

LIT

HOW TO
GET YOUR
SOUL BACK



Bryan Ward

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By Bryan Ward
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Letter To The Reader

Dear Reader,

I get you.

You and I, we are brothers. And there are millions of guys like us out there. Dads who deeply value their families AND their work, and are desperate for the tools to be successful in both of these worlds simultaneously.

I don't know what you do. You could be a painter or a programmer, a poet, a copywriter, an entrepreneur, an activist, a photographer, sculptor, novelist, musician. All I know is that you have a creative force inside you that is crying to come out. I know that when an artist ignores the creative force inside, no matter how noble the reason, that it begins to kill you inside, like it was killing me, and that the whole concoction ends up poisoning you for the very people (your wife and kids) you were denying it for in the first place.

I don't claim to have all the answers. Not by any means. But I have been living in the tension of this false dilemma between "art" and "family" for over a decade now, have grappled with the angel, and found a framework, a set of tools that has given me my soul back.

I'm so happy you're here, because I can't wait to share it with you.

Bryan Ward

Key Concepts

In this introductory section, we're going to explore several key concepts that are essential to the framework you're about to learn.

If we went straight to the tactical portion of this report without examining the concepts they are predicated upon, you would have neither the belief nor the conviction required to actually take those steps.

In contrast, by spending a few minutes on these key underpinning concepts, your action-taking will be fueled by an inspiring and contextualizing set of ideas, and the natural resistance points anyone encounters when trying to do something new will be much less of a threat to your progress.

Key Concept #1: Marriage As A Mantle

Fatherhood and Marriage is a mantle. If you choose to shoulder it and do the work, it will bring you to places of joy and satisfaction and love that a single man cannot imagine.

But if you falter... if you double guess your choice... if you decide half-way in to shirk the mantle, or grumble at its weight... you are lost.

It will punish you without mercy, brutally and endlessly.

Key Concept #2: The Paradox Of Difficulty

The nature of difficulty is paradoxical. Biologically, we are geared towards efficiency and energy expenditure regulation. That is why we naturally follow the path of least resistance... to conserve resources.

That is how our bodies evolved, and it is an adaptation that serves you well in the physical world of meat, bone, tooth, and claw, where you may need to call upon every reserve of strength at any moment to escape the saber tooth tiger.

But our souls have evolved in such a way that they are most fed by the fruits that can only be tasted by finding and seeking out difficulty.

I believe we have reached a tipping point in our human development where the evolutionary mechanisms and instincts that compel us to avoid difficulty are more of a detriment than a boon.

It is essential that we become more adroit at toggling seamlessly between biological efficiency and taking on the kind of creative challenges that expand and fuel our souls.

You must already know this at an intuitive level. Else you would never have knowingly taken on the staggering difficulties and stresses of raising a family.

This extends to your art. Great art is art that stretches and challenges you to the breaking point. You continually question whether you are able to "do this."

Key Concept #3: Time vs Courage

Let's do a quick crash course in the evolution of time management best practices.

In the first dispensation, the prevailing belief was that time was the essential commodity, and that it needed to be managed and optimized.

In the second dispensation, thinkers like Tony Schwarz pointed out that time is, in fact, fixed and finite, and not amenable to our control. In

other words, it was a grand illusion to think that one could manage time. One can only manage themselves in the face of time. And so their emphasis came to energy management--managing and optimizing our own energy levels in the face of inexorable time.

In my observation though, what we really mean when we say we do not have sufficient TIME to do something, what we really mean is that we do not have sufficient courage.

Key Concept #4: Muse vs Masterpiece

If you think of your wife as the "muse", the lover that you hope and want to inspire you and feed you emotionally, to keep you inspired, so that you can go to your work with a full heart.

I've found a different conceptualization that has literally changed my life.

I've found that everything changes when you stop expecting your wife to be your muse and treat her instead as your artwork, your masterpiece.

In fact, treat your entire family life as yet another canvas on which to create your art.

If you look to your family to make you happy... look to see what you can "get" from them emotionally, you will be constantly disappointed. That is not their role. Their role is to be your canvas.

The idea is much more common in the context of art. We have heard the idea that you cannot wait for inspiration, that if you waited to feel inspired, waited for the muse to alight, we would never start anything. The key is discipline... to plant your ass in the chair and write / draw / code / paint / compose / whatever.

It is the same for your family life. If you wait for your family to fulfill you, for your situation to become less demanding before you do your work... you will never get there, and you will feel constantly that your family is the enemy of your art, that your art life is not progressing BECAUSE of your family, and seeds of resentment will grow.

Everything changes when you treat your art and your family as a canvas that is utterly responsive

to your touch, to your influence, that is under your power to love, and cause to flourish.

Your wife and family is not where you go to get inspiration... it's where you go to give and create inspiration.

In the same way that you create whole worlds in your art, so too you have the possibility to use your same creativity to create a thriving, utterly unique, delighting, restful family culture.

Now let's begin the actual steps of the process.

STEP 1: The Deathbed Test

In this section, we're going to jump into the five step "get lit" process and begin with the very first step.

In this section, you'll learn a simple ten minute exercise that will rock you to your core and make the direction of your creative life very clear. It will give you the creative focus and direction you need to move forward with confidence.

The concept is to do what I call The Deathbed Test - to graphically and deeply place yourself in the position of your last breath and use that as a searing search and vetting tool to truly separate the noise from the signal, to establish the "true north" of your craft.

Here's what you do.

Find a quiet place where you will be left undisturbed. This can be a bedroom, study, office, studio, park bench, etc.

Close your eyes, and take a few moments to calm your mind. Take ten deep breaths with an inhale to exhale ratio of 1:2. This will clear your mind, calm you, and take you deep into soul.

Now, imagine yourself on your deathbed, with just hours left to live.

Take the time to really imagine it. Make it as real as possible. Imagine the feel of the stiff sheets, the hospital smell, the sound of your family nervously sniffing and swallowing, crying, surrounding you. Imagine the feel of your wife's hand as she holds yours to comfort you. Imagine the click and beep of ventilators and hospital equipment. Imagine the weakness and frailty of old age consuming your body, your strength gone, each breath a mountain climb.

Go to that place, imagine the smells, sounds, taste of copper, your own breath thin and rotten, your organs dying.

Can you imagine it? Do you feel the emotion? The memories, the regrets?

Now, before the poignancy fades, ask yourself this: Assuming that you have not done any great creative work between now and the imagined deathbed moment, what of the things you have NOT done fills you with the most pain, regret, and anguish? What is the thing you thought you would have time to do someday but have not, in fact done? Which of those

unchecked items on your life's to do list
absolutely guts you to the core?

Stay with the pain and narrow it down to the
top 3 to 5 things.

Got it?

Good. Now write it down. Write down the one
thing left undone that pains you the most.

Isn't this too simple? What if I don't know what I
want to do? Won't my "one thing" change and
evolve with time as I figure out what I truly love
to do and am good at? As opportunity comes
my way?

All valid questions. But the key is to define what
you know NOW, at this step in the journey, to be
your most profound and pressing call.

The journey of a thousand miles begins with a
single step - the key is to know what direction
that first step should be in so that you have the
clarity and the stark simple compulsion to take
it. You will always be able to meander and
modify that direction as you move forward. But
without forward movement you do not have the

ability to even get to these inflection and modification points in the first place.

Recap: So here's what we've covered in this section. In a nutshell, find a quiet place and take the time to crawl deep into the vision of your deathbed experience, and use that as a vantage point to cut straight to the heart of your soul's desire, the white hot center of your soul's creative energy.

STEP 2: Your One Thing

In the section, we're going to take the ONE THING--the most satisfying creative achievement you could hope to realize in your life--and create minimally invasive, non-threatening creative practices that ensure movement towards its actualization.

This is THE missing piece in most artists' life. Most artists create massive low-grade stress and anxiety because their vision is so massive: it overwhelms the practical achievement... and so they are creatively constipated. The journey is too great, the whale too big.

There is a second reason. Ironically, because you are an artist, you are able to visualize an art achievement so beautiful, so perfect, that it could never exist in that perfect state in the actual physical world. So you make the unconscious decision that imagined perfection is better than actual compromise!

Let's get to the nuts and bolts.

We're going to do this by forming a simple micro-commitment. A micro-commitment is, as it sounds, a very small, non-intrusive commitment. Instead of saying "I'm going to write a novel," you form the micro-commitment

that will get you there eventually, but via a non-overwhelming practice. For example, "I will write fiction for 15 minutes every day" (one of my own personal micro-commitments, by the way).

My wife mentioned once that one of her mentors said that even if you are insanely busy, you can still find 15 minutes, 10 minutes, or certainly at least 5 minutes to work on something each day.

That stopped me in my tracks.

I realized in that moment, that for some reason, I had arbitrarily set the minimum threshold for daily art in my mind at 1 hour. In other words, I told myself a story... that if I couldn't do at least an hour a day on my art... don't bother.

Embracing micro-commitments has been an absolute game-changer for me.

Here's what you do.

Take that one major achievement you found through the Deathbed Test and ask yourself "what are the actual things I need to DO to accomplish this?"

If your ONE THING is writing a book, then the DOING part is writing.

If your ONE THING is starting a business, then the DOING part will be more varied, but still, there will always, at every stage, be the ONE THING that is the most direct step towards seeing it accomplished. In the business example, it will be creating the product, testing the market. It is essential that you exercise courage vs time here and cut through the busywork. Getting business cards made is NOT the ONE THING. Incorporating is not the ONE THING. The essence is proving the concept, shipping the product, making that first sale.

If your ONE THING is to write a novel, here's how you could translate that into a daily practice:

What: Write fiction for 15 minutes every day

When: Figure out when your energy is freshest during the day, when your energy and brain power is at its highest. For many people, that is sometime in the morning. Also, factor in the logistics of your life. If you take the kids to school each day, you may need to do your 15 minutes in the evening.

How: Do it every day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

So, to sum up, take your pen and paper and write down the one micro-commitment that will, step by step, get you to your opus.

Important: Err on the side of underwhelming yourself.

If you have not consistently written music for years--or EVER--don't let the rush of actually formulating your plan and micro-commitments carry you away. Don't promise yourself "I will compose for 1 hour a day." Not going to happen. Too much, too soon. It's easy to be too aggressive here. I used to do it all the time.

Begin with something easy. 15 minutes is a great starting point. Everyone has 15 minutes to spare. That's like, a long tooth-brushing and flossing session.

If you are insanely busy and even 15 minutes seems like a stretch, don't despair... just go even smaller. 10 minutes. 5 minutes. Whatever you can commit to doing every single day.

Once you make that commitment, write it down on your second sheet of paper.

Commit to do it for the next 30 days. Thirty days is not the absolute optimal timeframe (recent research suggest the optimal time to establish a habit is actually 45 days), but 30 days is close enough for most to establish the habit, particularly since the habit is so non-intrusive.

When you complete your first 30 days, take stock. Has the practice become habitual? Is it easy? Do you often find yourself doing more than your fifteen minutes (or whatever time allotment you have committed to)? If so, then consider adding a small amount the next month. For example, an additional 5 minutes, taking the total to 20.

Don't feel pressure to add 15 minutes each month. Err on the side of less.

Remember, the key to achieving copious amounts of work does not lie in massive one-off projects and caffeinated all-nighters. Those can be fun, but the practice that builds your oeuvre... the solid base that does the true heavy lifting... is your daily micro-commitments extended out over time.

One of the most pernicious lies that dog creative dads is the lie that you don't have the time. Or that you don't have the inspiration to make progress on your art.

That daily hit of progress will do amazing things in your life.

1. You will see tangible, daily progress towards the ONE THING that most lights your fire.

2. You will build up a repository of good will and trust in yourself. You will keep your commitment with yourself, which will in turn build your self-confidence. You will find yourself committing to other things and doing the work you must do and want to do with a full heart. Because now you know in your gut that you are the kind of man who does what he says he will do.

You are the kind of man who does not just pay lip service to art, who does not just claim to be an artist / poet / entrepreneur -- but who actually works at it every single day.

It becomes part of your practice.

So, to recap this step:

1. Decide how to best turn your creative ONE THING into a daily practice... into a bite size micro-commitment small enough that you will stick with it

2. Write that micro-commitment down on paper. Make sure to give it a specific activity, a specific time frame. For example: "I will song write for 15 minutes each day as of March 1, 2014."

3. Do it. Every day for 30 days. then take stock and determine whether to continue at the same amount of time or to add incremental time to each day's practice.

In the next section, we'll look at how to expand your practice beyond your art and actually build "the ground" that supports and animates everything.

STEP 3: Build The Ground

In this section, we're going to cover the process you'll follow to build The Ground in your life.

What the hell is "The Ground" you say?

The Ground is your whole person capacity to do good work. It is the combination of body, spirit, and soul... all optimized, stroked, and kept in a high state, to underwrite the immersive, exhausting and depleting work of great art.

I call that capacity for great work The Ground.

It is your job to stay inspired. Much of the inspiration comes from doing the work. But the rest of it comes from having Ground to walk on, to stand on... to have a robust biology that supports and undergirds your creative work.

You may have a complicated relationship with what I'm about to say. Press on regardless.

Your daily practice, the shovels and pick axes you will use to build The Ground consist of the following three categories: Morning Ritual, Health Regimen, and Opportunistic Seizure.

Here are the top things I recommend you do as part of your Morning Ritual:

Daily Gratitude
Daily Journal Keeping
Self-Love Statements
Meditation
Breathing Exercise
Visualization

Here's the skinny on the morning ritual: It's a *la carte*. Do whatever you want. But establish a ritual. If you want to pick from these, great. If you want to create your own, that's fine as well.

From my own experimentation, and from research, the practices that give the most people the most bang for the buck are daily gratitude, meditation, and breathing exercises. But experiment. Decide on a regimen to try for 30 days. Suspend judgement on your results until the 30 days has passed.

And again, as with your art practice, you don't have to go crazy here. My morning ritual is only 9 minutes long. Less is more.

Here are the top things I recommend you do as part of your Health Ritual:

Lots Of Water

Daily Exercise
Daily Walk
Nutrition Plan

These are obviously good for you. Most of us don't do them consistently though. You'll find that once you create momentum in your art, you will feel more motivated and inspired to do the things you know you should do... including develop and stick with a health regimen.

Remember, consistency is better than over-ambition. If you don't normally exercise, don't go crazy here. Just commit to a ten-minute walk at lunch every day or something equally easy.

The last category is the Opportunistic Seizure.

If your soul is going dry... you need to seize the bones life throws you every day.

At nearly every moment, you are given opportunities to build and add to The Ground.

Your son wants you to jump into the creek with him. The rain wants you to run naked through it to the garage and back.

It's about seizing the moment.

Put your hands in the mud. Light the match.
Walk in the rain. Get naked. Make love in the
grass. Eat out of wooden bowls. Eat with antler-
handle cutlery. Light a candle at dinner and let
the wax run all over the table. Eat meat with
your hands. Buy shell-in nuts and crack them
with a nutcracker. Drive with the window down.

Everyday life gives you a thousand opportunities
to grab life by the balls, to dazzle your
physiology, to jump start your soul.

Maybe this sounds crazy to you. Try it anyways.
You'll thank me.

In fact, do one of these things in the next 24
hours. You'll know in your gut when you spot one
of these things.

And, far from being the time-waste you tell
yourself it will be, you will feel your soul
electrified. The world will take on it's that sense
of wonder.

...

That is how, piece by piece, you build the ground. That's how you anchor and support deep capacity for creative work.

Listen. It's one thing if you're a solitary bachelor artist, living out of the back of your truck and doing your art, living on nothing more than red bull, adrenaline and passion.

But as you know, once you have a family, that is not enough. The moment you proposed to your wife and married her, you by definition became a player of the long game. spurts and bursts don't cut it anymore.

And this is another way that your art life and your family life feed each other. The pattern of family investment is actually the same as great art investment: longer time horizons.

STEP 4: Create Your Family

When you liberate your creativity and give it the seriousness and the commitment it deserves, something changes not only to your relationship with your art, but also to your relationship with your family. Or more precisely, with your relationship with your role as husband and father.

Let me explain.

In my experience, when we as men get angry and impatient with our family, what's really happening is we are growing frustrated with our limitations, our own failure to live up to the standard of husbandhood and fatherhood we hold ourselves to.

Just as you do your daily practice with art, do your daily practice of family.

Just as you are creating your masterpiece of art, your novel, your album, your app, your business... so too you are creating your family life, your own family dynasty.

Your wife and kids are your other ONE THING.

If you are not being an intentional husband and father, it will manifest as anger and irritability. You may think it's them, but it's not. It's you.

Which is good news, because that makes it real easy to fix.

Here are some of the best things you can do as far as family micro-commitments go:

Weekly Breakfast Dates With Your Kids (1 on 1)
Storytelling At Night
Pray Or Express Gratitude At The Dinner Table
Make Breakfast Once A Week
Daily Tea With Your Wife

You get the idea... it could be anything. The key is, to do the little things that build family culture and family bonds EVERY DAY.

It's all about the long game.

STEP 5: Dealing With Setbacks

So, now you know the framework. You know the steps to take.

But what about those days when you stare at the wall and feel like absolute crap?

What about those days when doubt rips you apart and you feel everything you've ever done or tried to do seems in vain... when you wonder why in the world you ever thought you could create art that mattered... when you feel like a lousy father?

Here's the secret.

You do it anyways.

I have my days where I feel like a piece of garbage, body and soul... where it's 11:37 at night, and I haven't done my art practice yet. It's the last thing I want to do. I want to say "screw it" and crawl into bed.

But I do it anyways.

And something magic happens. Within moments of dragging your ass to the desk or the table or the couch and picking up the pen (or guitar pick or keyboard or paintbrush or pencil

or chisel or whatever) the magic comes back. You get caught up. And you remember why you do this everyday... and you do the work.

But what if you DON'T do your work?

So you have a brutal day, or a brutal week, and despite your best intentions, you miss a day.

This is an important day.

You are standing at a major inflection point. This is the first day of the rest of your life.

You can do one of two things:

1. You can look at that broken link in your chain of doing and say "man do I suck." You can let that blemish on your record disproportionately rattle you. You can lose heart, and let that be the loose thread that unravels the whole sweater.

OR

2. You can get back on the horse and choose action over perfection. You look at your art not in the context of one crappy missed day or week, but in the context of a life of creating... of

opening your heart and soul and sharing the depths of what grows there with your family, and with your world.

Conclusion

By following the steps in this report, I am confident you will separate yourself from the mass of men who lead, as Thoreau said, "lives of quiet desperation" and instead arrive at your deathbed with a sense of deep satisfaction.

Despite all the voices that said "you can't"... "You're nothing special"... "someone else could do it better"... "who are you to create"... despite all the forces that pushed against you... you persevered. You did the work.

And because you did the work, you will look around at your family, at the legacy you created, and you will marvel not only at the body of work you created, but also at your family life: the love you poured with all your strength into those people. And the world will marvel not only at your art (or not... it doesn't matter) but at your family life, at the world your heart built.

One last thing.

Don't just close this report and then go watch a movie or something.

Go now, while these words are still ringing in your brain, and take the very first step. The spoils of war, and of life, go to the bold.

Don't put this down and forget. Don't tell yourself "I'll do it tomorrow" (when has that ever worked for you?) Do something different. Be different. Demand more.

Do it now.

From the bottom of my heart, with love for you and your family,

Bryan Ward

