didn't matter at all. He simply had fun creating, he couldn't care less about the outcome.

When you complete your own creative work, you begin to focus too much on the outcome. What do others think? Is this good enough? As adults, we adopt our own insecurities and beliefs about what is considered good or bad. However, it's time to abolish those insecurities. So how can you do that? Reconnect with your inner child and adopt a child-like playfulness surrounding your passion. Create something just for the fun of it, and then do something you would never do, throw it away! Did you type a poem on the computer? Then delete it. Did you create a sculpture? Smash it. A painting? Pour black paint all over it. No matter what you create, destroy it the way a child would.

This might sound incredibly silly, but there's a point. You must detach yourself from the results and stop worrying about the outcome. Simply create something for fun and stop worrying if it's good, bad, or what others will think. Become a child again and sing for the fun of it, dance like no one is watching, and color outside the lines.

Kleon suggests that if you want to reconnect with your inner child on a deeper level, then you should try playing with children. Of course, if you don't have any, then maybe pick up a children's activity to do by yourself. Spark some creativity by coloring in a book or playing with some blocks. Writer Lawrence Weschler did just that when he was feeling exceptionally down and found playing with blocks allowed him the creative escape he needed. So dive into your inner child and you might find inspiration and creativity you never knew you had.

Ordinary Can Equal Extraordinary

Do you think that your life is boring? Perhaps you think that your mundane life prohibits you from creating extraordinary things. Maybe you think if your life was more glamorous then you would find more inspiration and become more successful. However, this is far from the truth. There is no correlation between your life and your creativity.

In fact, many great artists have drawn inspiration from their seemingly boring lives. If you can search through the crevices of your daily routine, your daily commute, or your daily job, then you might find hidden within those crevices a source of magical inspiration. Writer J.K. Rowling formed the idea of a young boy attending a school of wizardry when she was on a delayed train, meanwhile, her mother was suffering from multiple sclerosis. She was on the brink of poverty when inspiration struck. Similarly, comic book writer Harvey Pekar used his mundane job as a file clerk in a hospital as his source of inspiration. As he collected stories and experiences around his workplace, he wrote incredible comic books that centered around those experiences.

Of course, sometimes inspiration can just strike at any moment. But if you are looking to find inspiration in your everyday life, then you're going to need to put forth the effort to find it. As you rush about your daily routine, you might miss the details that will spark your creativity. However, Kleon suggests an activity that will help you slow down and observe your surroundings. Simply take a pad of paper and a pencil, focus on a subject, and begin sketching. While art critic Peter Clothier suggests observing your subject for an hour before drawing, you certainly don't have to spend that much time. Instead, take his advice of slowing down and really focus on the details.

No matter your creative outlet, anyone can benefit from sitting down and taking an hour or two to sketch their surroundings. You most certainly don't have to be good at drawing, simply use this time to reconnect with

your environment, slow down, and allow the inspiration to flow from your pencil to your head.

Know When to Walk Away

We often hear that some of the best sources of inspiration are times of hardship and suffering. When an artist goes through a divorce or breakup, they may write some of their best songs. Take Sam Smith, who thanked his ex for inspiring him to write his grammy-winning album. So while there is some truth to the matter, it's important to know when your creative outlet is bringing you joy or just bringing you down.

Take the myth of the tortured artist. This myth suggests that as long as you are creating outstanding art, then you must be experiencing a sense of unhappiness, anxiety, or depression. We see this in artists like Sylvia Plath who committed suicide a month after producing her only book, *The Bell Jar* and Van Gogh who painted "Starry Night" while battling his own addictions and anxiety. This myth suggests that every great artist is falling victim to sadness, addiction, or unhealthy relationships. And while rough times can certainly become a source of inspiration, it's a completely backward way of thinking about your creative outlet.

Isn't your outlet supposed to be a source of joy? Something that makes you happy? It's supposed to be something that serves our lives, not something that we become slaves to. Once you begin to sacrifice your happiness or the happiness of the people around you, it's time to re-evaluate and put down the brush, so to speak. If it's become a source of misery, don't be afraid to give it up. In fact, there are plenty of other ways to serve and gain happiness. Whether it's volunteering at the local shelter or helping your child with their homework, you can find other ways to bring yourself and others joy.

However, if your creative outlet still makes you happy even in the roughest moments of your life, then continue what you're doing. As we mentioned in a previous chapter, "do what you love."

Final Summary

We go through many seasons throughout our lives, some may inspire us while others put us in a creative rut. However, when you find your creativity ebbing and flowing throughout your life, you can take the necessary steps to revive and foster it. By establishing a routine, creating a Bliss Station, and embracing airplane mode, you can create a space that nurtures your creativity and provides a sense of inspiration. Additionally, keeping your workspace tidy, reconnecting with your inner child, and avoiding unnecessary titles can help you continue your creative passions without falling into a creative rut. It's also important to avoid monetizing and focusing on your followers as you may find your creativity becoming work. Lastly, know when to walk away from your passion if it becomes a source of misery rather than happiness. Remember that the ultimate purpose of your passion is to serve joy in your life, and what others think never matters.



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