



HOW TO LIVE LIKE AN ARTIST

(WITHOUT EVER HAVING TO BECOME ONE...)

WISDOM AND LIFE LESSONS
FROM THE ARTIST LIFESTYLE

SHEILA CHANDRA

How to Live Like an Artist

(Without Ever Having to Become One)

Wisdom and life lessons from the artist lifestyle

By

Sheila Chandra

*For those who always wanted to run away to the circus,
but never quite got round to it...*

COVID-19 preface

I've had this book on the shelf for a couple of years, but having been seriously ill, there hasn't been an opportunity to get a deal with a publisher for it. And right now, it doesn't feel important either. I didn't write it to make money, but rather because I was aware of how few artists can afford to be full-time these days, and how much of the collective wisdom that comes from having lived a dedicated artist lifestyle might be lost. I wanted it to be codified somewhere.

Today, as I write from the beginning of my third week of lockdown - and being aware of how little ordinary people in the UK (who are today on their first day of lockdown) are used to being at home and structuring their time – I feel this book should no longer be on the shelf, but instead, out there available as a free resource for as long as the lockdown lasts.

My artist friends are likely offering emotional support to those settling into being self-directed around their work and time; possibly for the first time ever, since they were young children. I think most extroverts are having a hard time of it, and many of us are worried about

our mental health. I can't say this book is a complete solution but I think it can help, which is the reason to release it now.

First, a quick guide. Much of the following information is already circulating in various forms, but here are the bones of what you need to know if you're not used to being home alone for much of the time. A caveat – some of you will have to work from home (so only some of these tips will apply) and others will be too worried about loved ones, finances or their future to apply the following. (I hope it all works out.) Or if you're a carer or looking after your children and have extra responsibilities, you may not have time to 'improve your life'. And it has to be said, some of you in the weeks to come will be grieving very serious losses. If you are, be gentle on yourself. But if you can...

- Structure your day e.g. get up and go to bed at set times. We don't just measure the passing of time by the clock or by daylight, but also by the rhythm of routines. Being free-form around your schedule and experimenting with sleeping at odd hours may feel 'cool', but is likely to make you feel disorientated and even physically ill.
- Get dressed. It sends your mind a psychological signal that you're ready for action and makes you feel more alert.
- Make your bed. Again it confirms that you're not going to sleep the day away. And if you do have to nap – getting into a neatly made up bed feels so much better.

- Try to take advantage of the daylight. Get out on the balcony, garden or out for a walk if you can socially distance. It resets your body clock.
- Listen to your body when it thirsts, hungers, needs to weep, shake, stretch or sleep.
- If you do get disorientated try the following, in the following order:
 1. Drink a glass of water/cup of tea or coffee.
 2. Open a window and take six deep slow breaths.
 3. Have a healthy snack or meal if you're hungry.
 4. Get dressed if you aren't dressed and it's daytime.
 5. Work out what's troubling you most.
 6. Ring or face time with a friend, either to talk about it or to help you to feel connected with the outside world.
 7. Don't pressure yourself to achieve anything.
 8. Get to bed at a sensible time and wake up at a 'normal' time for you
- If you're isolating with others in your household, try to carve out some 'alone time' or a space where you can be alone.

- Follow all the lockdown rules of your region and take extra care when going out for necessities, and with sanitising yourself, your house and what you bring home.
- If you can, check on your neighbours.
- Eat at regular intervals and feed yourself healthily as far as possible.
- Gentle exercise, such as a Youtube dance or exercise workout in your living room or dusting off your exercise bike will help to keep your system in good form. Even 10 minutes a day is good for you.
- Plan some work or an activity – but not too much. Don't panic and try to fill the day. Allow for your inclinations to direct you.
- Explore all the generous freebies being made available online just now such as museum tours, plays, audiobooks and box sets.
- Absorb yourself in your passions for a little every day. Hobbies like playing an instrument, gardening, knitting or painting have a definite rhythm to them which also helps soothe you on a visceral level.

- Being productive is not a measure of how much you're worth – repeat this mantra daily.
- If you don't have to work, don't worry about falling behind. Following your true interests has a magical way of getting you to exactly where you need to be. And if this is an activity that you've neglected, it might take a couple of weeks of being 'indulgent'/slopping out, before you're able to find what you need to do. Enjoy the process and don't panic. You will find it. This is also true for children in this period – who, don't forget, are also scared. Aim for two to three hours of learning a day – no more. And don't forget that the maths learnt when cooking, or the social skills learnt during play are all learning too. In fact, children learn much faster through play. Explore what experienced homeschoolers say about this.
- Feed your mind. Read that classic novel. Go on a virtual tour. But not because you 'should'. Because you want to.
- You've got time now, even if it's only because you don't have to commute – so appreciate the little things. Slow right down and savour and replay moments of pleasure.
- Dream about what you want to do when this has passed. Let yourself enjoy it. Write down a wish list if you like.

- Feel your emotions and let them pass through you. Tell people you love them.
- Build connection with others, even if it has to be via digital means. We're all in this together.
- Remember that disabled people live with the kinds of restrictions you're chafing against for years on end, with no promise of anything different – and additionally, often while in great pain. Try to let this add some more empathy for vulnerable people of all kinds – from the homeless, disabled people, abuse victims, the elderly to refugees and migrants - to your outlook. As the crisis is showing us, allowing any of us to fall behind, endangers us all.
- If you're an employer or manager – think about what this time at home has taught you about how work could be organised differently. What kinds of opportunities to benefit your staff, suppliers, clients and customers do you see?
- We all admire our keyworkers like NHS staff (and other healthcare system workers) social care workers, truckers, refuse collectors, teachers and supermarket workers. But remember too, to value what you can offer, even if it's only a friendly smile or word. Your strengths are also needed, so give what you can. More people believe in you than you

know. The superhero narrative of a single person saving the world has been strong in recent decades. Maybe it's time for a new one – that of each of us doing something, however small, to save each other.

- And perhaps most important... It's your creativity that's also needed now, more than ever. What has this crisis turned upside down in your perceptions, attitudes and thinking? What are you reading on social media and in serious books that upends your notion of what's possible or right? Take time to stare into space and wonder why things are the way they are. And how they might, or should, change. And how you can change them.

Stay safe everyone... and I hope this can be a time of kindness, social responsibility and transformation for our society as well as a time of sacrifices.

Sheila Chandra

24th March 2020

Contents

Introduction	.13
The artist knows how to do nothing	.17
The artist knows how to think and to think nothing	.27
The artist inhabits their body	.41
The artist recognises their passion	.52
The artist feeds their soul	.58
The artist knows how to be brave	.66
The artist over-delivers for the love of it	.73
A final lesson from the artist	.79

Introduction

Most of us have grown up in awe of artists. Maybe you've found yourself wishing you had their skills, or envying their lifestyles. Maybe you've admired their contribution to the world, or even the way they've changed the world. Maybe you'd always intended to become one, but 'life' got in the way...

Maybe you didn't have the talent, the support or the temperament to become an artist. Or maybe you just decided that you didn't want the downsides... the risks and the potential rollercoaster career.

But something of that yearning is left, isn't it? Maybe your admiration for the passion and bravery of an artist's way of living in a materialistic world, never diminished – and you'd love to have some of that in your own life, but without any of those downsides.

You too, can live like an artist

I'm not suggesting you give up work, or finally throw everything up to paint, the way you'd always intended. But the wisdom and creativity that artists weave into their everyday lives can be yours – and many of the special qualities they're able to cultivate as a result, too.

In these pages are the lessons I've learned living as a full-time artist for well over 30 years. I've learned what people project onto artists and creators of all kinds, what they admire them for, and the special skills those artists can develop which enhance their lives, whether anyone else notices or not.

Living like an artist – whatever your role in life – means having a more peaceful, joyful, genuine and creative life. In short, a life well lived.

Most of us want to shine in some way. Most of us want to find the key to living more authentically. Artists have lessons for all those who want to find their path to these things. And I've laid them out for you here. But first...

What do we admire artists for?

Why are good artists so universally respected? What qualities do people admire in them? There are plenty of less desirable traits that artists can exhibit. Few people romanticise living in squalor, poverty or emotional chaos. But then, few good artists match up to the ‘dysfunctional genius’ trope that is so bandied about in popular culture. So what do we want to learn from them?

Well ‘coolness’ is a big one. Most of us would love to be as old as Bowie got to be, and still be as cool. Charisma is another quality most of us admire in artists. Maybe something of the self-possession and wisdom they’ve gained from constantly carving out their own path. Maybe the confidence it took for them to do that, to stand out and be different. Maybe their deep engagement with life and the time they can spend being creative. Maybe their discipline and steely determination? Maybe their playfulness? Maybe the bravery and self-awareness they possess, which allows them to comment on the human condition. Maybe we want the ‘highs’ they experience, or the respect their legacy brings them. Maybe, like them, we want to be more ourselves. And maybe, as I’ve said, we want to shine too.

I’m going to give you the keys to all those things

The simplest way to live like an artist is to become one. And doing so will probably, over the course of a few decades, show you to how to

develop most of these desirable qualities. But I know you don't have the time or the inclination for that! So I've broken this artist wisdom down into seven chapters. Unlike my other books so far, you can pick and choose whatever aspects of the artist life/philosophy you like, or which you think will work for you, and put them into practice. But they do tend to join up in roundabout ways, so you might find yourself going further and deeper with time.

This is about enriching your life

You won't relate to, or agree with everything here. But have fun with it! Mix and match, pick and choose, go on an adventure with the way you are within yourself and find out what works for you. Sometimes it will take a little bravery – but the highs will be well worth it.

Chapter 1

The artist knows how to ‘do nothing’

We know artists by their work. And the good ones are generally praised for being reliable and prolific. Great artists definitely ‘do’ a lot. But strange as it may seem, all that disciplined ‘doing’ often begins with ‘doing nothing’ even though to begin with, the idea of mastering ‘doing nothing’ seems a little contradictory.

Why is ‘doing nothing’ important?

Well, counter-intuitive as it may seem, ‘doing nothing’ helps you develop the key to being highly disciplined, living more authentically, living joyfully and to finding your life’s purpose. (We’ll explore more of that last one later in the book.)

But the other reason it’s important is because ‘doing’ i.e. being productive or useful, is meaningless without its corollary ‘doing nothing’. To use an analogy, most people are aware these days of the

principle of consent. If someone doesn't have a right to say 'no', then their 'yes' is not true consent.

Most of us don't think about this when we're constantly exhorted – from cradle to grave – to be 'busy' (whether making money or working or bringing up children or giving to our communities). 'Busy' is our 'yes'. If 'doing nothing' is our 'no' but it's constantly derided, does the work we do in our lives, truly come from a 'yes'? The artist knows how important a wholehearted 'yes' and 'no' to work are.

What is 'doing nothing'?

By 'doing nothing' I don't mean literally sitting still, and staring at a fixed point for hours on end. I mean spending time with no fixed purpose and without entertainment. You could call it 'pottering', but I'm not.

Connection to self

That's because the crucial difference between 'pottering' through a set list of small tasks and 'doing nothing' is the connection you have make to yourself. This is the essence 'doing nothing'. When you 'do nothing' you wait quietly, listening to what your inner impetus is. It will change, moment to moment. And when you have time put aside to 'do nothing', you're free to follow that impetus.

Try it now. There's a quiet voice in you, or a feeling in your gut, that tells you exactly what would be good to do, right now in this moment. It's always there, but so often we ignore it. What is yours saying? Is it asking you to make a cup of tea? Or take a short break? Or take a few deep breaths? Or even just change your position while you read?

Once, we all knew how to 'do nothing'

We were all born being supremely good at 'doing nothing'. Babies and toddlers are never bored, or unsure of what to do next. Their inner impetus quietly drives them and they're totally in touch with it, moment to moment.

But then, stuff happened. You were sent to school or nursery and gradually that 'free play' time – where you could direct yourself and follow your instincts as to what you were interested in, became eaten up. The pressure to work to a pre-set schedule, and achieve set standards to that schedule increased, until you completely lost touch with the 'doing nothing' instinct. And that probably happened over and over again, to the point where the total freedom to set your own agenda became a scary prospect.

I remember when I decided to go on sabbatical at the age of 20 (I'd made four albums in the space of two years and really needed a total break), how a high-powered lawyer friend of mine said how much doing

that himself would scare him. He'd become so used to external deadlines and the pressure of work, that he just didn't know what he'd do with himself if they were removed.

I too, remember panicking and not knowing how to structure my time when I left college, became a full-time artist, and had whole days stretching ahead of me. Suddenly there was no need to get up at 8am, or work at any particular time. It felt surreally disorientating – rather like being in a dream.

Too many of us have lost touch with our inner impetus and fear unstructured time. This leads to compulsively filling it. Even if we don't, we can forget to make concrete and conscious space for a lack of structure in our lives.

This is so chronic a problem that most artists need to go through some kind of 'de-conditioning' process where they learn to listen to themselves again – and to trust that their inner self knows, better than they do, when and how they should work. I'm not saying they don't get subject to external deadlines and pressures in their working lives. We all are. The difference is that artists who've done this deconditioning will revert to 'inner-self directed time' as soon as they can.

Is it really *that* important to master ‘doing nothing’?

There are a few reasons why it is important. Firstly, ‘doing nothing’ is pretty foundational for artists. They can’t produce their best work until they’ve mastered the process. That’s because working to deadlines which make no sense to your inner self will result in sub-standard work. The world may not notice, but you won’t be producing work to the finest standard of which you’re capable. When the inner self has a chance to tell you, moment by moment, exactly what it needs in order to come up with your best ideas, or create while you feel inspired, your work quality finally fulfils your potential.

But the second reason it’s important to master ‘doing nothing’ is that I’ve promised to give you the keys to all those wonderful artist qualities you want to cultivate in yourself. And ‘doing nothing’ relates to many of those. The first is...

Passion

If you’re in touch with what you need or feel like doing, moment by moment, you’re able to practise listening to your inner self for longer and longer periods of time. The skill of doing that builds up like a muscle that starts out weak from underuse and gets stronger and stronger. And that inner self has some great wisdom to offer in terms of what your passions are.

One way to discover your passions is to remember what has always interested you – on a macro level. However the path we often miss, is the one of noticing what you're pulled to do, again and again. Not what you 'think' you might like. You may have bought the paraphernalia for any number of hobbies that you just didn't end up doing. No, the inner self will pull you over and over to do particular activities, some of which will be completely informal – whether it's writing in a journal, or drawing, or reading a certain type of book, or doing some yoga poses, or tinkering with your bike. Why is this important? Well it leads you inexorably to another quality. Paradoxically the very quality we've all been told that 'doing nothing' will destroy.

Discipline

Finally, we get to the 'doing' stuff. Most artists are highly disciplined. They're disciplined in the conventional sense of doing what needs to be done for their art – however much they dislike it. However they're also usually compulsive about working on what they create. And that internal discipline which makes them create, comes from natural inclination. The only difference between an artist who feels compelled to create, and you (if you're not versed in the art of 'doing nothing'), is that they've re-learned to make that connection to the wisdom of their inner self, and let it dictate how they work, whenever possible. The key to being disciplined turns out ***not*** to be about having huge amounts of willpower.

It turns out to be doing the thing you felt pulled to do anyway, and saving your willpower only for those essential hated tasks.

Working to your inclination may not be possible or practical for you if you are employed by someone else. But you can practice it in your personal life. And the reward is...

Peaceful flow

Have you ever been so wound up or burnt out that you just don't know what to do with yourself? Most people resort to junk activities at that point. They may compulsively smoke or eat or watch TV, or have a spliff or a drink. None of these things are wrong in themselves (although many of them are not good for you). What's wrong, is that in this example, those activities are being used to cover up your real needs.

What you actually need at that point of burnout or stress, is a big dose of 'doing nothing', however counter-intuitive the activities your inner self suggests may seem. Your inner self knows exactly what you need to do to recover in the fastest time possible. If you've let yourself go too far, this will be very hard to do, and it won't feel great for the first day or so. But over time, you'll come back to your normal, peaceful self, and much more quickly than if you simply self-medicate.

If you're not at burnout point then 'doing nothing' is the fastest way to feel happy, satisfied and relaxed. It's so simple – and something at our fingertips, if only we'd take the time to listen.

I suspect 'doing nothing' is something indigenous people understand better. Reportedly, when Native Americans first encountered Europeans, they were nonplussed at the way Europeans divided 'work' and 'holidays'. To them, doing the tasks that we call 'work' happened because they came out of an inner impetus – a readiness – to do them. And then of course, they no longer felt like work. So what was the need for a holiday?

If you're afraid of unstructured time – because you think you'd never want to stop lazing about – then try listening to your inner self some more and learning to trust it. What you'll find, to your delight, is that it isn't a slob at all.

Cultivate some 'doing nothing' time in your life

Make a commitment to put aside an hour sometime in your day. Maybe get up an hour early while the rest of the household is asleep – or put time aside in the evening when you'd normally be watching a boring documentary because there's nothing else on TV. Or curtail your time on Facebook. Just make sure you're not exhausted before it starts.

Then, spend that hour just listening to what you have the energy and inclination to do. You might find you want to clear out a kitchen cabinet, or draw a few sketches, or that you actually have the mental energy to read some of that ‘improving book’ you intended to get round to. You’ll probably find the task becomes a pleasure and not only that you do it better, but also that you enjoy it much more. But what’s absolutely key, is not judging what your inner self wants you to do. Even judging some activities as ‘good’ defeats the point.

The more you do this, the better you’ll become at listening to those inner voices and inclinations. And that can only be a good thing as it pulls you to discover more about who you actually are. You’ll also find that everyday life feels much more relaxed, and as though you’re getting a mental holiday.

Stick with it

If to begin with, you end up doing nothing but relaxing for hours, it’s either because you were too tired when you started (and I mean physically, emotionally or mentally tired) or because you’ve got a lot of ‘doing nothing’ to catch up on. Don’t worry, you’ll feel the impetus to do more, once you have.

The lesson from the artist

The wisdom of the artist is to harness the power of that inner wild horse inside you that has its own inclinations. It's very strong – as I'm sure you've found out when you're having to work at something you really don't feel like doing. So why work against it?

Chapter 2

The artist knows how to think, and to think nothing

The artist is good at both thinking and not thinking. Much as most of us pride ourselves on being discerning creatures, the truth is we go through most of our lives on autopilot.

A common experience for most of us for instance, is driving or walking somewhere familiar, arriving and having no memory of the journey. Our body and subconscious mind have done the work – including dodging cyclists and stopping at junctions. And that's no bad thing. Our brains don't have to be working at their hardest all the time. That would be like cycling uphill forever. Your muscles would get exhausted and there's no need for it. Best to save brainpower for the thinking that really needs to be done.

But too often, our opinions can be on the same autopilot. Either influenced by what pundits or our friends think, or inherited from our

parents and not really worked through. If we're lucky, we revise these opinions as we get older and as experience forces us to reconsider.

And to be fair, we are not really encouraged to think for ourselves. Who has not been witness to 'little Jenny' or 'little Johnny' being told off for 'daydreaming' in the classroom? And isn't 'daydreaming' essentially, a way of not paying attention to another person's agenda?

What is daydreaming?

Daydreaming is no bad thing. And it's a shame that little Jenny got told off for doing it. We daydream in the truest sense i.e. letting our minds drift into a kind of nothingness dream, when our brains need a rest. Going back to the philosophy of 'doing nothing' from the previous chapter, that's your mind telling you it needs a break before it can take in the next piece of information properly. So all poor little Jenny was likely doing, was trying to make sure she kept her brain fresh.

The other kind of daydreaming, is indulging those gentle and random thoughts about things we're interested in. These can (very inconveniently) be totally unrelated to the meeting or lesson or project we're currently involved in. That doesn't mean they're not valuable. Da Vinci was a notorious daydreamer. He gazed out of the window during lessons observing the birds and wondering how humans might, one day, fly. The world would have been a poorer place had Da Vinci concentrated on his lessons.

The beginnings of creativity

You'll have realised by now where I'm going with this. Daydreaming is the wellspring of creativity. Creativity can't happen without a lot of staring off into space and wondering.

The trouble is, ask prolific artists and creators of all kinds where they get their inspiration from, and they'll either name specific prompts for that brilliant painting, or talk about how they got up every morning at 6am to concentrate on developing their idea. This is not wrong. Those things were indeed part of the process.

But what they forget about, or even hesitate to say, is that the actual idea came while they were daydreaming. It might have come while they were in the shower and thinking random stuff, or as the idea for this book did, while I was having lunch alone in a café. My conscious mind was resting, and so my subconscious mind had the space to put together a number of previous thoughts and influences and present them to me as an idea. Sure, in hindsight, I can quantify what those influences were, and it's taken sitting down with pen and paper and working the idea through in a determined way for me to start writing. But had I not been daydreaming in the first place, it's unlikely the idea would have arrived at all.

The trouble is, it all seems so scarily random and unprofessional doesn't it? 'Oh, it just came to me.' sounds weak and as though you can't be relied upon to come up with the goods another time.

To believe that, is to do your mind a great disservice. Our renaissance model of science has given us the image of the ‘rational being’, and so we tend to default to believing that our rational conscious minds come up with the important stuff. The artist knows better.

The subconscious mind (and the right-hand side of the brain, which is less accessible to our conscious self) work away in the background digesting and formulating important information. It’s our subconscious mind that will weigh up a situation in a flash – far too fast for our conscious mind to keep up with – and give us a gut feeling that a certain person or situation is dangerous. We call this intuition. Or give us a hunch about a work situation, and make us try something unorthodox which works brilliantly. We call this ‘experience’ or ‘wisdom’. And it’s our subconscious mind and the right-hand side of our brain that will work patiently on an idea, presenting it when they’re ready (and the conscious mind shuts up for long enough for them to get a word in edgeways).

I encourage you to daydream

You can’t force daydreaming – that’s a contradiction in terms, so I’m not going to tell you to ‘consciously daydream’. However, you can allow yourself to do it more. You can wake 15 minutes early to allow your mind to drift up naturally to thoughts of the day, from its wanderings while you dreamt. You can allow your mind to wander while you take

the bins out, or clean the floors. You can allow yourself to stop reading that thought provoking book or news article, in order to stare into space for 10 minutes while you ponder the implications of the author's point, and whether it's correct or not. You can take the time to listen to those thoughts you have, that others never seem to articulate.

What are the benefits of daydreaming?

For one thing, regularly daydreaming will allow your mind to feel more rested. Your thoughts will lead you towards your passions and to new directions in your life – making it feel more purposeful and authentic. A sabbatical often isn't necessary to 'reinvent' yourself, if you've allowed yourself to daydream throughout your life.

The result of being more rested mentally and allowing your wisdom free reign like this, is a greater insight into what's really going on around you – with your children's development for instance. And you're likely to come up with more creative solutions to your problems. It also builds up your mental muscles and keeps your brain working well when you allow yourself to dwell on your conundrums and tease out your own answers – just as efficiently as the advice to 'learn something new' throughout your life does. In short, it's a way to cultivate your own intelligence.

Unorthodox thoughts

I want to dig a little deeper though. Those thoughts that no one ever seems to articulate that I was talking about, are in many ways, the most important to have. The awkward ones that no one else seems to think, or want you to entertain. The experiences left unarticulated. The sufferings no one acknowledges, or even the common sense that seems to be uncommon.

We can feel alone with these thoughts and feelings. Take heart, because chances are, if you feel something unacknowledged about an issue, lots of other people are feeling it too. There just hasn't been a space in our collective culture for it to be acknowledged. The recent #MeToo campaign is a prime example. Women who have held onto stories of assault for decades because collective culture wasn't ready to acknowledge them. And yet, when those unacknowledged thoughts and feelings burst forth, they're often the most powerful.

Tapping into the zeitgeist

This is one of those artist qualities most of us would kill to have. Let me explain how they do it.

Your unorthodox thoughts won't all be about an injustice or the political. In fact, most of them won't be. They'll just be thoughts about how 'such and such' doesn't make a lot of sense to you – and that maybe

there's another way to do things? That's how most new products and services get invented.

This kind of thinking is how artists tap into the zeitgeist – contrary to our notions about what it means to be 'original'. I mean, think about it. If an artist was truly a 'one off' and had weird ideas that nobody related to, then no-one would enjoy consuming their work. It might be fun to enter an entirely surreal world that you don't connect to in any way a few times, but it's not something you'd want to do regularly.

No, the artists we love, are the ones that articulate our often unarticulated feelings, thoughts and longings. They do it *for* us.

Bravery

We love and respect them for it, because we know that this process is not always a comfortable one. And here we come to another artist quality some of you will want to cultivate. If you want to think for yourself, you'll have to be brave. The thoughts you'll have are not always those that are immediately productive, and sometimes they'll be downright disruptive – like wearing long hair in the early 60s when everyone else was sporting crew cuts, or the kind androgynous clothing that in the 70s attracted insults in the street, for example. It's not necessary that you act on your unorthodox thoughts, of course, but if you do, breaking through the tide can attract criticism. But 10 years later, those people

who criticised you, will grudgingly pay you respect for being ahead of the curve.

Being ‘cool’ and being respected

That bravery is the path to a quintessential artist quality we all love i.e. being ‘cool’. You can’t be ‘cool’ without it. ‘Cool’ is a word we’ve used so long we’ve largely forgotten about its origins. Being ‘cool’ originally meant being ‘cool to’, or pretty much indifferent to what others think about your clothes, work or lifestyle. In the curtain twitching 50s – where everybody felt it was imperative not to be ‘talked about’ by their neighbours – teenagers and film icons pioneered a fashion and philosophical rebellion and invented ‘cool’.

These days ‘cool’ is still mostly associated with fashion or personal style. And I must admit, it’s far easier to be seen as ‘cool’ if you’re thin and have a trademark look. But no amount of thinness or style is going to make you really ‘cool’ for decades unless it’s backed up with some substance. That’s why the essence of ‘cool’ is still being happy to disregard everybody’s opinions and follow your own counsel in matters which affect only yourself. ‘Cool’ is the epitome of self-possession.

However, if you’re not thin, and never will be, take heart. You might never be described in classic terms as ‘cool’ – but if you follow your own path and do what you feel is right, you will still be regarded with respect.

‘Thinking nothing’

Okay, change of pace, because now I’m going to examine the opposite. Many artists – though not all – also know how to ‘think nothing’. Before you worry that I’m going to start getting all ethereal and ‘Zen’ on you, I want to emphasise that for artists, this is a very practical skill.

Of course, being able to calm your mind and nervous system at will, via meditation, is a great ability to have. It will give you more emotional control, as well as more tolerance and compassion. If you have the patience, I encourage you to do it. I have to confess that I never have. But there are still times when I’ve utilised the power of ‘thinking nothing’.

How to ‘think nothing’

As I said, I’m not someone who’s going to sit down and meditate. But I have borrowed the ‘meditate while doing something else’ idea from Buddhists – which placates my impatient mind. The following is an exercise they call the ‘walking meditation’ and it’s amazing for developing more ‘presence’ and ‘charisma’ when performing, giving a lecture/presentation, or even just when you walk into a party.

Here’s how you do it. Find a place where you can walk unhindered. It might be in a garden, a large empty corridor or out on the nearest nature trail. Then begin like this. Empty your mind. Stay in

the moment, breathe and take the first step. Think only of breathing and taking that step. Then breathe and take the second step. Again, think only of breathing and taking that step. And so on...

You can walk at any pace, slow or fast, to suit yourself. What I have taken a long time to write, is something that doesn't take long to do. Keep breathing, walking and thinking of nothing else. At first, your mind will wander off almost instantly – to some tree or landmark or some issue of your own. But gently pull your attention back to walking and breathing. It's like balancing on a log. You keep falling off, but you keep getting back on, with no fuss. Soon you can stay on it for longer and longer periods of time. Practice for at least 10 minutes a day for two weeks and you'll start seeing a huge difference.

If you can't find somewhere to walk, sit quietly and do the exercise with your breathing alone. This is useful during long, boring and useless meetings that you're forced to attend, as you'll be doing something positive for yourself in the meantime.

How many artists stumble onto 'not thinking'

While doing walking and breathing meditations are useful to hone your mental discipline, most artists don't discover 'not thinking' in that way. More commonly, they just find themselves completely absorbed in their work.

I used to be a singer (before pain issues made me give up). Even as a young girl, once I started singing – and even when singing scales or a single steady note – my mind would empty. I would be totally enthralled to the sound and the physical sensations involved in producing it. This made practicing easy. It was never boring. And practicing in that way also strengthened my mental discipline and gave me a rest from worries about my career.

Many, if not most people, use their hobbies to help them to ‘stop thinking’. That total absorption and obliviousness to the world and even to time, is something our minds need in order to rest. Like ‘doing nothing’ in the previous chapter, this is something we did a lot as children. In fact, it’s our birth right. We come back from those activities refreshed and rejuvenated.

This is why artists will say that what they do doesn’t feel like work. That’s not correct. It’s very hard work, and the pressures can be immense. But ‘not thinking’ in the way I’ve described, does take the strain away for much of the time.

‘Presence’/‘charisma’

However you describe it, this is another artist quality that most of us would kill to have. And however mysterious ‘charisma’ seems to be when we experience it, cultivating it is relatively simple.

We need to still the voices in our minds, and simply be present. That’s it! That’s all that having a great ‘presence’ actually is. (Sadly, we’re not great at that. The mind chatters away, removing our attention from the present moment – to the point where we’re cheated of the sensations and feelings it contains.)

Don’t believe me? Well, try the walking or breathing meditation for two weeks before that big presentation or speech. Do it consistently. On the day, treat the speech like another meditation. As you’re called to the podium, breathe and stand up. Then breathe and walk to the podium. No need for nerves because, hey, you know how to breathe and walk! You’re not going to get that wrong... Then breathe and put your notes on the lectern. Then breathe, look up and say hello. As before, this takes ages to write, but seconds to do. No one will think you’re being slow.

Give the whole speech in that way – concentrating only on each thought or idea as it comes up. You’ll feel far less nervous (because nerves are actually you worrying about things you can’t do anything about in the present moment) and will be far more likely to do a good

job. And, afterwards, listen to the feedback you get from your peers. You won't feel as though you've done anything special. But they will.

'Thinking nothing' regularly

I recommend cultivating some activity in your life that makes you 'think nothing' on a regular basis. TV, and video games don't count. You might think you're resting your mind when you do them, but you're not. You're actually taking in lots of random information and shrinking your attention span.

No, I mean some totally absorbing hobby. In addition, working with your hands in a rhythmic, repetitive manner, such as when you're carving a piece of wood or hand-sewing a quilt can be very soothing. Make time for it, and understand that when you do, you're also making time to be peaceful and to cultivate the power of your mind.

Quality

Great work is something we also admire artists for. I recommend doing the walking or breathing meditations on a regular basis – especially if you have a high-powered job where calmness, and a good presence are important. It will help you learn to concentrate and improve the quality of your work.

One of the challenges of being an artist is developing the capacity to concentrate on difficult work for long periods of time in a world that seems to want to chop our attention spans into smaller and smaller pieces. Having the steadiness to concentrate is crucial if you want to produce anything of quality, or note.

The lesson from the artist

Learn when thinking and ‘not thinking’ are useful to you. Separate them out and do them both consciously rather than letting them get muddled up. That way, the quality of both your thinking, and your ‘not thinking’, will improve exponentially, and serve you better.

Chapter 3

The artist inhabits their body

Biopics of artists – whether fictional or based on reality – are often full of torrid affairs which scandalise their more sedate and respectable peers. This is part of the myth isn't it? That artists live more passionately, more viscerally.

Good art comes from the body and the emotions

Not all artists become more aware of their bodies. But the fact is, creating art consistently means tapping into your physicality and emotions if you want to do it well. And certainly if you want to keep doing it for decades.

Artists have to regard their bodies as part of their equipment – as often, they cannot create their work without them. So painters have to

watch their necks, shoulders, hands and eyes. And singers have to care for their throats and ears. This accounts for the phenomenon of bands who were partying hard in their 20s, suddenly hiring vegan chefs and masseurs to accompany them on tour. They realise that they simply must take care of their bodies, because their bodies are not replaceable.

The coolest artists go further than that

Some of the coolest artists to be around are models, dancers, acrobats and clowns. Their physical ‘presence’ and charisma are usually undeniable. All these groups of people have one common denominator – they truly ‘live’ in their bodies.

Dancers and acrobats have no choice of course. They spend most of the day concentrating on their bodies and training their muscles. The result is that their strength and tone simply radiates off their bodies in a highly attractive manner.

Working on the body for six hours or more a day is not something most of us have time to do. However we can take another leaf out of their books...

‘Listen’ to your body

I don’t just mean when your kidneys twinge or you’re hungry, although that’s good, of course. I mean, make time to listen to what your body is

saying in the moment, and to move as it requests. It's really another way of listening to that quiet 'impetus' inside you that I talked about in chapter one. The following exercise is just a way of taking it to a more visceral level.

Prepare by changing into some loose clothing that you can move in easily, and make some space to move. Put on some fairly gentle mid-paced music without vocals. I find tracks by the Penguin Café Orchestra are ideal, but experiment to find out what kind of music you can lose yourself in.

Follow your body's dictates

Begin to move. Listen to how each body part tells you it wants to move. It may be very small movements at first. You may make stretches, or lunges or idiosyncratic movements that do not at all resemble dancing. That's absolutely fine. 'Dancing' is not what we're aiming for here. We're aiming to connect with and listen to what your body is telling you about how it wants to stir itself.

Do this for 10 – 20 minutes. As you do so, you may find your movements change. They may get bigger and more exuberant as your body discovers that you're allowing it to express itself without limitations. Remember all those 'Dance like no one's watching...' inspirational posters? This is what that phrase really means. You may look awkward. You may make 'mad' movements. You may twitch and

be stiff. None of that is important. What's important is that you're allowing your body some time to speak to you.

What the body may say

The body knows what it needs. It may ask you to make 'illogical' unwinding movements. It may ask you to make asymmetrical movements that you don't repeat with the other arm or foot. It doesn't need you to. The body knows how to release tension through movement, if only you will stay completely present with the wisdom of the impetus towards the specific physical movements that it's communicating to you.

You find your arm feels like rising. Your head feels like turning. Your legs feel like sweeping or stomping. Follow that inner spark inside the viscosity of your body.

The body also knows how to keep itself safe. It will not ask you to make a movement that it's not ready to make. Your mind may ask that – and if you strain yourself, check that the impetus you were listening for was really coming from your body. Most likely it was coming from your head.

How do people who do physical comedy avoid getting hurt? Well maybe they can't avoid accidents involving sets or props, but other than that, all they do to keep themselves safe is listen to their bodies from split second to split second. They'll often begin the day with an exercise of

this kind. It warms up both the body in a holistic way, and also strengthens the performer's connection to their body.

What has this got to do with living like an artist?

Listening to the body is another way to be peaceful. Your poor body contorts itself all day to fulfil the dictates of your mind. To complete tasks, and to do your 'junk activities' when you're running away from yourself. It will placidly slouch even when doing that hurts your back, or stare for hours at a computer screen until your eyes redden and water. It's a meek and obliging being.

But oh, when you allow it free reign to take care of itself – your body reminds you what relaxation really is. Listening to your body – to music as I have suggested – can be far more relaxing than set stretches or flopping on the sofa for hours. It's refreshing as well as relaxing. Most of us have forgotten how refreshing movement can be in our 'couch potato' world.

Grace and presence

Inhabiting your body is a sure way to be more graceful. Men are often specifically encouraged ***not*** to inhabit their bodies, in order to ignore pain so that they can push through it, and so that they can be 'tough'. To be in touch with their bodies, to allow them to curve sinuously and

to be expressive, is associated with 'being gay'. (I've put it in inverted commas because this is supposed to be an insult and to be avoided at all costs. I can't see it myself, but I know that there are many echelons of society in which there are punishments specifically meted out to men who 'look gay' – from stares to punches – which is a great shame.)

If you don't inhabit your body you're more likely to push it beyond where it's happy to go (which for men, I suppose is the point...). That means injury though, which may then dog you for the rest of your life. I want to encourage my male readers to disregard all this repressive bullying, and to listen to, and inhabit their bodies. To make movements that you're unaccustomed to making – even if it has to be in the secret of your bedroom or living room. It's very good for you.

If you do, you'll find yourself moving with more grace. You'll be a more graceful and confident dancer (great for attracting lovers) and you'll hold yourself with more fluidity too. That's attractive in both sexes.

And think about some of those rock and pop stars you admire? Bowie, Prince, James Brown, Beyonce, Michael Jackson, Bruno Mars and Kate Bush, for instance – they were/are all supremely confident in their movements. Look them up on Youtube. They all look like dancers and move like cats. That doesn't just come from a dance training. It comes from physical confidence. And for them, that physical confidence also translates itself into a great, easy and fluid presence. And so,

‘listening to your body’ is something you’re going to have to cultivate if you want the same.

Sexiness

Let’s face it, they also looked damned sexy! Dancing is a form of foreplay – even a form of mate selection in many indigenous societies. And that’s because it tells you a great deal about the health and genes of your potential partner. And a lot about how good they’ll be in bed. We all instinctively know this.

Sadly, some men hold themselves like a piece of two by four – especially as they get older. They’re about as much fun to go to bed with as an ironing board. They’re not in touch with their own bodies, so they don’t move sensuously in bed. But even worse, because they’re so cut off from their own bodies, they’re not tuned into or listening their partner’s body either. So they do what they think they’re ‘supposed’ to do to arouse their lover, rather than what that person is actually reacting to. And that makes for awkward, passionless, or even painful sex. By contrast, a man who, despite the way society has tried to keep him from it, *is* in touch with his body, is often a joy in bed.

Women too, benefit from staying in touch with the way their body wants to move, to the point where they no longer think about how it looks. This makes for less self-consciousness in bed about your tummy rolls and love handles. It’s one thing to be told your partner isn’t judging

you on those things (of course, they're just delighted that you're naked!). It's quite another to be able to shut off the critical voices in your mind that come from decades of having your body unfairly compared to teenaged models and being judged for not measuring up. The kind of active listening to your body I've described, will help you practice silencing those voices – before you ever take a stitch off. That, in turn, will open the door to your being much more abandoned and expressive in bed – and having a better time as a result.

And isn't all the above what you always suspected about those 'cool' artists? That they were damned sexy and good lovers?

Being 'cool' again

Since we're back to talking about it, another component of 'being cool' is that everyday grace I was talking about. Funny how style icons can make the most awkward of movements and still look 'cool'...

Do you want to know their secret? They simply stay in their bodies. They're never 'mentally outside' them, worrying about how they look (which is a recipe for looking like a dork).

If you're mentally 'outside' your body picturing what you look like – you'll always look awkward. That's because you're simply not 'embodying' yourself. This used to be a problem for just a minority of people. But in our selfie obsessed culture (which encourages people to

continually think about what they're looking like to others) it's worth mentioning here. Stay inside your body (mentally) as much as you can.

Playfulness

If you've been putting my suggestions into practice, by now, you'll be used to paying attention to the in-the-moment impetus of your body. Listen to what it tells you about being more playful in the moment. This is the skill that small children use when they turn any environment into a playground. Safety bars become something to swing off, and support pillars, something to swing around. The voices in their heads become characters they play, or make them say the thing that nobody has dared to, so that everyone can laugh. Playful imagination is the beginning of comedy and of thinking out of the box. Playfulness is the mother of 'what if?' and 'why not..?'

Finding your unique voice and sense of humour

You too may start to become more aware of the 'voices' in your mind, alongside with the suggestions to 'play' made by the body, like the children in the playground. This is because, while you've been listening to the body, what you've become aware of is that spark of consciousness within you, which animates you. It can prompt you to make a thousand different movements, but it remains ever the same.

It can also have a thousand faces. In clowning or fooling these are called ‘masks’ – because performers remain ever mindful that while those voices/masks can be any kind of character, the animating force behind them is pure consciousness and remains the same. Your inner consciousness encapsulates the infinite – which means you are infinite – and becoming more aware of your ‘masks’ is a very practical way to experience that.

Commonly these ‘masks’ manifest via voices in your mind i.e. the commentary that your mind makes on everything, and also via body language that you feel in your body. Start to listen to, voice them, or let them have conversations with each other, and you’ll discover lots of different ‘yous’ all just waiting for you to express them.

You may be surprised at what you find... Underneath the voices you most often pay attention to – such as the masks that complain, or are optimistic, or sad – you may find long forgotten personalities that re-enliven you. And what’s most comforting about letting them speak, is realising that they all articulate the human condition (something we’ll touch on again, later in the book). They’re often funny too.

Find times when it’s appropriate to let both your mind/masks and body run free. Make time and space where you can be alone to do it. It’s incredibly good for you.

The lesson from the artist

Staying connected to the impulse to move and be ‘inside’ your own body is great for taking care of it properly, being graceful, playful and for becoming a better lover. Voicing your ‘masks’ will make you more creative, solve your stage fright (if that’s an issue) and give voice to the infinite potential inside you.

Chapter 4

The artist recognises their passion

We touched a little on the subject of your passion/s in chapter one. If you put time aside regularly to ‘do nothing’ you’re likely to discover much more about your true interests and passions. There are several advantages to doing this.

Find out what really relaxes you

Too often in our puritan minds – we embrace the idea of the difficult. Now, it’s not that something that’s difficult is not worth doing – just that the quality of ‘difficulty’ is not a virtue in itself. But that is something we often forget. (Often, even artists will fail to value their own talents because what they do seems too ‘easy’. They forget that that’s how talent works...)

And because of this, we often embrace hobbies that our minds like the idea of, but which don’t truly relax us. We may choose them because

they fit with our idea of our own identities – or because they'll make us look 'cool' to others (of course, if we're not truly enthused by said hobby, we look anything but...).

By now though, if you've been putting aside time to 'do nothing' regularly, you'll have found yourself being drawn back towards certain activities. Some of them might not even be conventional hobbies. You might find you like tidying up! Or reading book after book on a certain subject even though it feels like they're all saying the same thing. (The latter two activities are something I indulged in for over a decade before I realised I wanted to write a book about home organizing, setting out my own unique system for staying tidy. That book, 'Banish Clutter Forever' became a bestseller...) Allowing yourself to do what you're drawn to (however eccentric it is) is a way of 'becoming more yourself' and being more contented. Who doesn't want more of that? In addition, there are another couple of upsides.

Your passions shape your work for the better and act like insurance

When Steve Jobs was in college, he studied calligraphy with a Trappist monk for 18 months. It taught him about the beauty of lettering, the importance of aesthetics and about chasing perfection. A couple of years later, he got into computers, and he realised the importance of elegant fonts, cursors and icons – in fact, he cared much more about elegance of design overall, as a result of that time learning

calligraphy. The result was Apple's design aesthetic, which might never have developed without that course of study, and which influenced every other computer manufacturer in the world. In short, indulging his passion in calligraphy is partly what made Steve Jobs a visionary that changed the world.

Now, at the time, Jobs' interest in calligraphy would have seemed like a waste of effort. Yet he let himself become absorbed and be led by his passion – however 'useless' it seemed. Eventually that passion is what lifted his vision at Apple above that of every other competitor.

The same is true of people who, for whatever reason, need to change career. Often it's the passions they have indulged – and built up years of informal experience in – which allow them to find a new line of work, or give them an edge over other candidates. The self-development they've unwittingly engaged in – with such ease too! – is actually a form of investment.

There's a wisdom in the subconscious mind. It knows better than you do, what your capacities are. Your inclinations may be due to some genetic advantage e.g. you may have an in-built physical advantage that translates into a talent for language or maths or for throwing a ball. Often the subconscious mind knows what these are, and will lead you to them, if you listen to that gentle voice of inclination.

Boredom is not a bad thing...

But as I hinted in chapter one, you have to make time for your mind and body to lead you. Good quality time – in the daylight and before you're so tired you're falling asleep, or too grumpy to try anything new. You have to discover what will make you leap out of bed early on a Sunday morning – whether it's motor-biking, or Morris dancing.

This is why unstructured time is so important for children. Although it's important to expose them to lots of new things and activities while they're young, it's also wise to allow them to become 'bored' regularly. Apart from the fact that you won't wear yourself to a shred driving them to multiple expensive classes and clubs every week, it's useful for them to discover by themselves, what they gravitate to. That way, they'll have a better idea of their innate talents and dreams when they're teenagers, and need to think about a possible career.

I remember a TV experiment with a family that went back to the 1900s for a few weeks and lived as our ancestors of a certain class did, with the right clothes and servants etc. One of them commented that she understood why all those Victorian gentlemen became amateur scientists and inventors. With no TV, and all the basic housework taken care of, the boredom forced them to become inventive.

How do I know if something is a ‘passion’?

The first clue, as I’ve said, is that you keep going back to a particular activity. Another is that you don’t insist on mountains of expensive equipment before you begin – you’re willing to cobble together whatever you can to make a start. The third, is that you become totally absorbed by it. Your mind becomes quiet and you think only of what you’re doing, until you suddenly ‘wake up’ and find that it’s midnight, even though you could have sworn that you’d only been there five minutes.

Out of your passions come your life’s purpose

Finding your life’s purpose is not usually something that happens in a day. Of course, if you’ve been adversely affected by something, you may make it your life’s work to effect a change in the law or to raise awareness of it. But for most of us, our life’s purpose doesn’t announce itself quite so loudly.

In fact, we may forget to ask about it at all. Wrapped up in the sensible practicalities of life, we may concentrate on studying, or career, until we’ve lost our sense of purpose entirely.

Most of us want meaning. Some reason to exist beyond taking care of those we love (important though that is) – especially if doing so is relatively easy to achieve. Of course, sorting out the practical stuff, like

earning enough to survive, and being healthy, are what have to come first. But what then? Better to give your life's purpose some serious thought before you start feeling empty and dissatisfied.

Each of us wants to feel special

And each of us is! In fact, each of us is a unique concatenation of circumstances, genetic predispositions, talents and experiences that means we each have something irreplaceable to give. But how do we find it? A standardised school system, of the kind that most of us go through, is not the place to discover our life's purpose. However, following your passions *is*. Keep doing that and they will lead you, through many false starts and blind alleys over many years or even decades, to the thing you love to do, and the reason you need to do it. And there is no better feeling.

The lesson from the artist

Make good quality time for your passions. Indulge yourself a little with books, or trips, or equipment occasionally. **Grow** – because it's the best way to insure yourself against life's twists and turns, and find what you were born to do.

Chapter 5

The artist feeds their soul

This chapter is about many of the things most people associate with an artist's life. Artists spend more time than most of us consuming art, and are often to be found at private views, concerts, or gatherings of artists. It all seems so glamorous, doesn't it?

Of course, artists do a lot of this in their own field because they need to stay up-to-date with what's happening in it – and to expand their skills and network of contacts. But it's more than that. Artists spend a lot of time appreciating the virtuosity and brilliance of other artists in all kinds of arenas entirely unrelated to their own.

Sometimes this is because they may have been personally introduced to the artist concerned. Sometimes art has been recommended to them or there's an industry connection e.g. maybe they have the same manager. But it's also because making art that pushes the envelope encourages you to be more wide-ranging in your tastes.

Feeding the mind and feeding the soul

All that time in art galleries or at concerts etc. feeds the artist's mind. Most original works are not produced in a vacuum. They blossom out of hundreds of hours consuming the art of others, and mimicking it too. In fact, if an artist reaches a block, often a walk or drive or visit to a museum will help 'unblock' them precisely because it stimulates their thought processes and reminds them of the untold possibilities.

And as you'd imagine, consuming art feeds the soul. It takes us out of the drive to hurry, be productive or consume, and into the realms of what makes us human – and makes us contemplate what's important in life. Alternatively, the sheer beauty of it can give our weary souls a rest.

Feeding your soul is not a luxury

As the old song says 'Hearts starve as well as bodies, Give us bread, but give us roses...' Exposing yourself to art isn't a luxury. It's what you need (among other things) to slow down, freshen up your thinking, or simply make you feel refreshed. In a way, nature is a work of art – and does much the same thing. And I would count gardening as one of the most therapeutic of creative arts too.

Make some time whenever you can spare it to indulge in experiencing art and nature – whether via a garden or a forest, or in a

gallery, a tiny independent pottery or a stately home. The ‘daydreaming’ and reflection time will soothe you back to being yourself again.

Creating art is important too

Perhaps you don’t think of yourself as a creator. If so, I’d like you to close your eyes and remember when you were totally absorbed in creating something. It might have been the last time you made a cake, or that time you knitted a scarf or made collages as a child. It might have been the time you planted a row of beans, or whittled a spoon, or sang at a folk club.

Try to recall how you felt. Was it ‘tired but satisfied’? A little pink-cheeked, but proud of yourself? It felt both ‘good’ and ‘good for you’, didn’t it?

All of us are creators by birth-right

Long before art was ever something you could sell – in fact, long before money ever existed – people felt the need to create, as the ancient hand prints on cave walls testify. It’s a need that’s written into us on the most fundamental level. And by that, I mean every single one of us.

Charging for art, in whatever form, has separated ‘artists’ out from ‘ordinary people’. In real terms, there’s no actual difference. Artists are people who create artistic works. That’s it. The only thing that happens

over time, is that those who both charge for, and are able to consistently sell their work, get to spend more time making art. And with those extra hours and years of experience comes greater skill and more maturity and wisdom about how to maintain an artist path in life.

The important thing is the act of creation

It doesn't matter what your medium is. It doesn't matter if it's high art, or 'craft'. It doesn't matter if you're good at it or not. It doesn't matter if you sell what you create, or if no one values the final product, including yourself. In fact, the final product doesn't matter at all. What matters is the act of creating and how it makes you feel. What matters is what it does to your attention span, and your ability to connect and engage with the world.

This is why creativity is your birth-right. Creating something with real love and care, for no reason other than for the joy of creating it, or as an offering to others, is something humans thrive on. For too long it's been relegated to the realms of 'unimportant' by our educators, pundits and peers. It's as though they seek to put people off creating by underlining the risk, the difficulties of producing anything good, and the 'frivolity' of creating at all! Instead we're told to make ourselves useful to society, and to make money while we're at it.

Those things are important of course – but so is art. Not because of some higher intellectual cause, but because it heals, balances and enlivens the person making it. It's as simple as that.

While I'm here, I'd like to put a word in for the 'analogue' arts. I think the creative practices that force you to connect manually with real materials – where the outcome can be uncertain and there are no 'undos' or 'do overs' are especially good for us. Engaging with basic materials is what primitive people spent (and still do spend) all day doing. But if you have a penchant for a digital form of art – so long as you're creating, that's the main thing.

Inner confidence

'Ever noticed how quietly confident many artists are? 'Ever wondered why that is? It's a quality many of us would kill for, isn't it?

Creating art gives you time to think for yourself. I highly recommend creating things from scratch wherever you can, or aiming to graduate to doing so when you're ready. Planning your artist works, rather than being dictated to by a composer, a recipe or a 'create-by-numbers' kit, makes you more flexible and innovative in your thinking. It forces you to take your own opinion seriously.

When you create from scratch, no one's decision matters but your own. Creating from scratch is a way to honour your own creative spirit

and wisdom. This is a powerful antidote to the kind of conditioning we've all experienced since we were small, that tells us that someone else knows better, or that someone else is the arbiter of taste, and will tell us when we're 'good enough'.

Artists know that few people are ever going to give you that assurance – especially when you're starting out and learning your craft. The artist's own opinions of their work have to do, and that becomes a good habit as they learn to trust their own judgement. That leads to the kind of humble self-awareness and quiet self-possession we all want to possess.

Peaceful flow

Here it is again. Creating something regularly – especially to your own design – leads to feelings of peace, coming back into yourself, connection and satisfaction. Meditation may be a way to reach these things that enables you to feel them in the world – but making something that you enjoy creating will produce these feelings pretty instantly.

Authenticity

Where has all this 'listening to ourselves' got us? Well if you do that more consistently on the micro level, pretty soon you start connecting to

yourself on the macro level. Making time consistently to follow your thoughts and impulses and express them usually means finding greater self-awareness.

If that's a practice you've been following while you've been reading this book then by now, you may have discovered more about what's really important to you. You may have found that that your life doesn't really reflect your true goals or passion. Or that it reflects what you thought they were once, but that now you know better. You may find yourself becoming who you really are.

This journey may lead you to therapy, to making changes in your life, or to listening to your dreams. You may find yourself needing friends who can converse on a deep soul level whether you're riding high or in trouble – rather than ones who only ever seem to be interested in whatever consumerist or status goals you achieved this week.

These are all symptoms of living authentically. When your mother told you that 'artists live dangerous lives', in emotional terms, she wasn't wrong. One of the things we value artists for is that they're truly and authentically themselves. They aren't trying to be anyone else. That isn't always convenient for others, but it does make for a more fulfilling life.

The lesson from the artist

Feed your soul by connecting with art. Make art yourself for the joy of it and let it enable you to discover more about who you truly are, and the kind of life you truly need, in order to feel joy.

Chapter 6

The artist knows how to be brave

Most of us grow up desperately wanting to be liked, and believing that we need to conform in order to achieve it. It is much easier to play along and let the most popular person in your group think you're agreeing with everything they say, than to break ranks and risk censure.

Most of us feel safer within 'tribes' of people that all talk a certain way, or dress a certain way, or follow a certain health craze, espouse certain values, or have the same hobbies, or shop in certain places, and acquire certain items – all of which mark us out as a certain kind of person. To be an 'outsider' fills us with horror.

In the past, it may have filled you with horror because you 'didn't know what to do with yourself otherwise'. If you've been following your inner voices and impetus, you'll have a much better idea of who you really are – and you won't need another's definition to shape your identity. And you'll have explored your own values a little more (rather

than the ones you inherited) which will make you feel stronger. If you've been creating things for yourself, you may have less of a need to define yourself via what you buy. However, it can still be difficult to find yourself on the outside of the 'in crowd'.

It's true that if you want an instant 'tribe' you're going to have to conform. And there can be many material advantages to doing so. It can often mean instant community, support, connections and being signposted to valuable opportunities and resources. For many people this makes it an essential compromise to make.

You can either be 'liked' or you can be brave

This is the point where living like an artist becomes a little more serious. Artists are people who are in the habit of listening to their inner selves. They rarely conform for the sake of it. And that means that they rarely fit seamlessly into the common cliques that most people want to belong to.

As most of us are dimly aware, they pay a price for this. They have to forge their own path – even build their own 'families'. If you're a member of some kind of minority e.g. you're gay and you're estranged from some of your friends and family as a result, you'll already know that this takes hard work. Finding like-minded people whom you can trust and enjoy spending time with is much harder than when you can just join a church or the local 'ladies who lunch' and get an instant community and a cosy social circle all in one go.

That may not be the path for you. You may love the circles you belong to, and find conforming to be a small price to pay. The artist does not – maybe they simply cannot. Whatever the reason, refusing to conform does have its upsides. Artists are free to become who they truly are. And they generally don't give a damn about whether what they do and what they like is 'approved of' or not.

So why do you find yourself liking artists?

So far, it seems like a no-brainer. Conforming in order to be liked gets you lots of concrete advantages, while not conforming means a lot of bravery and hard work. But let me ask you a question. When you conform, are you really liked? Do you inspire a strong liking, or are you clinging onto your place in that clique you need to be in? And while you're busy clinging on, do you feel liked for yourself? In short, is conforming really that satisfying?

Sometimes, you'll meet an artist, and feel that however eccentric they are, you just can't help liking them. They may not conform, but they have your grudging respect.

The secret to really being liked is a paradox

Fools, clowns and comedians know that the secret to being liked is to be 'like' others. At first, that seems like a recipe for conformity, but it goes much deeper than that.

As I've said, others will tend to like you when you're 'like' them. Except of course, you're not exactly like them – so how do clowns and fools use this principle? They dig much deeper, below dress, political opinions and material goods, right down to the human condition. They express their particular take on those universally human experiences – whether it's tripping up on something, or experiencing loss. (If you've been letting your 'masks' speak, you'll already know how to do that – as you'll have dug down to your essential 'human-ness' – past all the stereotypes and roles that have been put on you.) Doing this is how they get past the need to conform and how, paradoxically, they inspire respect and a much deeper 'liking'.

Maybe a writer or artist expresses something for you that you've always felt but never had the courage to say. It's comforting in that moment to realise that there's someone 'like you' out there, feeling the same thing. That's how and why you connect to them and their work.

That kind of ‘being liked’ takes bravery

So, by now you can see that this is a longer but much more satisfying route to being likeable. On the way, you get to be yourself and live an authentic life. Plus, you have the satisfaction of knowing you have people’s respect for being your own person, and that when you do inspire affection, it’s the *real* you that people know and love. Those are powerful incentives to be brave and be honest about who you really are.

It takes understanding all this very consciously to have the bravery to stand out from the crowd. (Knowing yourself well, from all the activities and self-reflection I’ve encouraged you toward earlier in this book will have helped you build up a strong core in you which makes this easier.) When you do, you may get approval and you may not. It’s certainly never easy at the beginning, as people around you will usually work very hard to ‘get you back in line’. What I can tell you from years of doing so is, unless you’re living under some kind of repressive regime, people’s disapprobation will not kill you (even if it feels like it!) And it does get easier with time as ‘being different’ becomes the new ‘norm’ for you in people’s minds.

I must just point out though that ‘being yourself’ should never excuse your behaving badly or selfishly to people. Be yourself, but be kind, always.

And by the way, just to remind you, bravery doesn’t feel like ‘having no fear’. Anyone sensitive to themselves and those around them

is generally too aware of what's at stake to feel fearless. Bravery is feeling the fear, every single day, knowing that you'll probably always feel that scared, and doing what's right for you and living by your own values anyway.

What it *can* feel like though – once you've stuck with it – is an incredible high. Because when you're brave enough to put your work or yourself out there, and people admire you, you feel loved on a level that no one who 'conforms to keep the peace' can ever feel. You're loved for who you truly, truly are.

Bravery is just the start...

Bravery is simply a beginning. Having it will enable you to shine because you'll no longer be afraid to stand out. Bravery is what enables you to shape your own life, regardless of the pressure others put on you to play it safe. Bravery will enable you to dream big – and to put sensible plans in place to realise those dreams. Bravery means initiating projects and risking looking a fool, rather than simply playing by the rules and waiting for life to give you what you want. Bravery means you'll have the emotional muscles to stick your neck out, or stand up and be counted when necessary, for something you believe in – however unpopular the cause. And who knows, once you're that brave, maybe that will mean you can fight to leave the world a better place than you found it...

The lesson from the artist

Conforming is comfortable, but not the path to a truly fulfilled and satisfying life. Bravery is scary, but often the beginning of a huge adventure...

Chapter 7

The artist over-delivers for the love of it

Where has all this ‘working because they want to’, listening to their inner selves, listening to their unorthodox thoughts, voicing things about the human condition and tapping into the zeitgeist got the artist?

Hopefully, it’s made them excited about their work, and leaping out of bed in the morning to do it. It’s got them working in a totally focused way with no notion of the time. It’s got them perfecting what they do, just because they want to so much. In short, it’s got them over-delivering for the sheer love of it.

‘You’ve got to be the best’

Artist grow up with this saying. They’re constantly reminded that there’s no shortage of creative talent, or people willing to step into their place. However, this isn’t why most artists and creators over-deliver. If they did, they’d be doing so in order to get away from a negative. Running

scared, and hoping that they were going to make the grade. And good creative work will not come from that emotional place.

Good creative work comes from a place of joy in what you're doing. That's why I've emphasised the way artists work from their own inner impetus and passion – right from the beginning. And when you're enjoying it that much, you don't want to stop until what you're working on is perfect. For the artist, this is perfectly natural. And underneath all the veneers we acquired as we grew up – we're *all* artists.

Over-delivering feels good

You may be in a job you dislike, or which is boring or workaday. It may not be possible for you to over-deliver when you work. And yet, with your hobbies, you do so naturally don't you? You don't stop to calculate the cost of the hours you've slaved over a painting or a model or a quilt. You didn't do a profit and loss calculation first, to see if it was practical to produce that item.

Why? Well, because the act of creating – when it's coming from the right place – feels satisfying. It feels good because it *is* good for you.

Most artists start out in this way, particularly when they're young and honing their skills. But even though – when they work professionally – they have to keep an eye on whether their prices repay them for the amount of time and effort they spend on what they

produce, they never lose that connection to working well for the love of it. This is both a high and low ace.

We exploit artists, and yet we need them...

The world both admires and fetishizes artists – a clear sign that creative people and the way they work, are misunderstood. The world worships them while underpaying and exploiting them, and the fact that creative people work mostly from love of their craft, makes them vulnerable to that exploitation. (That's the low part of the ace.) And yet, we need artists.

There's an apocryphal quote attributed to Churchill from the Second World War when he was supposedly asked to cut funding for the arts. He replied 'Then what are we fighting for?' Churchill may not have actually said it (there's no concrete record of his having done so) but the fact that this quote has been copied and pasted millions of times says something about the place we hold for the arts in our collective consciousness.

We recognise art as a pinnacle of human activity. However, if it were just some fancy abstract concept, I don't think it would hold such sway in our hearts. We wouldn't *need* to consume the popular arts, such as music, the way we do. So why do we need them?

Artistry is an antidote to our materialist world

Let's start at the grass roots level. Why is creative work, done for the love of it, so good for you? Well, it's because creating is a basic need for humans. This is something we've forgotten because most of us manage largely without it. However, artists probably have a greater natural need for it than most people. (I know that when I'm between books, those close to me can start begging me to work on something new, because I'm generally happier when I am...).

Often, we're condemned as 'uncreative' early in our lives, and substitute our need to create with the act of choosing goods. Acquiring items with a high art or design value can make us feel temporarily satisfied, but the high is usually only momentary – which can lead to an expensive addiction. Owning something beautiful is not as satisfying as knowing that you created it yourself. That's why working on something creative regularly can eliminate the need for the material signifiers of worth that many of us are addicted to, as I mentioned earlier in the book. The simple act of creating something for the love of it, is the antidote.

And what about the wider picture? What happens to us when we live in a world in which everything is weighed and quantified? A world where even many of our relationships are constrained by transactional etiquette around whether we've 'returned a dinner', offered an equally valuable gift at Christmas-time or 'bought our round' in the pub? (This

is a concern that didn't really exist in the primitive world, by the way... Primitive people tended to give what was needed freely – so much so, that some of them didn't have words for 'please' and 'thank you'. Sharing was expected.) And what happens to our emotional selves in a world in which the latest diet or 'must have' item promises so much, and too often, delivers so little?

We long for something more. For something which gives of itself unstintingly, without counting the cost. We long to be valued that much.

What happens when the artist 'loves' their audience

The artist could simply stop at delivering a technically great product. You'd certainly have no reason to complain – although it might make you feel strangely 'empty'. But often the greatest ones give you something more. For free. They over-deliver for the love of it.

That is a kind of subversion of the market. Strictly (and certainly in the short term) it makes no economic sense. What happens then? Well, when the artist over-delivers for the love of it, our faith that being human is about more than carefully weighed transactions, is restored. They make us feel that we no longer solely live in a harsh world where you only 'get what you pay for'. And regardless of the state of our personal relationships, *we feel loved*.

For 99p or whatever, we can have a song that genuinely moves us. (I think it should be more, because it'd still be cheap at £4.99.) It's worth much more to us than we paid for it. This is why we value art so much. This is why we respect and admire artists so much, and it's also the artist's high ace.

The lesson from the artist

I encourage you to over-deliver wherever you can in your life. With your partner, with your children, with your creative work/hobbies, and within your community. It really is what makes life worth living – both for you and for the people who receive what you give. And if you needed any more convincing, over-delivering, time after time, is the way to make your life meaningful and, piece by piece, build your legacy.

A final lesson from the artist

I hope practicing some of the techniques in this book has brought you all the artist qualities – the charisma, discipline, authenticity, confidence, determination, joy, peaceful flow and respect – that you desired. These exercises never lose their potency and the journey never ends. That's because the magic is in *living* this way – in the 'doing' and not the 'having'.

Valuing the 'doing' and not the 'having' is a quietly subversive thing. It runs contrary to our marketplace culture. But nevertheless, step by step, it will make you happier, and enable you to *become the artist that creates your own life*. Yes, I lied with the title of this book. If you've been following all the habits I've suggested here, you're already an artist after all

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to Chris Butler for the cover and formatting here and his support in putting this out quickly and for free during the COVID 19 lockdown in the UK. Also to Alan Jones at First4IT solutions who sorted out all the technical download stuff so quickly and enthusiastically.

Author biography

“Chandra is one of the most distinctive, imaginative and unbelievable vocalists you’ll ever hear.”

What’s On

Sheila Chandra made some of the most beautiful and innovative recordings in the World Music category – beginning with her band Monsoon’s 1982, ground-breaking Asian Fusion, Top Ten hit around the world, ‘Ever So Lonely’ – until voice problems forced her to retire in 2010.

Since then, in an unlikely twist, she’s gone on to become a best-selling author with *Banish Clutter Forever* (2010) outlining her own system for home organizing, which she says makes it possible to “pretty much, never tidy up again”.

“I’ve read other books on clutter but nothing really seems to work. Sheila Chandra’s system is so simple and effective it even worked on an inveterate hoarder like me. Absolutely brilliant.”

Amazon reviewer

She also began mentoring the (then homeless) street artist Stik in 2008, writing a version of her next book ‘Organizing Your Creative Career’ (Watkins 2017 and 2020) just for him. Stik has gone on to become one of the most famous and collectible street artists in the world.

"So much financial anxiety, substance abuse and general bewilderment could be spared if this practical empathic advice was more widely available. ...offers the reader a highly intelligent consultation with a world-class artist [and] a map to building a solid foundation for your artistry."

Katie Rose – fRoots

‘How to Live Like an Artist’ tells you exactly how to use timeless artist wisdom to enhance the way you live.

For further information

www.sheilachandra.com

<https://christopherbutler.crevado.com/>

© Text copyright Sheila Chandra 2020

© Cover/Back Cover artwork copyright Chris Butler 2020

All rights reserved.

‘HOW TO LIVE LIKE AN ARTIST’

A gift from the author, and free to download during COVID – 19 lockdown.

Artist lifestyle lessons to help you thrive in life, and self-isolation/shelter-in-place.

- * Discover your inner self-direction when making your own schedule**
- * Understand and master the secret of great presence and charisma**
- * Find the secret to being ‘cool’, and how to tap into the zeitgeist**
- * Feed your soul and find meaning in the way you spend your time**

Most of us admire artists of all kinds – and with that admiration often comes the desire to be more like them, and to cultivate the special qualities that they display. We wish that we too were charismatic, ‘cool’, sexy or capable of tapping into the zeitgeist and living with passion. Undoubtedly, spending a few decades living like a professional artist helps people gain many of the special qualities that our most revered creators have. But most of us never have that luxury. And there has been nowhere to go to learn the wisdom that accrues from living an artist life....

But now there’s a book full of artist lifestyle secrets to be your guide. You’ll learn to:

- * foster a more commanding presence**
- * be more disciplined effortlessly**
- * find more joy in the way you work and play**
- * nurture that peaceful flow you’ve always suspected artists experience**

‘How to Live Like an Artist’ allows you to bypass decades of effort and learning to gain the secrets of creative people you admire, all in one go. Although deceptively simple, this down-to-earth, user-friendly guide has the power to transform your way of living. Its series of seven simple habits will produce a sea-change of approach, enabling you to live more creatively, more passionately and more serenely – while enhancing your life on a permanent basis.