

GOING PRO

**A series of resources and motivation
for the soon-to-be creative professional.**

A BIT OF BACKGROUND

1. It all started when I picked up *The War of Art* by Steven Pressfield. His book gave me a new view on the artwork of doing work.
2. Then, I extended the million-dollar question: Are you a pro?

MY TAKE (Words on Going Pro From a pro)

3. Next, I talked about the necessity of scheduling time to work. Whatever dream /idea/project concept you have won't come to fruition if you don't make time to work on it.
4. Following the issue of scheduling was that of making the start. Even if it's on your calendar, making the start can be daunting, but you can't finish something you haven't started. We must finish, so we must start.
5. Once you've started, it is important to avoid seclusion. Isolation is a dream killer. Don't go at it alone.
6. Finally, I wrapped up my portion of the series by talking about finding the necessary tools to stay inspired. Surround yourself with whatever it is that makes you tick. And of course, it needs to be organized.

SAM DUREGGER (Words on Going Pro From a Pro)

7. First, he shared about the emotional process of going pro. Getting prepared for the process, and handling the anxiety.
8. He followed it up with a post on the physical process of going pro. Practical insight and helpful resources to get you on your way.

WHO ARE SAM AND SAM?

9. Sam Mahlstadt – sammahlstadt.com
10. Sam DuRegger – theomusings.com & samwellcreative.com

BOOKSTORE

11. The Going Pro Bookstore

1.

I have read a few books so far this year, and I have been incredibly impressed. To be honest, I may have read a few of the best books out right now in the past couple months.

I seriously encourage you to check out these books if you don't currently own them. They are the type of books that need to be placed on a nearby shelf within quick reach. They need to be read, and read again, and read once more. The words are timeless and profound.

[The Ragamuffin Gospel by Brennan Manning](#) – It was in the first few pages of the book that I realized [he was talking about me](#). Not the theory of following Jesus, but he was telling the story of my faith journey. [This quote](#), even among a sea of literary and theological gems, rocked my world a bit. Even as the cheese is falling off my cracker, I continue to clutch my teddy bear.

[A Million Miles in a Thousand Years by Donald Miller](#) – This book made me ask some big questions. Big, soul-searching questions. While I read the book, I began to experience a desire to [live a good story](#). Miller is not only a great storyteller, but also brings the reader along in the quest to live great stories of their own. I have since come to the realization that great stories (written and lived) are created in the editing process.

[The War of Art by Steven Pressfield](#) – I haven't read many books on the craft of writing, but this book was brilliant. More than "how to write" or "how to be creative" this was a book about conquering fear, doubt, confidence and anything else that keeps an artist from creating. I have a new found desire to become a pro, and conquer the Resistance.*

*Following this post, I began to seriously question whether or not I was serious about "going pro" as Pressfield puts it. Sure I wanted to write, and hopefully/eventually make a career out of it somehow. I had the desire to be a professional writer by trade, but had not yet taken on the role of the professional writer by mindset and deed. It was here that this journey began.

2.

If you are an artist at any level, or you are an entrepreneur, or trapped in a cubicle with a desire to be creating, you must *you must* read *The War of Art* by Steven Pressfield.

As previously stated, this book got me thinking, and I wouldn't be doing you any good if I let you continue without another plea to go pick it up if you haven't already.

A profound point in the book for me was the clear distinction between

being an amateur

and

being a pro.

Succinctly:

A pro is someone who succeeds due to perseverance.

An amateur is someone who quits.

So the question of the day is this, *have you turned pro yet?*

The question has no bearing on whether or not you get paid to do what you love, but rather, have you taken on the mindset of the pro?

Do you approach your craft like it's a job? Do you conquer the Resistance by pushing through the distractions, or do you listen to the lies and give up?

So...

Are you a pro?

If so, the rest of this material will serve as encouragement, as well as practical advice on increasing productivity.

If not, you are in luck. This project was developed with you specifically in mind. The introductions of getting started on a project all the way through launching a business are made in the coming pages. Welcome.

3.

Part of the illusion of being a creative – and for the sake of this discussion, I am including entrepreneurs, because I think they have just as heavy a burden of creativity as artists – is that you have to be spontaneous, flighty and always shooting from the hip.

There is more danger, however, than creative mojo found in those attributes. The creative who breaks through, writes the book, launches the business or starts the charity is the one who got organized and carved out the time in their schedule to **do the work**. Sitting down to write up a business plan is not spontaneous, and crafting a proposal is hardly the result of a flighty mindset.

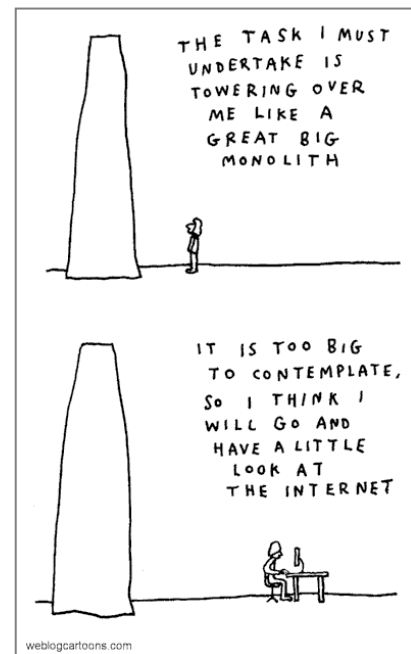
While you will certainly have eureka moments on the fly, these should be the great exception, not the norm. Keep a pen and paper handy at all times as to not let these slip, but don't go looking for them. When you spend your time trying to get inspired, you lose the opportunity to spend time working.

Eureka moments, those times where you finally think of the solution, the perfect sentence to end the chapter, the ideal location for the shop or the perfect local partner *only happen* after you have scheduled yourself time to think about and plan such issues. Only when you have exhausted yourself in preparation and finally walked away from your work will your muse show up and surprise you with inspiration. She is rarely sneaky, though, as she is usually relegated to your work time.

I understand the difficulty of making time to pursue your creative venture. I have worked several jobs with irregular hours, and as I write this, I am still transitioning to an 8-5. It's easy to say, "I'll get to it when I have time," but the truth is – **there will never be time if you don't make it**.

Start your morning earlier, stay up an hour later, research during a break at work or rearrange your recreation. **We all have time**, the pro is simply the one who manages it.

Don't let fear keep you from scheduling the work that could change your life, not to mention the lives of those around you. It is more difficult to carve out time to work on something that *may or may not* succeed, but none of us are as busy as we think we are. Conquer the fear, and mark the calendar.



4.

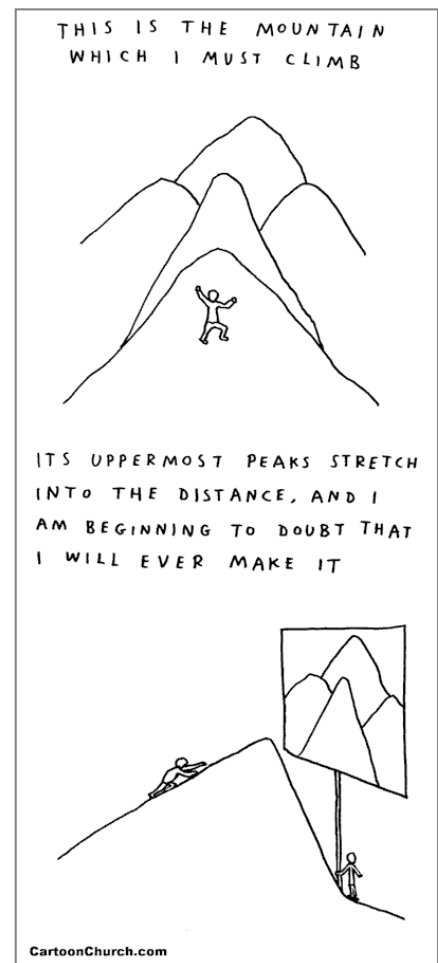
“THE SECRET OF GETTING AHEAD IS GETTING STARTED. THE SECRET OF GETTING STARTED IS BREAKING YOUR COMPLEX OVERWHELMING TASKS INTO SMALL MANAGEABLE TASKS, AND THEN STARTING ON THE FIRST ONE.”

– Mark Twain

Getting started can be a daunting task. Breaking down a vision, business or idea into manageable tasks, as Twain said, can be quickly overwhelming. If you fail to adjust your perspective from a big picture view to a single-task-at-a-time view, you will never begin to work on your project. Ben Arment, daily blogger at benarment.com and author of *Church in the Making*, once said that creativity at 30,000 feet is art, and at ground level is a to-do list.

Whether you are more comfortable with a task list person or a blank sheet of paper (I prefer the latter) you must pick a place to begin, *and begin*. Twain spoke of “small manageable tasks” as the way to get started. Similarly, Scott Belsky, founder and CEO of Behance and author of the New York Times bestseller *Making Ideas Happen*, speaks about actionable items as the vehicle that moves an idea from concept to creation. “Brainstorming should start with a question and the goal of capturing something specific, relevant, and actionable.” All too often, creatives can get stuck following a brainstorming session, because the generated ideas seem too large to achieve, and too intimidating to take on. Belsky goes on to say, “Action Steps are the most important components of projects—the oxygen for keeping projects alive. No Action Steps, no action, no results.” The bottom line is this: if you can’t break down your project into manageable or actionable tasks, you are dead in the water.

I have a theory that any type of formal brainstorming or planning has a lifespan of about five minutes. This may be due to my terrible memory, but I think it transcends my limitations and affects all creatives. If you don’t get to work, you will eventually lose it. You will lose your concepts, epiphanies, motivations and any resolve to push through whatever obstacles may arise until it’s done. Let me make an overtly obvious statement that I often need to be reminded of:



You will never finish (publish the book, launch the business, finish the movie, start the organization, change the world) **if you never start.**

A few tips and resources to help get started:

- make [a list](#)
- open a [notebook](#)
- get [yourself organized](#)
- get your [project organized](#)
- [sit down](#)
- start already

If you are a person of faith, let me make a bold statement:

God has placed a dream inside of you. He has given you a vision of what you are here on this earth to do. And you know it, because you have experienced a *that is what I'm meant to do* moment. If you don't start to work on creating that thing, you will not only die unfulfilled, but you will also live out the rest of your days unfulfilled.

Go. Get. Started.

5.

Many creatives tend to be independent individuals who don't look further than themselves for help. Of course, this is part of the DNA of the millennial generation beginning to take the reigns in many facets of our society.

The culture of young creatives says go *do it yourself*, and the technology follows. With YouTube, you can create, edit and publish your work easily. With blogs, you can do the same with your writing. And a perk of being in the most networked generation is that your audience is expansive.

However...

The do it all yourself mentality will only get you so far. There are better writers, designers, organizers, networkers, builders, artists and executives than you. There will always be someone more talented and qualified, ready to take your spot when you bow out. Rather than let this cripple you, the smart creative recognizes this and reaches out.

If you can get yourself to ask for help, you are well on your way to success. All it takes is an admission that you aren't all sufficient. If you can swallow your pride, and lay aside your ego, there is plenty of hope. A dose of humility usually goes a long way when dealing with other talented individuals. People love to be needed, but don't love to hear how great you are. If you need help, reach out and get it; don't let yourself get in your project's way.

Collaboration opens the door for which you do not hold the key.

6.

Going pro, no matter how skilled or successful you are, requires gathering tools. I see this happening in two ways primarily:

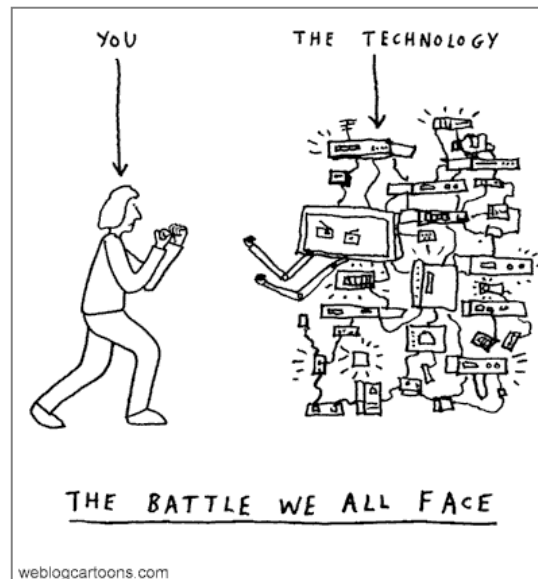
1. Building a toolbox that will help increase your efficiency
2. Filling a bookshelf that will inspire you.

Your toolbox should be highly specialized to your projects, and continually evolve as you progress through different stages of

- your projects (on a low level)
- your development/career (on a high level).

Whether your toolbox consists of an iTunes playlist of creative tunes* or a full-fledged time management strategy**, **your focus needs to remain on the work**, not the tool. We are not in a tool acquisition race, but rather seeking out what we need to get our work done. If it helps you get more quality work done, keep it around. If it uses up your time without providing substantial, actionable results, cut it loose.

Your bookshelf should be full of whatever it is that inspires you to work. Of course, there are plenty of books that deal with working smarter, working faster and being generally more efficient. In general, these are great books to have around. However, the problem with such books is that they often fail to *inspire*. As a writer, there are very few books on writing that end up with me sitting down to write. There are, however, some brilliant short stories, novels and other pieces of literature that sit me down at a desk, pen in hand, **ready to work**.



High caliber input will eventually yield high caliber output. Read the brilliant stuff, and leave the mediocre for the amateurs to sort through.

****Ghostly International put out a playlist of [music for creatives](#). Ghostly is, “Music for Creatives is built to inspire deep dives into the dark waters of creative flow.”***

*****Time management tool – [Rescue Time](#) - A web-based app that tracks your computer time, and can set alerts and/or reminders. For those of us who tend to get distracted online, trapped in the time suck of social media.***

7.

Striking it out on my own was the most exciting and thrilling decision I've ever made, and also the most terrifying. And I think this dichotomy is good, in the sense that the tension between the two enables you to balance the external pressures that come with going pro, much like a tight rope walker, who must stay focused on platform ahead, and not focus on the horrific results should he misstep.

Maybe that's too morbid a perspective, but during this economic season, I would be shortchanging you if I didn't slap you in the face with the reality that entrepreneurship in a down economy is difficult and emotionally taxing. Contrary to the free and easy times during an up economy where the climate is right for potential entrepreneurs to "test the waters," without the potential of failure because the strong job market offers a nice "safety net." So. if that doesn't motivate you to stay in middle management amidst the safe corridors of cubicle-land... then you might just have the gumption to go pro.

A word about gumption: Entrepreneurs are a gritty bunch, full of spit and vinegar, never settling for the red tape and slow-footedness that surrounds bureaucracy and corporate culture. This trait, albeit one that causes anxiety in the corporate 9-5 crowd, is essential in the realm of entrepreneurship. There must be passion, an insatiable appetite to sell your product, ideas, or services; as well as a resourcefulness which must be utilized in the beginning months, when "boot-strapping" becomes more than just a cliché' term, and literally becomes a daily routine. Also, remember as a pro, you are not only lead visionary; you're also, the sales team, the finance director, the marketing staff, and the workhorse making the product or delivering the service.

If you are a tried and true entrepreneur this is why you put your skin in the game in the first place, because you saw a better way, and had the gall to risk it all! The question that awaits an answer is... Do you have the gumption to persist when the game gets rocky? Because remember the odds are against us, as 50% of new businesses fail within the first 5 years.

So. In this light, I should not worry about whether or not [Samwell Creative](#) will be around 5 years from now; as my focus should be on today - delivering the best product/service I can to my immediate customer. Because success in business (read: profit) rarely has to do with a 5-year strategic plan, rather it depends on the day-to-day consistency found in an organization that has integrity, passion, and a product or service that adds value to the customer, the latter being the most important.

I'll close with one last thought on going pro...

If you're scared enough to jump, I can promise you a couple things: sleepless nights, and life with endless possibilities. The emotional journey in going pro, for

me, has been both these things, as well as a deep feeling of fulfillment as I follow my heart and step out into the unknown.

8.

If the last article was a little too ethereal for you... then hopefully this will be the steak and eggs that fill you up, before you step out and go pro. First a word on incorporation, and setting up a legal entity that's not kin but seems to be more demanding.

Incorporation, LLC, S-Corp, sole-proprietorship and other ways to birth a business.

I don't want to get too technical, but you should first decide what type of incorporation you want to pursue, each one is different in set-up, tax implications and the way that they are expected to be run. Some handy information can be found [here](#) or a more lengthy discussion [here](#).

As far as the process goes, unfortunately, every state is different. And that is D for Dumb. I found this out first hand as I recently moved from Oklahoma to Iowa and realized my former state made it a little bit easier/cheaper to start a business, but there is good news as most [state websites](#) have plenty of resources for you to peruse and hopefully, in the plethora of links and legal jargon, you'll be able to figure out the unique process to incorporation. If you have a lot of time and limited budget, you can do the legwork yourself, be patient and make sure you do everything including but not limited to applying for an EIN, signing letters of incorporation, registering with the state secretary, trademark your business name, and patent your unique process, product or idea. If your limited on time and have some cash, you can find a Lawyer who is familiar with state laws and process, and for a nominal fee (\$500-\$1000), you'll be rolling within 3-5 business days "not as a businessman but as a business, man." (shameless [Jay-Z](#) plug)

Non-profit

All I can say on this is... get ready. Because incorporating as a not-for-profit is a bit of a waiting game, the paperwork is a little more extensive and the waiting period can be six months to a year. Some more information on the differences can be found [here](#).

Up and Running

A lot of effort at the beginning is spent figuring out the processes of your organization, financial accountability and project/client management. So, in an effort to give you a head start, below are some links that are beneficial... some are free and others are for a nominal price, with the basic principle being - find something that allows you to focus on your core business rather than be in the weeds of day-to-day administration.

These products and services have helped me immensely, mainly by uncluttering my desk, and allowing me [Get Things Done](#).

Web Apps

[Wordpress](#) – CMS system for website templates and themes, below are some sites that sell sweet templates and themes:

- [Woo Themes](#)
- [Theme Forest](#)

[37signals](#) arsenal:

- [BaseCamp](#) – project management, between team members and clients.
- [Highrise](#) – contact management when you have a lot of people to keep track of.
- [Backpack](#) – file management for those big projects that have a lot of files flying back and forth between team members.

[Google Apps](#) – because free is awesome. And collaborating on documents and presentations shouldn't be difficult.

[Evernote](#) – notes, folders, and documents. I love this app, because it syncs notes from my phone to my ipad to my laptop to my web app.... Four places that have a catalog of notes from business meetings, to conference notes, to blog posts. I use this everyday.

[Freshbooks](#) – invoicing, time tracking, billing, and expense tracking... also has the ability to tie-in with more robust accounting software.

[Square](#) – an iPad/iPhone app that allows for you to accept debit or credit cards anywhere... Use at fundraisers, booths, and other places when ATM machines are pricy, and cash is scarce.

Tips and Tricks

Don't buy, just try... You can always upgrade to a paid account, if a web app offers a free trial, take advantage of it. Do this with other web applications as well, not everyone needs Adobe Photoshop to do design and layout in... If you can get along with cheaper alternatives, do it. ([Acorn](#) is a cheap Photoshop alternative that gets the job done). Or do what I do and use a mixture of Keynote, Acorn, and [Little Snapper](#).

Online Banking... if you bank online, use Bill pay services. Not only do you save money on buying stamps, but in most cases the bank sends out checks that look

a lot more professional than the ones they give you for free, in which your scribbly handwriting is the first thing noticed.

Be resourceful... you don't always have to pay cash money for services and products, as other business owners may be willing and eager to swap services with you. Not only does this broaden your network, but it allows for others to grow with you. For example, swap five referrals to a design company you like, for them to design your logo for free, once your fifth referral hits their desk, your logo is next on the queue. Be creative and find ways in which to help other entrepreneurs do what they do best.

Develop a network... not like the WOO personality who must meet everyone in the room, rather, develop relationships with others in and out of your field of business... let them get to know you, and don't offend them with overt displays of brain flexing. Nobody likes a know-it-all. Networking is about connecting people in one circle with people in another, focus on how your connections can help someone else out, rather than how their connections will help you.

Build margin... going pro is more than just making a million dollars. Success can be defined as profit as well as margin. Being able to work on your time, and having space in the day to enjoy the sunshine, watch your daughter's soccer game or be apart of non-profit work. Don't only define success as more money in the bank. Finding margin has helped more than a few entrepreneurs avoid the burnout that can come if you're working 24/7/365. And don't say you'll do it in a year when the books are finally in the black, but start the habit from day one - make it a priority and burnout will be something you do with your new muscle car, rather than a description of your current mental state.

9.

About Sam Mahlstadt:

He graduated from the University of Iowa, where he studied English and Religious Studies. He helped plant One Church in Winston-Salem, NC. He writes about engaging faith in such a way that creates a new culture on his personal blog, Creating Culture (sammahlstadt.com).

10.

About Sam DuRegger:

He has a MBA in Entrepreneurial Management from The University of Oklahoma and an MA in Ministry from John Brown University. He writes about faith and culture at his personal blog, TheoMusings.com.

11.

Click through for access to the [Going Pro Bookstore](#), which will continually evolve as must-have books are published and discovered by the Creating Culture community. There are two sections in the bookstore, creativity and productivity. Happy Reading!