

[Creative Endurance - learn more!](#)

Creative Endurance

56 Rules for Overcoming
Obstacles and Achieving Your Goals

MIKE SCHNAIDT

FOREWORD BY STEPHANIE MEHTA

—

ILLUSTRATIONS BY KAGAN McLEOD AND
MARCO GORAN ROMANO



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“
You need to figure out what you’re really passionate about, and do it.”

—SAGI HAVIV
P.59

“
Sometimes the hill is easy; sometimes it’s steep. But when you reach the top, all is forgiven.”

—YUKO SHIMIZU
P.33

—
This book is dedicated to my students, past, present, and future. You continue to inspire me, and I hope this book inspires you.

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Foreword

BY STEPHANIE MEHTA



IT'S AN EXCITING TIME TO BE A CREATIVE.

Interest in creativity and the creative process has perhaps never been greater. Management consulting firm McKinsey, best known for helping companies maximize profits, has started issuing reports linking creativity value and financial performance. *Fast Company* issues an annual list of the Most Creative People in Business, celebrating artists, inventors, designers, and corporate executives who deploy innovation and unconventional thinking to solve big problems. Start-ups and established brands

alike are starting to appoint creative directors to burnish their credibility with younger consumers.

Few people advocate for creativity in business like Brian Chesky, the cofounder and CEO of Airbnb. A graduate of the Rhode Island School of Design, Chesky calls Airbnb an “entirely creatively led company,” and he’s urged corporate leaders to consider adding creative folks to their boards of directors. Creativity “should be in the [board]room. It should be in the conversation,” he says.

But even as the business community professes ardor for creativity, most corporate executives don’t actually know how to harness it. Fewer than half of design leaders surveyed by McKinsey say their CEOs fully understand their role, and only one in ten CEOs say their senior designer is involved in strategy. The report concludes that many chief designers are doomed to fail because they lack the authority to make the meaningful creative contributions they were hired to bring to the organization.

And research from ad agency TBWA Worldwide finds creative talent are more likely to feel “burned out or discouraged” than the overall workforce.

.....
 ▶ **Stephanie Mehta** is the CEO and chief content officer of Mansueto Ventures, the parent company of *Fast Company* and *Inc.*



ENTER CREATIVE ENDURANCE. Mike Schnaidt offers practical, digestible tips to help reenergize creatives—and just about anyone else who is feeling a bit blocked. Many of the contributors are professional athletes or creative leaders who previously played competitive sports, and their stories about overcoming adversity and challenges give the book energy and urgency that you won’t find in other books on creativity, which can be a little on the contemplative side.

I met Mike in 2018, when I was recruiting a creative director for *Fast Company*. Because *Fast Company* assertively covers design, I was seeking a partner who would elevate the look and feel of our magazine, website, and events to give us credibility with the creative community—but not push the design so far that we’d alienate more traditional business readers. I came armed with all sorts of questions aimed at teasing out Mike’s point of view and influences. We talked about creative



**THE STORIES
 ABOUT OVERCOMING
 ADVERSITY AND
 CHALLENGES GIVE
 THIS BOOK ENERGY
 AND URGENCY
 THAT YOU WON'T
 FIND IN OTHER
 BOOKS ON
 CREATIVITY.”**

directors we admired, photography, tight budgets, and who *Fast Company*’s readers are. It was only when I left our first meeting that I realized that he’d interviewed me. He got the job and brought that same level of inquiry to his role: He’s known to ask lots of questions to understand the underlying philosophy and themes of the work he’s about to tackle.

Lucky reader, you are the beneficiary of Mike’s insatiable curiosity. The twenty subjects featured in the book represent just a portion of the people he interviewed and consulted for this project.

Imagine Mike’s delight when he realized that researching this book would entail calling up a bunch of people he admires and asking for their insights on creativity, perseverance, and more. And it is a testament to Mike’s big-hearted world view that his subjects truly come from all backgrounds and walks of life. I can’t think of many other books about creativity that include interviews with a nine-year-old and a seventy-six-year-old, a Black woman astronaut and a bank vice president.

I’ve also observed Mike’s own brand of creative endurance up close. He really practices what he preaches in the book, and creatives will glean some smart insights on how to deal with executives who say they want creativity but can’t always articulate their intentions. (Yeah, that would be me.) Noncreatives should read it, too. Not only will you learn what your creative counterparts do all day, you’ll quickly realize they’ve got the creativity—and with Mike’s help, the endurance—to help you solve all manner of challenges.

Introduction

BY MIKE SCHNAIDT

IF IT WEREN'T FOR RUNNING, I wouldn't be as creative as I am today.

It's mile sixteen of the New York City Marathon on a hot November day. As I stride across the Queensboro Bridge, something feels...*off*. I'm sweating profusely. Muscle cramps squeeze my calves, hamstrings, and quadriceps into a vice. My right forearm locks into a forty-five-degree angle. I look like the Tin Man trying to run a potato sack race.

Curse the weather gods for sucker-punching me with this heat. *Did I just sweat all my electrolytes out?*

The cramps worsen with each step forward. One thing becomes crystal clear: My personal goal of a time juuust a little bit faster than four hours and twenty-two minutes (my previous marathon time), has been blown to bits—thanks to these muscle cramps. I'm frozen in place.

As the other runners bolt past, I slow my mind and let my thoughts simmer.

This isn't a race against them. This is me against me. If I can overcome this obstacle, I can raise the bar for what I'm capable of.

This tenet provides my body with just enough of a trickle charge to trundle toward the finish line, clocking in at five hours and thirty-two minutes. Not the time I was aiming for, but a huge mental win for me. This reframing tool is known to psychologists as cognitive reappraisal, and it's the key to my creative endurance.



C

COGNITIVE REAPPRAISAL IS A technique used to reframe a negative situation into a positive one. A tool commonly used by therapists to help patients deal with stress and anxiety, it's applicable to your career as a creative.

Whether you're a designer, writer, photographer, or any other type of creative, your career is full of obstacles. Confusing feedback, tough clients, and slashed budgets are as fun as a cramp in your calf, and they sideline you from making something great. But with cognitive reappraisal, you can reframe those obstacles as creative opportunities. For example, if my budget is tight at *Fast Company*, I'll save money by deploying a typographic solution instead of hiring an outside artist.

Creative Endurance will teach you how to reframe your problems and make better work as a result. Jot this down: A positive response to a problem will create a positive outcome.

GLOSSARY

+

CREATIVE

Individuals who can generate original ideas or solve problems in new ways. They have the ability to draw connections between seemingly unrelated phenomena. Fields include the arts, science, technology, and business.

+

ENDURANCE

The ability to exert oneself over an extended period of time. Physical examples include a marathoner, cyclist, or swimmer. In mental terms, it can include a painter who can spend hours in their studio or a writer who works on a book for years.

✓

CREATIVE

ENDURANCE

The persistence through challenges and obstacles that occur throughout the creative process. Creative endurance involves the development of resilience, optimism, and grit to overcome these challenges. Read about those tools on the next page.

HERE'S A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK

SECTION 1: YOUR DAY

In this section, you'll learn how to overcome obstacles in your daily routine. You'll build focus, race through distractions, be imaginative in boring meetings, and develop a sustainable creative practice.

SECTION 2: YOUR PROJECT

Here, you'll hone your creative process through proven techniques for brainstorming, researching, and prototyping. You'll gain skills in selling your ideas to clients and employing their feedback.

SECTION 3: YOUR JOB

This section will guide you through the creative industry with practical tactics for interviewing, hiring, and *gulp* getting fired. You'll also learn about creative budgeting and presentations. Fun!

SECTION 4: YOUR LIFE

Finally, you enter the big-picture phase of your career. This section will help you discover your creative voice, personal values, and long-term goals for making an impact in your industry.

EACH SECTION ENDS WITH actionable takeaways and activities. The book is designed to be easily digestible, with stories no longer than two pages.

Whether you're running a race or tackling a big project at work, overcoming an obstacle will always be rewarding. While your career may feel like a marathon, with the tools and strategies in this book, you won't have to suffer.



Grit



Ultramarathoner Dean Karnazes ran across the United States over the course of fifty days, but on day nineteen, he hit his wall halfway through a marathon in Arizona. To overcome this obstacle, he focused on the present and broke the race down into a series of smaller steps. Karnazes explains, "It's a Zen-like experience and helps me get

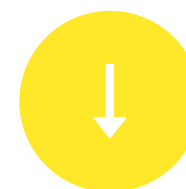
through anything." This strategy helped him through the remainder of the race and can be applied to any big project in your career. By breaking the project down into a series of manageable steps, you avoid feeling overwhelmed and increase your chances of success. Read about Karnazes on page 36.



PACK THESE TOOLS

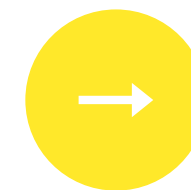
THREE MENTAL CHARACTERISTICS FOR CREATIVE SUCCESS.

WITH THE UNDERSTANDING THAT cognitive reappraisal is the driveshaft that turns obstacles into opportunities, it's time to open up your toolbox. You have a trio of tools: resilience, grit, and optimism. Resilience rebounds you from setbacks, grit empowers you to persevere through hardship, and optimism fuels your confidence to achieve your goals. In this book, you'll encounter stories from a diverse range of professionals who've faced their own obstacles, such as self-doubt, failure, and lack of inspiration. Through their experiences, you'll discover inspiration and insight to apply to your career.



Graphic designer Sagi Haviv is the definition of resilience. When he first came to the United States from Israel, he didn't make it into Cooper Union, the prestigious art school. He trained as a method actor for a year to secure his visa and was accepted to Cooper Union on

his second shot. Years later, when Haviv applied to Chermayeff & Geismar, they didn't have any openings. He demonstrated his passion by offering to work for free. Today, he's a partner at Chermayeff & Geismar & Haviv, where he designs brands for some of the biggest companies in the world, including the U.S. Open and Conservation International. His inspiring story of resilience begins on page 58.



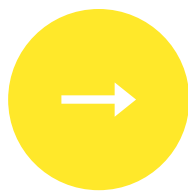
The astronaut Jeanette Epps has dreamed of going to space since she was a child. In 2018, her trip to the International Space Station was put on pause for undisclosed reasons. "Things won't always go as planned," she says. Epps remains optimistic and believes "the journey is the creative part." Epps's story on page 26 will give you a boost of inspiration.

Resilience

Optimism

Who's Who

THE ARTISTS, ATHLETES, AND EVERYONE IN BETWEEN THE PAGES OF THIS BOOK.



RUI ABREU

Portugal-based type designer and founder of R-Typography. Abreu's craft of type design is meticulous and monotonous—and requires a unique type of endurance.

MASSY ARIAS

Fitness influencer and entrepreneur, featured on the cover of magazines such as *Women's Health* and *Parents Latina*. Single mom, unstoppable work ethic.

MOLLY BAZ

Chef, author of two cookbooks, and video host. I was curious to learn how she remains cool and confident while on camera.

DICK BEARDSLEY

Motivational speaker and former

long-distance runner who came in second place to Alberto Salazar in the 1982 Boston Marathon.

EVE BINDER

Design leader in the tech industry. Résumé includes Chase, Grubhub, AOL, and oh, also happens to be my wife.

JEANIE CHEEK

Wardrobe stylist and costume designer who's kept her cool while working on high-pressure television shows such as *Lip Sync Battle* and *MTV Movie Awards*.

DAVID COOPER

The guy who illustrated two children's books for Kevin Hart. What was *that* like?

DAVID CURCURI TO

Founder of Works Well With Others Design Group and former design director of *Esquire*, where he was my boss.

BILLY DEMONG

Former Nordic combined skier and five-time Olympian. I wanted to learn more about the mental strength necessary to be an Olympic athlete.

MARION DEUCHARS

Illustrator, graphic designer, and author of twenty books. Utilizes breathing, stretching, and yoga for balance in her workday.

EVELYN DONG

Professional mountain biker who jumps her bike 15 feet (4 m) in the air.

MICHELLE DOUGHERTY

Creative director who oversaw the design for the *Stranger Things* title sequence.

JEANETTE EPPS

NASA astronaut and aerospace engineer. I was curious about the endurance required to be an astronaut.

KARIN FONG

Director of Imaginary Forces, a motion graphics studio responsible for title sequences on everything from *Thursday Night Football* to *Spider-Man*.

RUSSELL FRANCIS

A 76-year-old painter and poet who discovered his creativity later in life.

VINCE FROST

Australian-based graphic designer and founder of Frost*collective design agency.

NOAH GALLOWAY

Former US Army soldier who lost his left arm and leg in Iraq. The definition of grit, Galloway perseveres as an extreme athlete.

CAROLINE GLEICH

Hikes up mountains and skis down them. How does Gleich weather-proof her mind from the imminent danger of avalanches?

CAMILLE GERKE

Third-grade student. I wanted to experience a child's imagination before it's impeded by the practicality of the workplace.

ANTHONY GIGLIO

Sommelier, author, and hilarious public speaker. Humor is a powerful tool for overcoming obstacles.

SAGI HAVIV

Partner at Chermayeff & Geismar & Haviv. I wanted to learn about the struggle with high-profile clients such as the U.S. Open.

HURLEY HAYWOOD

Former race car driver and five-time winner of the 24 Hours of Daytona. Figured a guy who could stay up and drive for an entire day would have a few things to say about endurance.

DEAN KARNAZES

Ultramarathoner who once ran for three days without sleep and has written five books.

JENNIFER KINON

Political campaigns are notoriously tough design sprints, and Kinon was the design director for Hillary Clinton's campaign.

SARA LIEBERMAN

Quit a full-time job in New York to pursue her dream as a Paris-based travel and food writer.

VAISHNAVI MAHENDRAN

Culture is creative fuel for this South Asian art director, currently at Apple Worldwide Retail.

BOBBY C. MARTIN JR.

Creative director at Apple. Scored a dream job working on Cory Booker's political campaign while at Champions Design.

MICHAEL BRANDON MYERS

Myers is an early adopter of AI, and I wanted to learn more about the tool that frightens many creatives.

JAY OSGERBY

Industrial designer responsible for the Pacific chair, which was the seat of choice for Apple Park (the corporate headquarters of Apple).

ALEX PIRANI

Former chef who pivoted in his thirties and went back to school to

become a graphic designer. Career changes like these can fuel your endurance by challenging your creativity.

ZAKIYA POPE

Senior behavioral designer and vice president at U.S. Bank. Pope was a successful college volleyball player, and I was intrigued how the sport influenced her views on diversity and design.

JOSHUA RAMUS

Architect who rowed crew while in college. What are the similarities between rowing and architecture?

ANGELA RIECHERS

Transitioned between three

careers as a writer, art director, and now program director of graphic design at the University of the Arts.

JASPAL RIYAIT

Once a senior editor at *The New York Times*, now an art director at Apple. Riyait forges her resilience by switching jobs once she's hit peak success.

LEO RODGERS

Cyclist who lost his left leg in a motorcycle accident. Optimistically believes we all "need to get our one crash out of the way." What can we learn from Rodgers about dealing with our own "crashes"?

KEIVARAE RUSSELL

American football

cornerback who was once signed by the New Orleans Saints. I wanted to learn how Russell deals with the uncertainty of now being a free agent.

YUKO SHIMIZU

Japanese illustrator and professor at the School of Visual Arts. Shimizu's artwork is elaborate, her work ethic, persistent.

NEIL STRAUSS

I wanted to learn interview techniques from this *New York Times* best-selling writer who's interviewed everyone from Chuck Berry to Lady Gaga.

PETER YANG

What was it like for this celebrity photographer to be on set with Barack Obama?

“It’s important for my creativity to not always think of the endgame.”

— MOLLY BAZ



P.22

▼
Jay Osgerby, on Being Creative

"I can't resist the excitement of making things, especially with people who are passionate—that feeling is contagious."

[Creative Endurance - learn more!](#)



IT'S RARE FOR AN ultramarathoner to be stuck in place, but that's exactly where Dean Karnazes finds himself right now. Hovering over his butcher-block writing table, he struggles with the opening scene of his first screenplay. How can he make a film about ancient Greece feel relevant to a modern audience? The problem nags at Karnazes like a splinter jammed under his fingernail.

This scenario of creative paralysis may sound familiar, whether you're struggling to get out of bed, stewing over a difficult project, or overwhelmed by a deadline. Remain still and your anxiety will continue to climb. The solution is simple: "Motion stirs emotion," says Karnazes.

He puts his personal credo into action and embarks upon a head-clearing run. At the

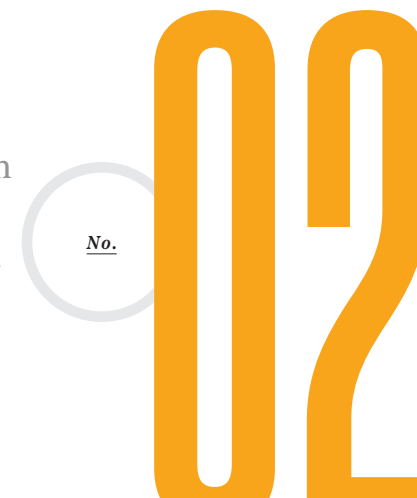
2,600-foot (792 m) summit of Mount Tamalpais, the idea hits Karnazes like a rock rolling down the hill. The film will open with students griping about their first day of Greek Classics Studies. When the professor instructs them to open their books, the film will cut to a battle scene in Athens.

Karnazes returns to his desk to write the opening scene. "The hardest part is finding the inner discipline and motivation to do something that you're not looking forward to," he says.

In this section, you'll meet other heroes who use movement to overcome obstacles. Race car driver Hurley Haywood swiftly cuts through distractions, astronaut Jeanette Epps deliberately multitasks, and mountain biker Evelyn Dong knows when to stop moving at the end of the day.

—
Carry a Notebook.

As you zip through your day, random ideas will flint like fireflies in your brain. Heed the advice of illustrator Marion Deuchars, and keep a notebook handy to jar those sparks of genius. "It's important to get an idea down on paper before I forget it," she says. The author of *Yoga for Stiff Birds* and nineteen other books has discovered forgotten book concepts in her notebook. Bonus: The notebook off-loads your short-term memory, making room for fresh ideas.





PING! A PARANORMAL message pops up, late in the day. “Hey, I forgot, can you create one more graphic,” asks your coworker. *Seriously?*

Astronaut Jeanette Epps deals with her fair share of aggravating messages while working at NASA Mission Control as Capcom. In that role, Epps gathers the thoughts of every console in the room, consults with the flight director, and relays critical information back to space.

“Sit back, and think about it. Don’t be reactive,” she says. “Find out what the real story is.” If Capcom mucks up their communication with an astronaut in distress, that could make matters worse.

Whether you’re Capcom or creative, your initial response will set the tone. Annoyed at your coworker’s message? Don’t respond when you’re angry. Simple as that. Let the request sit for a bit, and your perception will change. In the morning, it might not feel that annoying.

Even better: Wait, and your coworker might realize they don’t actually need that extra graphic.

Look at the situation from the perspective of your coworker. Do they really need that graphic tonight, or are they just knocking an item off their to-do list? *C’mon, that’s understandable.*

Let’s say the coworker does indeed need that graphic, and these late requests are common. Resolve this situation, but acknowledge the bigger picture:

There might be a workflow issue. Are you discussing all of the graphic needs at the outset of a project? Is there someone else making these requests, and do they need to be part of the communication from the beginning? Spend some additional time collecting your thoughts, then set up a meeting to discuss these issues.

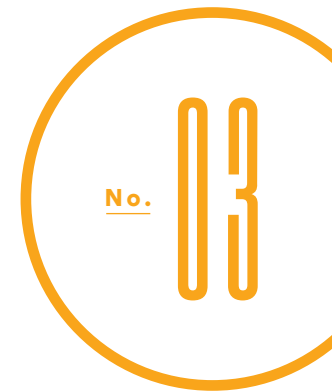
Talk about problems: When Epps and I spoke, NASA just experienced a coolant leak on the Russian Soyuz rocket. “It’s better to laugh than cry in these situa-

tions. So much can go wrong—as long as it’s not the worst-case scenario, then all is good,” she says.

See the bright side like Epps. Last night, the message felt like a crash landing. This morning, it’s a chance for liftoff.

▼
Dick Beardsley, on Endurance
“Do whatever it takes, physically or mentally. Keep going, day after day, no matter what obstacles might be in your way.”

How an astronaut deals with an onslaught of messages.



Slooooooow

DOWN YOUR RESPONSE.



MY GROWTH PLAN

“I don’t wake up hungry.”

MOLLY BAZ SHARES HER RECIPE FOR DAILY INSPIRATION.

■ **OCCUPATION**
Cookbook Author,
Video Host

■ **LOCATION**
Los Angeles,
California

EXERCISE PRIMES my creative process. I need to feel the urge for food to get really excited to cook. There’s nothing worse than feeling full from a meal you just ate and then stepping into the kitchen to create. Nothing happens.

THERE ARE TOOLS I use for inspiration. I’ll cook in an improvisational way. It’s important for my creativity to not always think of the endgame.

I MADE CHILI RECENTLY. I sat with my husband, turned on the fireplace, and was like, *We’re going all-in on vibes tonight.* He’s a big sounding board for me. He will say, “This is yummy. I’m enjoying this, but it’s missing a little bit of Molly.” When he says that, I’m like, “Ugh, I knew it.”

MY IDEAS ARE OFTEN shaped through

conversation. My inner and outer thoughts are not always the same, and talking to someone else will help me understand what I *actually* mean.

CHILI IS A GREAT EXAMPLE of a recipe that comes from being like, *Oh, that’s what I want to eat tonight.* And then, the next day being like, *That was really good. I’m gonna turn that into a recipe.* That chili became Spiced Chili with Many Beans and Some Greens. It’s in my cooking club.

I USE THE SAME ingredients in multiple ways in a recipe. It’s an incredible way to keep ingredient lists tight. On my chili, I started by sautéing onions into the base and reserved a quarter of the onion. I thinly sliced it, tossed it with lime juice, and put pickled onions on top.

WHEN CLARKSON POTTER reached out to me to write a cookbook, I was shocked. But they wanted me to write it for Basically, a sub-brand of *Bon Appétit*. After I thought about it, my first book isn’t going to be Molly for someone else. It’s going to be Molly for Molly.

I WAS ASKED TO WRITE a list of one hundred recipe titles as part of my proposal. I started throwing titles on paper, like Pastrami Roast Chicken with Schmaltzy Onions and Dill. Smooshed and Crispy Potatoes with Salt and Vinegar Sour Cream. Things that sounded good to me.

NAMING IS IMPORTANT. You have five to six words to explain everything about a dish, from ingredients to technique. You have to be choosy.

ONCE THE PROPOSAL was approved, I stepped into the kitchen to tackle those recipes, and the inspiration wasn’t there.

MY COOKBOOK RECIPES evolved from the original ideas. Even the kinds of ingredients that I was fixated on changed over time. Every month, there was a new thing I was obsessed with. They find their way into the recipes. Right now, I’m in my sesame seed phase.

A RECIPE STARTS WITH A VISUAL in my head—what will the finished dish look like? Taste is important, too, obviously. The two need to intersect to make a recipe great.

I MADE A CONSCIOUS DECISION to spend my own money on hiring an outside firm to design the second cookbook. I specifically chose people who are not cookbook designers—I didn’t want them to take a traditional approach.

GRAPHIC DESIGN and recipes are similar. On the final dish, ingredients need to be balanced. You can’t have too much of one thing—it’ll overpower the dish.

I WAS A LINE COOK. If you get an order in, you have seven minutes to get it out. It’s all about efficiency. That eliminates mental chaos.

WHEN IT CAME to the techniques in the book, I decided to hold my reader’s hand in a way that’s not the common convention for recipe writing. I organized the ingredients by the department where you find them in the grocery store. It’s annoying when there are herbs on four different parts of the list. You end up running circles around the grocery store.

I’M DOING THE THING I’m meant to be doing—teaching people how to cook and having fun while doing it.



TAKEAWAYS

1

Set your ideal environment to be creative. Exercise whets this chef’s appetite to write recipes.

2

Don’t worry about the end result. Enjoy the process and you’ll get there.

3

The act of creating is an evolution. First make it good, then make it great.

IDEAS



Yuko Shimizu, on Joy and Purpose

“Making something from nothing is pure joy for creators like me. Illustration is my purpose, and it makes me happy.”

[Creative Endurance - learn more!](#)



Tedious Task? Higher Purpose.

This Olympic Gold medalist’s simple secret for plowing through the mundane.

BILLY DEMONG IS TRAINING FOR THE Nordic combined skiing event in the Olympics. Running for hours on a treadmill, he stares at a Post-it Note with a dot drawn smack in the middle of it. This is a tedious yet meaningful task.

As Demong explains, “Boring is part of the pathway to success.” On the treadmill, he’s honing his ability to tune out distractions and focus—a crucial skill for thundering down the ski slope.

Demong’s strategy is to overprepare. While he’s running on the treadmill for hours, the actual Olympic event will entail 30 minutes of cross-country skiing. Less time if he wants to win.

This philosophy applies to creatives as well. Let’s say your boss asks you to organize some jpeg files. Boring task, but you can make it meaningful. Remain optimistic: This can lead to something bigger—the opportunity is in your hands. Develop a new workflow for organizing jpegs. Find a new tool. Once you’re done, ask your boss if you can work on a larger project. Go above and beyond on boring tasks, and they can take you to your next role.

Put this on a Post-it note: Demong won Olympic Gold in 2010 when he crossed the finish line in 25 minutes, 32.9 seconds. This was a first for the United States in the sport of Nordic combined skiing. All those hours of training led him to success.



GET UP AND STRETCH

“When you’re sitting and creating, your brain is excited, but your body is suffering,” says the illustrator Marion Deuchars. She has two stretches. The Superman: Stretch your arms straight up. The Lobster: Stretch your arms to the side, and bend at the elbow with your fingers aimed at the sky. Hold both for three breaths.

Break a Boring Routine.

One little change a day will make for a big creative slay.

We face a similar conundrum to Karnazes: Our minds love routine and hate the struggle that comes with change. As you get better at a creative act, your mind forms the process into a routine—a go-kart track that loops round and round, day in and day out. If you’re a fiction writer, that might mean waking up at 5 a.m. every day and grinding out two hours of work. This is when your work gets stale.

Flee out of your comfort zone. Once a week, try writing nonfiction at a local coffee shop, and start at noon. You’ll remix your brain patterns and develop a fresh perspective on writing fiction.

Karnazes’s birthday jog unlocked his running superpower. During a run across all fifty states, Karnazes was invited to the White House by Michelle Obama. “It was an unbelievable high point,” he says. “The White House was the last place on earth I ever thought I’d end up.”

Challenge yourself to break a routine today. It might lead to an unexpected tomorrow.

DEAN KARNAZES PEELED OFF HIS PANTS and went for a run.

On his thirtieth birthday, Karnazes stepped outside for a moment of reflection. “I was so comfortable that I was miserable,” he says. “Everything came easy, and running was tough.” After too many tequila shots, he made the creative decision to run 30 miles (48 km) in celebration of his thirty years on earth. In a pair of silk boxers. On this fateful night, Karnazes discovered his creative approach to breaking routines and quit his cushy corporate job the next day.

✓ **NEW HABITS, MORE CREATIVITY**
Flip a few routines for a fresh perspective.

+ **SCHEDULE**
If your days feel stale, start earlier, or later. “I never run at the same time two days in a row,” says Dean Karnazes about his ultramarathon training. Just check with your boss.

+ **TOOLS**
Change your software for a fresh perspective. If I’m stumped while writing on the computer, doodling on a piece of paper will break through any creative blockages.

+ **TIME**
Limit yourself to twenty minutes, and it’ll reduce the amount of overthinking. “The idea happens when you don’t think about it,” says Vince Frost, founder of Frost*collective.

+ **COLLABORATOR**
They can point out things you missed—helpful when you’re in a time crunch. My wife, Eve, is a designer, and she’ll frame feedback based on what’s best for a user.

+ **LOCATION**
Illustrator Marion Deuchars will go to a noisy coffee shop to focus for an hour. “I find the distraction quite stimulating,” she says. “It sets a time and place to focus on one idea.”

Q


+

A

THE ASTRONAUT

YOU'RE FACING A CREATIVE BLOCK AND **JEANETTE EPPS** IS FLYING AT SUPERSONIC SPEED. HERE'S HOW TO KEEP YOUR COOL.

■ **LOCATION**
Houston,
Texas





BEING AN ASTRONAUT IS ONE OF THE coolest jobs on another planet—a dream shared by many but pursued by few. I huddled with Jeanette Epps to learn more about why she wanted to become an astronaut, how she got there, and the challenges she faced in her quest to go to space. I was impressed by her calm demeanor, which she attributes to her time in Iraq. “The real you comes out when you’re under pressure,” she said. Read on to learn how you can be invincible to stress like this astronaut.

How is being an astronaut creative? When I was a kid, my twin sister and I had this game where we’d watch the Moon follow us home. I was being creative by thinking of the endless possibilities in life. To be an astronaut, you have to dream. *What would it be like to get a little closer to the Moon? Closer to Mars?* Some astronauts come back from space and say it’s the blackest black you’ve ever seen. That’s so exciting to me.

You were supposed to go to space, but that didn’t happen. How did you deal? I’m an optimist. I always have been. I just had leadership training, and we learned about Crucible Moments: situations that force the real you to come out. How you react to a tough situation is important. When I was removed from the flight, I had to decide who I was at that moment. Resilience is important, in any field

you work in. Things won’t go as planned. You need to be able to recover fast and properly. In leadership training, we reflected back on our entire life to examine for crucible moments that shaped us.

Did you have a crucible moment as a child?

Hours before my twin sister and I were born, my mother’s home was broken into. From that point on, she was always afraid, so we were very protected. We read and studied a lot. Public television was big in my house: *Mister Rogers*, *Sesame Street*, *The Electric Company*, and *Vegetable Soup*. That crucible moment shaded my mother’s life and the ways she raised us. It helped me become who I am today.

What stoked your imagination as a kid?

Science fiction. I loved *Doctor Who*, and always thought it would be cool to have a robotic dog. Being on video chat reminds me of the teleportation in *Star Trek*.

Why did you become an astronaut?

When my brother came home from college, he looked at my report card and said, “You’re doing well in math and science. You can become an astronaut or an aerospace engineer.” That stuck with me, but I chose to do things that made me happy in my career. I worked at Ford Motor Company as an engineer, but then the CIA called. You don’t know what you’re going to do for them (laughs), but it’s exciting. At some point, I figured I was getting too old, so I applied to the Astronaut Corps. I had good experience as both a lab geek and an operator, so I felt qualified.

Do you currently lead a team of people?

No, but as an astronaut, you’re also a role model. I’ve had students come to me five years after giving them advice, and they tell me they’re working in aero-

space. I’m almost in tears. As role models, astronauts lead, but from a different vantage point.

What’s the toughest part of being a role model?

When I put on that astronaut uniform, I’m a blue beacon. Imagine if I yelled at a guy on the road if he cut me off while wearing the suit? I can’t do that. Little kids want to give you the biggest hug ever. It’s the cutest thing, but it’s also a reminder: As an astronaut, I’m a public figure with responsibility.

I’ve heard spacewalk training is incredibly hard.

Tell me about it? We learn how to operate a robotic arm. Physically, it’s tricky to operate. But it’s also mentally draining: You’re concerned about impressing other people. Once you stop worrying, it’s doable. There’s a great expression in Russian, *praktika - mat’ ucheniya*, which translates to “practice is the mother of learning.” I tell students all the time that anything you don’t know is hard.

Are you excited to go to space?

It’s been a long road. The journey is the creative part, and there’s so much to learn along the way. Because once you achieve that thing, then what’s next?



TAKEAWAYS

- 1** Projects won’t go as planned. It’s normal to be annoyed at first, but then you need to adapt and move forward to thrive.
- 2** Tough situations in your life are crucible moments—ones that define your character. How will you react?
- 3** You’re likely a role model to someone at work. Team members will be inspired by your actions in challenging situations.

▼ **Yuko Shimizu, on Focus**

"If I worry about everything I need to do, then I get stressed. I don't think about anything else than what I'm working on right now."

06/ Race through Distractions.

Stay on course
like this race car driver.

→ **PUSH NOTIFICATIONS. EMAILS.** Meeting invites. These distractions are roadblocks in your focus. As a young creative, you'll feel compelled to respond right away. How do you get *anything* done?

Take inspiration from race car driver Hurley Haywood's experience in the 1975 Rolex 24, a grueling endurance race where mental resilience is key. The thick fog of the night is clouding the focus of the drivers. Haywood gets a call. "Should we cancel the race?" asks his crew chief.

"Set your watch, and time my next lap," Haywood responds, in a moment of resilience.

He ignores the fog and hammers through. "I saw this as an opportunity for our team to make up extra time. If you're not able to adapt to changing conditions, then you're not going to win," he says.

Haywood's team secures first place. By taking a calculated risk, he proves it's possible to cut through the distraction.

You can apply this same mindset to your work. Need to get into your creative zone? Turn off push notifications, and set your status to "Heads down," or another indication that you're focused. This will reduce the amount of time lost when you're switching context from task to task. Your boss will appreciate the final results.

A FEW USEFUL DIVERSIONS



THE COFFEE MAKER

Illustrator Marion Deuchars prefers a percolator. "Complex rituals offer greater distractions," she says, and that allows her extra time to think. "There's no way I can come into my studio and just start working."



A MESSY STUDIO

Twenty-one other artists used to share a studio with Deuchars, but now she's on her own. "If you don't have people around, you find something else." By tidying up the studio, she can mentally switch gears between tasks.



A HANDS-ON ART PROJECT

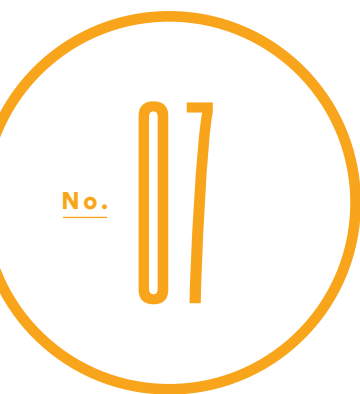
The act of painting stones provides Deuchars with a moment of active relaxation. "There was a point that I had to put them away, because it was so joyful and would distract me for hours," she says.



THE DOG

Deuchars will take her dog, Pip, for a walk. "He's a hound, so he's always on the hunt for any little furry thing." That forces her to be more observant of her surroundings and keeps her focused.





THE

Pitch

DOESN'T NEED TO BE PERFECT.



LIKE THE HEADLESS HORSEMAN, you stampede into yet *another* meeting, but without a fully-formed idea in your noggin. Hey, it's not your fault—there are so many meetings, and you haven't had time to think about this one. But what if I told you that blank canvas in your head is an opportunity? Let's listen in on a meeting at *O, The Oprah Magazine*.

Late in the day, the art department is huddled around a conference table, brainstorming a perplexing story on the power of chance. The working title is "Moments of Grace." Art Director Angela Riechers is uninspired but needs to participate.

Team members are tossing out cliché ideas like four-leaf clovers and dice. Someone suggests hiring an illustrator who works with paper, which sparks a related idea for Riechers. She makes a paper fortune teller and tosses it on the table. "I was so bored, making something with my hands actually helped me," she admits. The following idea was to illustrate Mexican *Lotería* cards. "The cards have an element of chance and luck to them," says Riechers. "Plus, they're visually appealing." The team continues to build on this idea, exploring fortune cookies and other visual ephemera. Eventually they hire illustrator Eduardo Recife to create the finished product.

Riechers's experience demonstrates the power of actively listening and infusing your own interests into brainstorming sessions. While none of the individual pitches were perfect, they built on one another to eventually form a great idea.

Similar to Riechers, you won't be enthused about every meeting. Take notes, listen, and strike when the time is right.

Boost a
bland meeting
with a paper
fortune teller.



MY GROWTH PLAN

“Illustration is like climbing a mountain.”

—
YUKO SHIMIZU'S FIRST CAREER OUT OF COLLEGE SUCKED. HERE'S HOW SHE ROSE TO THE TOP.

OCCUPATION

Illustrator, Adjunct Professor,
School of Visual Arts

LOCATION

New York,
New York

W

—
WHEN I WAS A TWO-YEAR-OLD in Japan, I took out a crayon, drew a line that went north, and added a circle to it. I said “Mom, I drew a balloon.”

—
MY PARENTS WERE against the pursuit of art. The Japanese have a notion that creative occupations are very difficult. They want their kids to be doctors, lawyers, politicians, or businesspeople.

—
AS A CHILD, I could only recognize about ten people in my class. I have face blindness disorder.

—
I WENT TO A REGULAR university in Japan. My concentration was in advertising and marketing, because I thought it was the most creative thing to do in the practical, real world.

—
I TOOK A CORPORATE PR JOB, stayed in it for

ten years. It wasn't a glamorous job, nothing like Samantha Jones in *Sex in the City*.

—
WHEN I TURNED THIRTY, I asked myself, Is this really what I want to do? I knew how to draw but felt inferior to anyone that went to art school. The only way to overcome it was to move to New York and go to the School of Visual Arts. I saved up enough money from my PR job and moved to the United States.

—
MY FIRST ILLUSTRATION JOB was for the *Village Voice*. Black and white. Tom Cruise, Rosie O'Donnell, and David Hyde Pierce, coming out of the closet together.

—
TOM CRUISE WAS really hard to illustrate. I look at the work now, and it's total crap. But I was really proud to get paid \$200 for it.

—
I TRY NOT TO TAKE ON projects that involve good-looking actors and actresses. Recently, I accidentally took on a job where I had to illustrate Brad Pitt. It was really hard. I printed his portrait really big and broke his facial features down into shapes. I really love graphic design, so I treated the challenge as pure composition.

—
COMING UP WITH NEW IDEAS is hard—you have to create something from scratch. Once I come up with the idea, I feel great, but then I have to sit in front of a piece of paper for hours and hours. But in a way, it's easier. I have something to compare it to. I never want to go back to my previous life in PR.

—
ILLUSTRATION IS LIKE climbing a mountain. I work hard. Sometimes the hill is easy; sometimes it's steep. When you reach the top, all is forgiven.



TAKEAWAYS

1
It's never too late to switch careers.

2
Reading can spark ideas for projects. Books flex your imagination. Set aside a time to read every day, even if just for ten minutes.

3
Travel adds to your personal experience, which enhances your imagination.

—
AFTER I GRADUATED from the School of Visual Arts, I had a year to find a work visa. After that, the visa would've expired and I wouldn't be allowed to work.

—
I WAS OFFERED TO TEACH a precollege class for high schoolers. They were in desperate need of a teacher of color. Later on, they gave me an undergraduate college class, and my immigration lawyer told me to never let that teaching job go. I needed it to keep my visa.

—
TEACHING KEEPS ME YOUNG. Right now, the kids are really into the 1980s, which is funny to me—they are dressing and liking things that I did when I was exactly their age. I tell them to look up artists from that time. We exchange information—they can learn something from me; I can learn something from them. Once you stop learning, you become old and grumpy.

—
I DON'T WATCH A LOT of movies, and I don't read graphic novels. I like traditional books with words. Books with words aren't visual, but that strengthens your imagination. It creates a better library in my brain, and that creates a better outcome in my work.

—
I TRAVEL A LOT. Mostly to conferences or workshops. I don't decide where I go. I meet people and experience local life wherever I go. Going to unplanned locations is an ideal way to be inspired and decompress. I don't use an iPad, so I can't bring my work with me. I read.

—
READING BOOKS about countries or places I have never been to—it forces me to imagine what the place looks like. Books are travel for the mind, and you don't have to spend any money.

▼
Zakiya Pope, on Writing Emails

“Strong subject line—I want you to open it. A quick greeting, short scannable bullet points, and then wrap that shit up.”

[Creative Endurance - learn more!](#)



No.

08

One (and a Half) Things at a Time.

How to focus when your to-do list is raining down like an asteroid shower.

YOUR MISSION: REMAIN creative and productive on a daily basis. *But how will you get it all done?* Just ask astronaut Jeanette Epps.

Epps is underwater in NASA's Neutral Buoyancy Lab, training for the spacewalk, which she says is “one of the hardest things an astronaut has to do.” Clock is ticking. Six hours to complete a barrage of tasks, such as tightening bolts, changing batteries, and screwing in light bulbs. Epps is sporting a bulky pressurized suit, which multiplies the difficulty of sub-aquatic movement and replicates the feeling of being in space.

Epps steels her mind. “Remain present, and think, *This is the most important thing I'm doing right now,*” she says.

Here's how you can apply Epps's wisdom to your work. Choose a key creative

task, such as designing comps for your director. This is your “full-task,” one that requires more creative energy. Next, pick a tactical task, such as file organization or emails. That's your “half-task,” and it doesn't demand as much creativity.

Focus on your full-task until you hit a creative block. Close the file. Take a break, and move on to the half-task. Emails usually aren't fun, but they aren't terrible when they provide a break from challenging creative work. This process reframes the two tasks as rewards for one another, and charges you with renewed energy for the full-task.

Find the right balance of creative and tactical tasks in your day, and you too can achieve neutral buoyancy—the equal tendency of an object to sink or float. Sounds way better than career burnout.

Don't Try So Hard.

INTRACTABLE PROBLEM? TAKE A BREAK AND LET YOUR SUBCONSCIOUS RUN THE SHOW.

ACCORDING TO ILLUSTRATOR MARION DEUCHARS, “THE RIGHT BRAIN INTERVIEWS THE LEFT BRAIN.

MR. SENSIBLE AND MR. CREATIVE HAVE A BATTLE,” AND THE SOLUTION MAGICALLY APPEARS.

No.

09

No.

10

▼
Leo Rodgers, on His Power Suit

“Oddly enough, when I lost my leg, my bike became my prosthetic, because I don't wear a prosthetic leg. My bike makes me feel like Iron Man.”

Unleash Your Creative Power Suit.

A simple article of clothing is the cheat code for confidence.

- 1 **I'M ABOUT TO GIVE MY FIRST BIG PRESENTATION FOR ADOBE.** Can this black T-shirt boost my confidence? Because right now, I don't feel like I belong here (1). When you're not feeling confident about the day ahead, regardless of whether or not you need to give a presentation, put yourself in a positive head-space with a creative uniform. By wearing an outfit you love, you project an image of who you *want to be*: a tool known as positive visualization (2). The artist Georgia O'Keeffe was on Team Black Uniform, and she chose the color for its practicality—one less decision to fuss over in the morning, therefore more time to paint in the day. ¶ When I was a young designer, I poured over design annuals, and the photos of the black-clad creative directors always stirred wonder. Today, wearing all black (3) makes me *feel* like a creative director, and that scuttles any unwanted insecurities. ¶ Okay, it's presentation day. Before I utter the first few words of *x-Heighted* (4), I feel like a combination of all my design heroes. I deliver my talk without a single stutter on stage (5). And thankfully, the black T-shirt hid my pit stains (6). Blazer, boots, or band T-shirt, your favorite outfit will turn up your confidence when you're feeling down.
- 2 Reminisce on your successes that led to this big moment. It'll remind you that you deserve this.
- 3 Practice mindfulness in the morning. Imagine yourself succeeding at the end of the day.
- 4 Take deep belly breaths right before a stressful event. It'll relax your nervous system.
- 5 Keep a journal of big victories. You can draw upon those memories in stressful situations.
- 6 Forgot to say something? Don't backpedal. You're the only person who knows.

Q

THE ULTRA-MARATHONER

+

A

DISCOVER **DEAN KARNAZES'S** SECRETS FOR WRITING FIVE BOOKS AND RUNNING HUNDREDS OF MILES, OCCASIONALLY AT THE SAME TIME.

■ **LOCATION**
Kentfield,
California



Why do you write? (Laughs) Wow. You came out of the gate with a tough one. Kidding aside, I write because it's hard. I write because I want to live up to my potential. I don't think I'll ever master the craft of writing—no piece of writing is ever perfect.

What's your key to endurance? Variety. There's a lot of creativity in what I pursue as a runner. Some runners like to run marathons; others run around the neighborhood. I pride myself on being a prolific runner versus a fast runner. I like to do everything from short 5Ks to 200-mile (322-km) ultramarathons. I like to make up adventures. Next weekend, I'm going to Greece with a friend. We're going to watch the sunrise from the Acropolis and then run 48 miles (77 km) to Athens to watch the sunset. It's not a race, just what I think is a good idea and a fun thing to do.

Do you write while you run? All the time. I used to carry a digital recorder. Now, I just dictate writing into my phone. As a runner and a writer, you can probably attest—we have some of our clearest thoughts while out running.

What do you think about while running? The big answer is that I think about a lot of things, and I think about nothing. Running gives you the freedom to not be bombarded by noise. My mother was an English teacher, and she used to say, "The best writers are the best readers." Training as much as I do, I don't have as much time to sit and read physical books as I'd like. I have five hundred audiobooks on my playlist, so I listen while I run.

I'm listening to Dave Grohl's audiobook. Did he read it himself?

Yes. It adds an extra layer, because his voice is so entertaining. The reader makes a big difference with audiobooks. I'm 100 percent Greek, and the first piece of literature, *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, was passed down orally. They were lyrical writers.

How does your Greek ancestry inspire your writing? I go to Greece, probably four or five times a year. I love reading the classics: Heraclitus, Aeschylus, and Homer. Reading a lot of Greek literature has really been instructive to my writing.

So much conflict in their work. What's your biggest conflict right now? I'm trying to figure out what really brings me fulfillment in life. Running is an element, but not the only one. I've written a screenplay inspired by Greek literature, and it's in the process of being produced by Hollywood. It was a challenge learning how to write in a different format than a novel or an autobiography.

What inspired you to write a screenplay? The combination of my love of classics and ancient Greece. During the lockdown, I delved deep into ancient Athens. Greece is the birthplace of democracy, and that was not only interesting to me but relevant to current times. Socrates was a really quirky, compelling person, and I just thought, What if I make him into a movie character?

Whom do you collaborate with? My wife. She's brutal. When you write, you want honest feedback—someone to say that a phrase is cliché. My wife will cross out entire paragraphs. I've never written a screenplay, so I need her help.

Sounds like new challenges inspire you. When it comes to both running and writing, I'm allergic to routine. I'm not one of those authors that can get up every morning at five o'clock and pump out one thousand words for my book. If the process feels mundane, then it feels like work.

Writing and running are kinda the same, huh? Yes. They're both inherent in us: 1 percent inspiration, 99 percent perspiration.



TAKEAWAYS

- 1 Variety is the key to endurance. Shake up the routine of your creative process by changing the time or place you work.
- 2 Running inspires writing because it allows your subconscious mind to process the creative work.
- 3 Every writer needs an editor, and every creative needs a second opinion. Find someone who's honest.

▼

ULTRAMARATHONERS MAY SEEM LIKE superhumans, achieving feats that feel out of reach for most of us. Karnazes's list of accomplishments includes: a run in the frigid South Pole, a run in the torrid Death Valley, and a run that spanned three days...without sleep. In speaking with Karnazes, my goal was not to marvel at his physical accolades, but to examine his mental drive. For someone nicknamed The Ultramarathon Man, he's a humble guy, with insatiable curiosity and a tremendous work ethic. Here's how he gets it all done.