

Read This First!

You can't use up creativity. The more you use, the more you have.

—MAYA ANGELOU

Ask yourself: Is the way you're working *working*? Is the way you're *living* working?

This is a book about creativity, but in a larger sense it's about life and how you live it. It's not just about starting a creative practice or becoming a better designer, writer, photographer, or entrepreneur—though it will supercharge all of your creative skills. It's about living a richer, deeper, more rewarding life than ever before. Embracing creativity in your life is like that moment when Dorothy steps out of her black-and-white Kansas house into blazing Technicolor Munchkinland.

Think about what led you to open this book today, at this moment. What are you seeking?

If you're confident that you're living your highest calling in life and fulfilling your potential to its fullest, great. If you bring generosity and playfulness to everything you do, not just to creative tasks but to every area of your life, fantastic. If the spirit of creativity and invention infuses every day and all of your important relationships with joy, inspiration, and vitality, you've already learned anything I can teach you. Whatever you're doing, it's working. You're living the dream. Go back to creating your day. The world needs what you have to give. Please give this book to someone who needs it.

Still reading?

Okay, here's the other possibility: you're not, in fact, living your dream. Far from it, maybe. Instead, you're seeking. You might be burned out, run down, stuck—or you might just suspect that life on Earth could be more than just *this*. Something's missing. You may or may not think of yourself as a “creative person”—whatever that means—but something about this book piqued your interest. You might not know what it is yet. You might not be willing to admit it if you do. We'll get to that. Rest assured, though: this book is for you.

Or maybe you do identify as a creative person, but you don't actually, you know, create anything. Much of anything, anyway. You used to take photographs, code, write, or play an instrument, but somehow the practice that once excited or fulfilled you slipped away. Funny thing is, you can't seem to get back into the groove no matter how hard you try. This book is for you, too.

Or you do make stuff. You write, dance, sing, or start business after business. It could be a side gig or your full-time job, but you create regularly and you've been successful with it. Now, however, you're unsure how to keep going—or even *if* you should. Maybe your current project is on the rocks, your client is driving you nuts, and you're ready to call it quits. Or you felt a void inside after your last show. In fact, maybe you've even been considering—*gasp*—settling.

If your creative practice isn't everything you'd always dreamed it would be by this point, isn't it time to give up?

Not so fast.

Without a resilient creative practice, supportive creative peers, a thriving community, and a powerful mindset, life just does not have the same vibrancy. Even a successful professional can flounder. This book will help you find what's missing. The creativity inside of you—right now, at this moment—is the lever we will

use. To quote Archimedes, give us a place to stand, and with this lever, we will move the world.

There is one final possibility: everything about your creative practice looks good on paper, but you still feel unmotivated, even apathetic, about continuing. This happens. It's happened to me. Everything can look right from the outside and still leave you feeling hollow.

The solution here is to remember why you started creating in the first place. We find the path forward by tracing it back to its beginning. Something inside of you called out to be expressed. Whether you started by dusting off the guitar you used to play in high school or signing up for an open-mic night at a comedy club, that inspiration—that joy, that life force you once felt in such abundance—is still available to you. You just have to hear the call and follow your path.

Wherever you find yourself, every new day is an opportunity to tune in to your creative calling.

The beauty of the path we walk is that no action is ever wasted—through all the twists and turns, you're never truly lost no matter how far you've wandered. This is the nature of the creative process: It all matters. It's all meaningful. The frustration, boredom, or resentment you might feel now is just your intuition's way of telling you that there's a turn up ahead. Will you be ready?

A good life is designed. Created. And this book is about living a better life *through creativity*. By expressing yourself regularly in small ways, you will discover the agency and drive necessary to create the life of your dreams. Creativity is as essential to health and well-being as exercise, proper nutrition, and mindfulness. Only with this potent energy unleashed will you be capable of living your life to its fullest.

This book is for you.

HarperCollins Publishers

Introduction

There's no such thing as creative people and non-creative people. There's just people who use their creativity and people who don't. And not using it doesn't go without penalty. As it turns out, unused creativity is not benign, it's dangerous.

—BRENÉ BROWN

Everything looked right on paper: I had “appropriate” ambitions and a clear plan for achieving them. I knew what I was going to do with my life and I had confidence that I could succeed at doing it. But inside, I was lost. Unsettled, emotionally absent, stuck. I couldn't put my finger on it, but something felt off. I was struggling and I couldn't take another step forward—how was I going to follow this plan?

It wasn't until I experienced the loss of someone dear to me that I realized something: that plan sucked. Each action made sense by itself, but the destination left me cold. The year before, I'd quit the opportunity to pursue soccer professionally. Now I was off to med school, plunging into another life I had no desire to live. What was I doing? How had this happened?

All my life, I'd sought the approval of others, to achieve at any cost. Becoming a doctor seemed like the obvious choice. The only choice. I truly believed that. Then loss taught me otherwise. My grandfather's unexpected death woke me up. Losing him reminded me that I'd only ever have one life. If I didn't pursue my calling on this go-around, I never would.

If I wasn't going to heal the sick, though, where did I belong in this world? What was I supposed to do? What was my calling? I didn't know the exact shape or contours yet, but there was something inside of me demanding to be let out. I found myself at one of life's crossroads, the "safe" path leading in one direction, uncertainty—and possibility—in the other.

Eventually I came to realize that a calling is just that: a whisper in the distance. Most of us don't wake up one day and decide we were born to be a horse veterinarian or an opera singer. That's a story we tell ourselves after the fact, once we've found ourselves wherever we happen to end up. No, a calling is an intuitive hint, a tug we experience when we're doing something that feels right: *This is awesome! I'm going to keep doing this and see where it takes me.*

If we keep listening to those hints and letting the tugs guide us, if we heed the call, we soon find that we're walking our own path. No matter where we're going, we're exactly where we're supposed to be.

So no, I didn't suddenly realize at the age of twenty-one that I wanted to be an artist, an action sports photographer, or the founder of an online learning platform. I simply decided to listen to my gut. I knew I wanted to take photos, simple as that. As long as I was doing what felt right, I figured, the rest would figure itself out—and it did.

This was the moment I summoned the courage to disappoint nearly everyone in my life. For the second time, I abandoned my plan for the future and took my first, hesitant step on a new path, the path in pursuit of my creative calling. I'm still on that path today, and I've never looked back.

Being creative doesn't mean quitting your day job, donning a beret, or moving to Paris. It doesn't mean dressing differently

or making a whole new set of “artsy” friends. It doesn’t mean trying on a persona or going through a phase. Forget everything you think you know about what it means to be a creator. Creativity is a natural, life-sustaining, human function that is essential to our health and well-being. It’s as natural as breathing.

In fact, let’s put it in perspective. Imagine a world where breathing is a shameful practice. They teach kids in schools: “Keep your breath down, children!” Kids never run and play because it would require heavy-duty exhalation. Adults don’t get excited about anything for fear of sucking wind. Imagine living in that world, getting by on little sips of oxygen and always feeling dizzy and tired.

Then imagine being told that a nice, deep breath of fresh air, one that fills your whole belly, is invigorating, refreshing, and incredibly good for you. Imagine being told that your society is sick, not you. Imagine being told that breathing deeply will change the way you think and feel forever.

What would you do next?

We are all born creative. No matter your race, gender, sexual orientation, ability, or background, creativity welcomes you. The goal of this book is to invite you to embrace and enjoy all of creativity’s benefits.

When we create, we tap into something powerful inside us. We don’t control this energy as much as we channel it. The strength of this creative force in every human being is undeniable—I’ve seen it unleashed too many times to think otherwise. You have this power humming inside of you right now, whether you know it or not.

When we make something, this vast inner resource gets activated, even if the thing we make is simple and small, even if it’s

a halting, first attempt that is quickly abandoned. Our creativity doesn't care. It's awake now. Energy starts to flow in every direction. If we keep using our creative energy by making new things day after day, month after month, something incredible happens. We *feel* better: awake, fulfilled, whole. By creating regularly, we access a new source of vitality.

Turning an idea in your head into a tangible reality is one of life's great satisfactions, whether the end result is a story, a photograph, a meal, or a business. We're born with a reservoir for doing this, a dense little chunk of creative plutonium. This reactor contains more than enough fuel to power our creativity for a lifetime. In fact, the more you use its power, the more of it is available to you. But, like plutonium, creativity is dangerous. All that energy has to go somewhere. It must be released through a regular creative practice. Bottled up, it can go critical, become toxic. Unexpressed, your creativity can poison your life.

What Is Creativity, and Why Does It Matter?

Creativity is the practice of combining or rearranging two or more unlikely things in new and useful ways. That's it, though this simple definition has hidden depth.

More important than the what is the *why*: When we create, we give of ourselves freely, adding value and expecting nothing in return. To do it, we must tap into our true, authentic self. This means that creativity is the process of learning to trust oneself. When pure creativity is flowing through you, judgment can't grab hold. It's impossible. This book will show you how to let go of all judgment and trust in yourself completely. Everything you need is inside you right now.

Your future rests on three distinct premises:

1. You are creative by nature, endowed with a near limitless capacity to make and grow new things.
2. Accessing this capacity requires a kind of creative muscle that must be strengthened to achieve your full potential.
3. By identifying as a creative person, accepting the world around you as your canvas, and manifesting your ideas regularly, you will intuitively create the life you truly want for yourself.

In other words: yes, playing the piano makes you better at life. Cooking or coding or building a business changes your mind, instilling the notion that you can shape your environment and your experience. It gives you an unshakable sense of agency. The more creative you are day to day, the better you'll become at building the life you want. It's just creation at a larger scale.

We've never been taught any of this. Our society's narrative around "creative people" versus "the rest of us" is false and destructive. Once you let go of that distorted thinking, your mindset will change. Suddenly you'll understand that creativity is an immensely practical pursuit, one of the true sources of abundance in life. Unleashing your creative capacity is, in fact, your highest calling, the key to shaping the arc of your life. As powerful and dangerous as creativity can be, the only way you can really mess up this gift is by ignoring it as I once did.

I'm also living proof that the damage is reversible. I learned to hear my calling and found the way back onto my path. That's why I'm so passionate about helping others excavate and eradicate all of their toxic, limiting beliefs about creativity, how it works, and who gets to use it. At the top of that list is the belief that creativity is a rare talent limited to a select few. Nonsense! Creativity is a natural force. It's our culture that trains it out of us.

Creativity connects our default modes: thinking and doing, open and closed. When we're open, we're evaluating the possibilities

and looking for ways to fit the pieces into a cohesive whole. When we're closed, we've got our nose to the grindstone and we're actively driving toward completion.

Being closed is fine. In fact, it's necessary—if we're completing the right thing in the right way. For example, if you're happy with the color and finish of that paint you've bought for the bedroom, don't just stand there. Roll up your sleeves and paint the damn wall. More often, however, we get stuck in the closed position. Usually, we're in such a rush to start that we don't give the color of our home a second thought. Until it's too late: "Ugh, everything is *beige*!"

We're taught from an early age to sit down, shut up, and do as we're told or risk looking weak, vulnerable, or foolish. As adults, the chronic stress and uncertainty of modern life keep us in that closed place, focused on checking off the next box on our to-do list. We get a kind of tunnel vision that prevents us from seeing the opportunities all around us. To thrive, we need to learn to weave back and forth between the two modes, open to closed and back again.

To be clear, by "creativity," I don't just mean "art," as in oil paintings and violin sonatas. Yes, art is a subset of creativity, but creativity itself isn't limited to specific crafts. It's the ability to make your ideas manifest in the world. It's problem solving. It's business and activism. It's raising a family. It's building connections, with others and with yourself, that make life worth living. Any creative craft practiced regularly—photography, coding, cooking—unlocks and activates your larger creative capacity. This allows you to see all the possibilities available to you and then choose among them to create the life you want.

According to the wildly creative actor, comedian, and author John Cleese, "Creativity is not a talent, it is a way of operating." To help you operate in this new way, I will draw on everything

I've learned about creativity—as an artist, entrepreneur, friend, husband, human being—to help you establish a rewarding and productive creative practice. Whether you create for a hobby, a side gig, or your day job, or even if you have no idea what you could make, this book might just save your life. I don't know where I'd be without this playful but sacred, silly but serious force of nature.

Pursuing My Own Calling

There's a reason it's so hard to follow our calling. The whisper of intuition telling us what we're meant to do and how we're meant to live comes from within, but it leads away into the unknown. Once I finally started listening to the call, I found myself on a new path. Not the path designed by my career counselor, encouraged by my parents, or suggested by society. My own.

It's a thrilling discovery to find yourself going where only you ever could. But hearing the call and finding your path are just the beginning. Next comes the doing. Walking my path took an epic amount of effort—hours of exploring, practice, trial and error—before there were any results. Money was a constant concern; I spent my first few years waiting tables on the side, eating ramen, and weighing paying household bills against the cost of buying film for my camera. Whenever I did have the opportunity to practice my craft, it was worth it—even if it meant hours spent clinging to the side of a snowy peak, clicking away with numb fingers.

No matter how tired or frustrated I became, I felt my feet on the path, and that made it all worthwhile. My intuition had been calling me all my life. Every now and then, I'd heeded it and experienced a rare sense of harmony and alignment without quite

realizing why. Now I was listening with both ears and walking with both feet. For the first time, I was in tune with myself, and that made all the hard work more than worthwhile. Though it was nonlinear and nonsensical, my path made perfect sense once I truly started walking it. I'd finally discovered an outlet for everything that had been trapped inside me.

Eventually, the work paid off and I broke through. I started traveling the world to photograph campaigns for brands such as Apple, Nike, and Red Bull. Now it was coming together: my creative aspirations, my professional ambitions, the money. It was *working*. I'd found a wonderful and fulfilling career for myself and I'd grown tremendously as an artist—and then I heard another call to connect with other creators, to live a more collaborative, expansive life than the one I'd been leading. That craving for personal and professional connection led me to an entire ecosystem of like-minded people, each passionately following her own creative path. This global community existed in parallel to the workaday world. These were artists, entrepreneurs, builders, and makers of things who prioritized creation ahead of life's other demands. Many worked independently, others were free radicals operating inside large organizations. I found so much motivation just in knowing there were others out there forging their own destinies as I was mine.

In professional photography, people kept their techniques to themselves and viewed other photographers as competitors, not peers. Sharing and learning weren't part of the paradigm. I found this to be true in other creative fields as well. This had to change. Since each of our paths was fundamentally the same, I didn't understand why we couldn't travel our own paths yet stay connected along the way. The creative path is difficult enough; why couldn't we help one another learn and grow? Starting a blog, I wrote about my successes and failures as a creator. As the

technology progressed, I started sharing behind-the-scenes videos about my work. By contributing to the creative ecosystem, I began to empower both myself and others. That rapidly led to a virtuous cycle of creativity, play, and discovery on the earliest social platforms, amplified by network effects.

Today, this kind of open sharing is normal for creative pros, but in the early days of social media, it was heresy. Old-guard photographers told me I was “destroying the industry” by sharing “trade secrets.” Maybe I was putting myself at a disadvantage by giving away the knowledge I’d worked so hard to acquire, but hoarding what I’d learned didn’t sit right with me. The opportunity to have an impact, create a community, and amplify my ideas seemed to outweigh any possible downside.

Disappointed—but not surprised—by the anger of my so-called peers, I pushed the criticism aside and doubled down on sharing. Deep down, however, I hoped other pros might eventually decide to share what they’d learned as well. I was still wrestling with “imposter syndrome,” the feeling that “real” photographers knew it all and that I wouldn’t be truly legit until I’d achieved complete mastery myself. Despite the substantial commercial success I’d already achieved, I still felt like a newcomer, an outsider, a fake.

As I continued practicing my craft and hurling myself at every emerging social platform and tool, I connected with ever-larger swaths of the worldwide creative community. They related to my work and my ideas because they were just like me—hungry for knowledge, stories, and experience. As engagement with my work grew, I realized that this phenomenon, whatever it was, was huge. Bigger than photography. Bigger, even, than art.

I didn’t know it at the time, but the concept of sharing knowledge, building community, and empowering others to pursue their own creative dreams would lead me to CreativeLive, the

online learning company I cofounded in 2010. Since then, more than 10 million students from every corner of the planet have consumed billions of minutes of video learning on our platform. We've built the world's best library of creative and entrepreneurial education, featuring more than ten thousand hours of the highest-quality learning. Our classes are taught by Pulitzer Prize, Grammy, and Oscar winners; *New York Times* bestselling authors; thought leaders; and game-changing entrepreneurs. Our classes, podcasts, and articles provide people with the inspiration and tools to unleash their own creative power and thrive in whatever they do.

The numbers still astonish me, but as I write these words some nine years into our journey, I feel certain we're just getting started. After all, the world has changed—we're long past the tipping point. Our species and our planet face a new set of challenges that only creativity can solve.

Who You Are

Right now, you might be replaying some of the things that have been said about your own creative capacity over the years. The words of parents, peers, teachers, and employers have a dramatic effect on our creative identities. A word of praise has inspired more than one creator. A word of negation has undermined many more.

How do you see yourself? Are you a novice, just getting started on the creative path and still skeptical that you have anything valuable to contribute? Have you been practicing a creative hobby for years but feeling the itch for a greater commitment to your craft—maybe even a full-time career? Are you an established

creative professional struggling to make ends meet or to stay engaged with your work?

This book will help you regardless of where you are today:

- **AMBITIOUS PRO.** You identify as a serious, professional creator—even if your work isn’t your primary source of income—and you want to take your work and its public reception to the next level.
- **STUCK CREATOR.** You want to make work, but you’re not getting anywhere, whether because of conformity, economic pressure, or fear. You’re open to a creative reawakening, but you’re unsure how to light the fire.
- **DEVELOPING HOBBYIST.** You’re content sticking with a day job that pays for your creative passions, but you want to increase your skills and develop a deeper and more productive creative practice.
- **CREATIVE CURIOUS.** You don’t think of yourself as creative, but part of you wants to explore the idea that creativity is fundamental to human well-being.

Regardless of what camp you’re in—full-time artist, entrepreneur, hobbyist, retiree, student, creator inside a company—this book will help you in ways you can’t even imagine. That’s the thing about creativity: You don’t need to see the whole path. You just have to take the next step. And the next. The path of every creator takes many unforeseen twists and turns. That’s its nature. The only way to “fail” at creativity is to stop walking the path altogether.

When it comes to creativity, no effort is ever wasted. Ever. Every unfinished manuscript, sunk business, crumpled charcoal drawing, or abandoned musical instrument represents another

step forward. Once you understand that your entire creative journey—every clueless mistake, every stinging failure—is an essential part of your path, you will see that there is nothing to lose by taking the next step, no matter where it leads.

A New Way of Operating

Taken as a whole, *Creative Calling* offers a structured, robust, repeatable system for the creative process. Each chapter is carefully designed to build on the one before it. I've divided the chapters into four acronymic parts:

- Imagine what you want to create—without limitation.
- Design a strategy to make your dream a new reality.
- Execute your strategy and smash through obstacles.
- Amplify your vision to create the impact you seek.

IDEA is simultaneously a framework to create any successful project *and* a tool for creating the life you want. In large and small ways alike, it will allow you to manifest your creative inspirations—and reinvent yourself in the process.

Each element in this system is valuable on its own, but harnessing the true power of IDEA—and by extension this book—lies in committing to the complete process. For example, Imagining your most exciting outcomes and Designing a plan to get you there without taking action may feel temporarily inspiring, but ultimately it's just fantasizing. Similarly, Executing or Amplifying someone else's big dreams will leave you unfulfilled and perhaps full of regret. A full IDEA cycle where all the elements of the process work together, on the other hand, cultivates personal power and creates the results you seek. Whether they're aware of

it or not, anyone who consistently drives successful outcomes—in specific projects and in their life in general—is using the IDEA process in some form to unleash their potential. By giving it a name, we can make sure we stick to this winning process in every area of our lives.

Once you've read through the book and implemented the suggestions that resonate with you, continue to rely on it as a trusted reference. Don't be shy, either. Scribble in it, reread it, dog-ear it, use it as a makeshift camera tripod in a pinch. Above all, take the recommended actions and see what happens. When I give you something to do, do it. Take this work as seriously as you would any process with the power to improve the rest of your life. A commitment to creativity will reward you many times over.

Along my journey helping millions of people pursue their creative passions, I have found that each and every one of us has been granted gifts. Yours are unique and specific. Job one is finding out what they are. Job two is bringing those unique gifts to bear. How? Pursue your own path, wherever it leads. Develop the skills to be successful in this pursuit. In moments of self-doubt, adopt a new mindset: stop avoiding the things you don't want and start chasing the things you do. The goal isn't to create a masterpiece; the goal is to make a masterpiece of your life.

Coming off the stage after a keynote speech at South by Southwest, the long-running conference and arts festival in Austin, Texas, I found a hundred or so people waiting for the Q&A. First in line was a woman in her forties who wanted to rekindle creativity in her life. She explained that she had always been passionate about design but that since leaving college, she had completely abandoned her dream of becoming a freelance designer. Not

only had she chosen a “safe” career that left her unfulfilled, she had also given up all forms of creative expression.

When I asked her what was keeping her from going for it, she burst into tears. The demands of work, family, and life left her with no time or energy for herself. She felt completely stuck because her family relied on the income she brought in.

Without even realizing it, this woman had bought into a huge lie that so many of us accept. We internalize the idea that our calling is too risky, too impractical to even consider pursuing. That doing so would be selfish, deeply unwise. Deep down, we know we’re selling ourselves out, so we carry this regret with us into each new phase of life. These faulty beliefs work their way into our bones as dogma, making it harder and harder to undo the damage as each year goes by. The only antidote, for this woman and for you, is to stop the madness right now. With love and empathy for yourself, gently summon the courage to make a change.

My answer to her was simple: Begin. Rekindle your creative craft for a few moments every day. Don’t worry about the rest right now; simply sit down and make something. Once you’ve rekindled your practice, you can decide if you want to take it further and earn money on the side or even change careers. Conversations with family and loved ones will be easier when they see the passion and love you bring to your craft.

Hers is one of thousands of real-life examples that have inspired me to spread this message, whether through my podcast, *The Chase Jarvis LIVE Show*, on social media, or now in this book, the culmination of years of thought about the nature and importance of creativity in our lives. If you’re in that woman’s place, too, let this book and the community of like-minded people using the hashtag **#creativecalling** inspire and embolden you to take the next step.

When we say no to our creative impulses over and over again, they harden, like a bottle of glue with the cap left off. Thankfully, that hardened gunk can be softened again. The creativity within you is indestructible.

Every time a new batch of audience members arrives at CreativeLive's studios to participate as course students, I'm struck by the transformations that follow. People arrive on day one tentative, even closed off. A day or two later, they go home fired up to embrace new creative challenges. It's beautiful.

Knowing you have creativity inside of you is the key. Do you already see yourself as creative? If so, great. We'll build on that. If not, will you accept the identity you've been given or will you claim what's rightfully yours? Will you take ownership of your own life?

If you're willing to say that you are a creator, prepare to enter a world of possibility. There used to be a prescribed path for entering any particular career. This is no longer the case. Beyond a handful of professions, many of the most rewarding jobs today are intrinsically creative. They involve doing things that didn't even exist when the people doing them were still in school. The prescribed paths are crumbling away. The textbooks are molding. It's never been more necessary—and *less* risky—to pursue your own path.

The world is at a crossroads, on the verge of a tectonic shift. Each of us must take responsibility for unlocking our own potential, no matter who we are or what we're trying to do. *Our creative calling is our highest calling.*