

We Are All Artists Now



Seth Godin

How Long Are You Going to Wait?

They told you to get your résumé in order, to punch your ticket, to fit in, and to follow instructions. They told you to swallow your pride, not to follow your dream.

They promised trinkets and prizes and possibly riches if you would just suck it up and be part of the system, if you would merely do what you were told and conform.

They sold you debt and self-storage and reality TV shows. They sold your daughters and sons, too. All in exchange for what would happen later, when it was your turn.

It's your turn.

You Are Not Your Career

Your ability to follow instructions is not the secret to your success.

You are hiding your best work, your best insight, and your best self from us every day.

We know how much you care, and it's a shame that the system works overtime to push you away from the people and the projects you care about.

The world does not owe you a living, but just when you needed it, it has opened the door for you to make a difference.

It's too bad that so much time has been wasted, but it would be unforgivable to wait any longer. You have the ability to contribute so much. We need you, now.

“Does Anyone Have Any Suggestions?”

We've all heard this request at the end of a meeting. Sometimes the moderator even means it. Sometimes the moderator, the boss, the person with a problem, actually wants to know if the group has an untried concept or an insight to share.

And the response is always the same. Silence. Sidelong glances, perhaps some shuffling of papers, but still, silence.

Really?

All these highly trained, well-paid, and respected people in a room and not one person has something to contribute? I doubt it.

Stick around for a few minutes, and if the moderator has earned any trust at all, someone speaks up. And if that person isn't summarily executed, someone else speaks up.

And then more people. Until finally, the room is filled with energy, a buzz that you can feel.

Finally, we're permitted to be human, to end the silence, to share our best work.

Amazingly, everyone in the room is capable of seeing and analyzing and solving. Everyone in the room is capable of passion. Everyone in the room can care enough to do something—if they can overthrow the self-induced, systemically amplified censor that keeps them in line.

Why didn't anyone speak up earlier? Why did we have to wait until the meeting was over?

Where does the strained silence come from?

This isn't a manifesto for other people. This is a manifesto for you. It's a manifesto for anyone who has been overlooked or brainwashed or seduced into being invisible.

A revolution is here, our revolution, and it is shining a light on what we've known deep down for a long time—you are capable of making a difference, of being bold, and of changing more than you are willing to admit. You are capable of making art.

Why Make Art?

Because you must. The new connected economy demands it and will reward you for nothing else.

Because you can. Art is what it is to be human.

“ This isn’t a manifesto for other people. This is a manifesto for you. It’s a manifesto for anyone who has been overlooked or brainwashed or seduced into being invisible.

The Icarus Deception

Just south of the Greek island of Samos lies the Icarian Sea. Legend has it that this is where Icarus died—a victim of his hubris.

His father, Daedalus, was a master craftsman. Banished to prison for sabotaging the work of King Minos (captor of the Minotaur), Daedalus created a brilliant escape plot, described in the myth that we were told as children.

He fashioned a set of wings for himself and his son. After affixing the wings with wax, they set out to escape. Daedalus warned Icarus not to fly too close to the sun.

Entranced by his magical ability to fly, Icarus disobeyed and flew too high. We all know what happened next: The wax melted, and Icarus, the beloved son, lost his wings, tumbled into the sea, and died.

The lesson of this myth: Don't disobey the king. Don't disobey your dad. Don't imagine that you're better than you are, and most of all, don't ever believe that you have the ability to do what a god might do. The part of the myth you weren't told: In addition to telling Icarus not to fly too high, Daedalus instructed his son not to fly too low, too close to the sea, because the water would ruin the lift in his wings.

Society has altered the myth, encouraging us to forget the part about the sea, and created a culture where we constantly remind one another about the dangers of standing up, standing out, and making a ruckus. Industrialists have made hubris a cardinal sin but conveniently ignored a far more common failing: settling for too little. But it's far more dangerous to fly too low than too high, because it feels safe to fly low. We settle for low expectations and small dreams and guarantee ourselves less than we are capable of. By flying too low, we shortchange not only ourselves but also those who depend on us or might benefit from our work. We're so obsessed about the risk of shining brightly that we've traded in everything that matters to avoid it.

The path that's available to each of us is neither reckless stupidity nor mindless compliance. No, the path that's available to us is to be human, to do art, and to fly far higher than we've been taught is possible. We've built a world where it's possible to fly higher than ever, and the tragedy is that we've been seduced into believing that we ought to fly ever lower instead.

Your Comfort Zone (Versus Your Safety Zone)

For a long time, the two were one and the same. The mountain climber who knows when she's outside of her safety zone feels uncomfortable about it and stops—and lives to climb another day.

Your entire life has been about coordinating your comfort zone and your safety zone.

Learning when to push and when to back off, understanding how it feels when you're about to hit a danger zone. Like the fox, we've been trained to stay inside the fence, because inside the fence is where it's safe—until it's too late.

We don't have time to reevaluate the safety zone every time we make a decision, so over time, we begin to forget about the safety zone and merely pay attention to its twin sister, the comfort zone. We assume that what makes us comfortable also makes us safe.

The fence holding us back is no longer there, but we still feel comfortable with the old boundaries. Now that a revolution has hit, now that the economy is upside down and the rules have changed, we have to confront an obvious truth: The safety zone has changed, but your comfort zone has not. Those places that felt safe—the corner office, the famous college, the secure job—aren't. You're holding back, betting on a return to normal, but in the new normal, your resistance to change is no longer helpful.

“ We've built a world where it's possible to fly higher than ever, and the tragedy is that we've been seduced into believing that we ought to fly ever lower instead.

We made a mistake. We settled for a safety zone that wasn't bold enough, that embraced authority and compliance. We built our comfort zone around being obedient and invisible, and as a result, we're far too close to the waves.

You can go to as many meetings, read as many books, and attend as many seminars as you like, but if you don't figure out how to realign your comfort zone with today's new safetyzone, all the strategy in the world isn't going to help you.

It's simple. There's still a safety zone, but it's not in a place that feels comfortable to you. The new safety zone is the place where art and innovation and destruction and rebirth happen. The new safety zone is the never-ending creation of ever-deeper personal connection.

Successful people align their comfort zone with the behavior that keeps them safe.

But what happens when the place of safety moves... and you don't?

Moving to a new safety zone is a little like learning to swim. It's clearly better to have the ability to survive (and even have fun) in the water, but for a long time it's not comfortable. Recognizing that the safety zone has moved might be the prompt you need to reevaluate your comfort zone.

If you become someone who is uncomfortable unless she is creating change, restless if things are standing still, and disappointed if you haven't failed recently, you've figured out how to become comfortable with the behaviors most likely to make you safe going forward.

Art Is the New Safety Zone

Creating ideas that spread and connecting the disconnected are the two pillars of our new society, and both of them require the posture of the artist. Doing these two things regularly and with abandon is where the new safety zone lies.

Maintaining the status quo and fighting to fit in no longer work, because our economy and our culture have changed.

The bad news is this: Artists are never invulnerable. This safety zone isn't as comfortable as the last one was. It took a hundred years for us to be brainwashed into accepting the industrial system as normal and safe. It is neither, not for long.

Forget Salvador Dalí

When you hear the word “artist,” do you picture the slightly crazed Dalí or the selfdestructive Jackson Pollock? Perhaps you've been trained to imagine that you need to be someone like Johnny Depp or Amanda F. Palmer in order to make art.

This notion is both dangerous and wrong.

Oscar Wilde wrote that art is “new, complex, and vital.” Art isn't something that's made by artists. Artists are people who make art.

Art is not a gene or a specific talent. Art is an attitude, culturally driven and available to anyone who chooses to adopt it. Art isn't something sold in a gallery or performed on a stage. Art is

the unique work of a human being, work that touches another. Most painters, it turns out, aren't artists at all—they are safety-seeking copycats.

Seizing new ground, making connections between people or ideas, working without a map—these are works of art, and if you do them, you are an artist, regardless of whether you wear a smock, use a computer, or work with others all day long.

Speaking up when there's no obvious right answer, making yourself vulnerable when it's possible to put up shields, and caring about both the process and the outcome—these are works of art that our society embraces and the economy demands.

Tactics Are No Replacement for Art

Understanding cutting-edge business concepts like the Long Tail and the Tipping Point and Purple Cow and GTD and the rest is worthless if you don't commit. Commit to the frightening work of flying blind, of taking a stand, and of making something new, complex, and vital—or nothing much happens.

These cutting-edge strategies and tactics seem to promise a pain-free way to achieve your goals. You can read about a new strategy, find a guaranteed, impersonal way to achieve, point the industrial machine at a new market niche or a new sort of note-taking technique or buzzword

and, presto, results without pain. Ideaviruses will be unleashed, points will be tipped, and tails will get longer.

Alas, there isn't a pain-free way to achieve your goals.

I've read these books. I've written some of them. And I love them all, but the ideas are not enough without commitment. They're not enough because strategy is empty without change, empty without passion, and empty without people willing to confront the void.

I've seen the frightened looks in the eyes of an audience of music industry execs as they contemplate the death of their industry (and the possibilities that lie in its rebirth). I've heard the ennui in the voice of yet another manager at yet another endless meeting. And I've witnessed countless opportunities squandered by people who could have taken action but didn't. Not because they couldn't figure out what to do but because they weren't willing to do it.

Microsoft and Sony Records and the local freelancer have all squandered clear and obvious opportunities—not through ignorance of what was on offer but because it was easier to avoid committing to a new way of thinking.

Strategy and tactics live on the outside, in the cold world of consultants and spreadsheets. They are things we do without changing the way we think. Art, on the other hand, is personal, built on attitude and vision and commitment.

This manifesto is about committing to do work that is personal, that requires guts, and that has the potential to change everything. Art is the act of a human being doing generous work, creating something for the first time, touching another person.

This manifesto is about why each of us should make art. Why it's worth the price. And why we can't wait.

The world is filled with ordinary people doing extraordinary things.

Art Is Frightening

Art isn't pretty. Art isn't painting. Art isn't something you hang on the wall.

Art is what we do when we're truly alive.

If you've already decided that you're not an artist, it's worth considering why you made that decision and what it might take to unmake it.

If you've announced that you have no talent (in anything!), then you're hiding.

Art might scare you.

Art might bust you.

But art is who we are and what we do and what we need.

An artist is someone who uses bravery, insight, creativity, and boldness to challenge the status quo. And an artist takes it (all of it, the work, the process, the feedback from those we seek to connect with) personally.

Art isn't a result; it's a journey. The challenge of our time is to find a journey worthy of your heart and your soul.

“Art is not a gene or a specific talent. Art is an attitude, culturally driven and available to anyone who chooses to adopt it.”

Not an Artist?

That's the easy answer. Artists are other people. They don't dress or act or do work like we do. They're not required to go to meetings, they're full of themselves, they have tattoos, and they have talent.

But of course, this is nonsense.

When you were rewarded for obedience, you were obedient.

When you were rewarded for compliance, you were compliant.

When you were rewarded for competence, you were competent.

Now that society finally values art, it's time to make art.

Quality Is Assumed

We assume that you will make something to spec.

We assume that the lights will go on when we flip the switch.

We assume that the answer is in Wikipedia.

All we're willing to pay you extra for is what we don't assume, what we can't get easily and regularly and for free. We need you to provide the things that are unexpected, scarce, and valuable.

Scarcity and abundance have been flipped. High-quality work is no longer scarce.

Competence is no longer scarce, either. We have too many good choices—there's an abundance of things to buy and people to hire.

What's scarce is trust, connection, and surprise. These are three elements in the work of a successful artist.

The New Scarcity

One kind of scarcity involves effort. You can put in only so many hours, sweat only so much.

The employer pays for effort, because he can't get effort he can count on for free. And the eager-beaver employee expends extra effort to make a mark but soon learns that it doesn't scale.

Another kind of scarcity involves physical resources. Resources keep getting more scarce, because we're running out of them. Paradoxically, we're also running out of places in our houses to store our junk and running out of room in our bodies to store what we eat.

The new, third kind of scarcity is the emotional labor of art. The risk involved in digging deep to connect and surprise, the patience required to build trust, the guts necessary to say, "I made this"—these are all scarce and valuable. And they scale.

Here Come the Noisemakers

You are chaos, and there is nothing to keep you out.

When network engineers think about the security of the network, they begin with a firewall. The firewall is designed to keep unwanted information and viruses out of the system.

The Internet doesn't have a firewall. We're all able to connect. We each represent the ghost in the machine, the noise, the one who might change everything.

What you feed the network changes what you get back. The network connects people to one another, people to organizations, and best of all, people to ideas.

This new network celebrates art, enables connections, helps tribes to form, amplifies weirdness, and spreads ideas. What it cannot abide is boredom.

If you want to write, here's a blog. Write. Today, writers like Xenia Jardin and Danielle LaPorte reach millions without the blessing of big media.

If you want to sing or make videos, well, sure, YouTube will happily show your work to the masses. Judson Laipply has already entertained more than a hundred million people with his short film—a video that cost exactly zero to film.

If you want to share an invention or fund a project or topple a government, the connected economy makes it easier to do that than ever before.

Can you imagine it getting less open? This is just the beginning.

Revolutions bring total chaos. That's what makes them revolutionary.

“Art isn't a result; it's a journey. The challenge of our time is to find a journey worthy of your heart and your soul.”

A Nonhierarchy of Artists

The painter in front of a blank canvas. The architect changing the rules of construction. The playwright who makes us cry. The doctor who cares enough to call. The detective who cracks a cold case. The diva with a new interpretation of a classic. The customer service rep who, despite the distance and the rush, makes an honest connection. The entrepreneur who dares to start without permission or authority. The middle manager who transforms the key meeting with a single comment.

You?

Welcome to the Connection Economy

The value we create is directly related to how much valuable information we can produce, how much trust we can earn, and how often we innovate.

In the industrial economy, the stuff we made (literally stuff—widgets, devices, and Orings) comprised the best assets we could build. Fortunes belonged to men who built railroads, lightbulbs, and buildings. Today we're seeking something a revolution apart from that sort of productivity.

The connection economy rewards the leader, the initiator, and the rebel.

The Internet wasn't built to make it easy for you to watch Lady Gaga videos. The Internet is a connection machine, and anyone with a laptop or a smartphone is now connected to just about everyone else. And it turns out that those connections are changing the world.

If your factory burns down but you have loyal customers, you'll be fine. On the other hand, if you lose your customers, even your factory isn't going to help you—Detroit is filled with empty factories.

If your team is filled with people who work for the company, you'll soon be defeated by tribes of people who work for a cause.

If you use your money to buy advertising to promote the average products you produce for average people, soon you'll run out of money. But if you use your money to make exceptional products and services, you won't need to spend it on advertising, because your customers will connect to one another and bring you more.

The connection economy has changed how you get a job and what you do when you get to that job. It has changed how we make and listen to music, write and read books, and discover where to eat, what to eat, and whom to eat with. It has destroyed the mediocre middle of average products for average people who have few choices, and it has enabled the weird edges, where people who care find others who care and they all end up caring about something even more than they did before they met.

The connection economy enables endless choice and endless shelf space and puts a premium on attention and on trust, neither of which is endless.

Most of all, the connection economy has made competence not particularly valuable and has replaced it with an insatiable desire for things that are new, real, and important.

“The connection economy rewards the leader, the initiator, and the rebel.”

Start Your Journey Before You See the End

The resistance wants to be reassured. It wants a testable plan. It wants to know that before it endures the pain, it is guaranteed the prize at the end.

“Give me more case studies, more examples, more reassurance. Give me proof!”

The lizard brain has succeeded in making you stuck. The best art is made by artists who don't know how it's going to work out in the end. The rest of the world is stuck with the brainwashed culture that the industrialists gave us, the culture of fear and compliance.

But culture is a choice. You don't have to accept a culture of fear or a culture of failure.

Right now, just down the hall or just up the street, is another artist, someone filled with hope and excitement, someone choosing a different culture, even though he's in the same town, the same industry, and the same economy you are.

Others have always done that art, always chosen that culture of hope, but you haven't done it enough (“too risky,” the lizard says), because you've been held back by a need for proof, by a reliance on assurance, and by the fear of humiliation.

Art is a project; it is not a place. You will build your dream house and it will burn down. You will start your business and it will succeed, until it doesn't, and then you'll move on.

You will stand onstage and speak from the heart, and some people in the audience (perhaps just one person in the audience) won't get you, won't accept you, won't embrace you.

That's what art is.

Art is a leap into the void, a chance to give birth to your genius and to make magic where there was no magic before.

You are capable of this. You've done it before and you're going to do it again. The very fact that it might not work is precisely why you should and must do this. What a gift that there isn't a sure thing, a guarantee, and a net.

It's entirely possible that there won't be a standing ovation at the end of your journey.

That's okay.

At least you lived.

“ Before we take the steps to reach our goals, we should understand why we're taking them. Part of the fulfillment lies within the process of reaching them.

Don't Waste This Platform

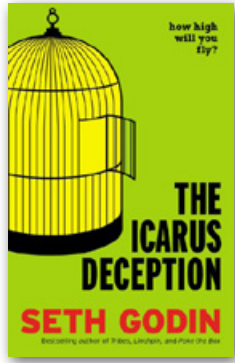
As I'm writing this, I'm drinking tea (made with leaves shipped through a supply chain more than three thousand miles long) out of a glass bottle (smelted at a temperature unobtainable by humans not long ago), and I'm working on a computer that would have cost a million dollars ten years ago, except you couldn't buy one at any price, and the computer is connected to the Internet via Wi-Fi (it's all a miracle).

We're living in a moment of time, the first moment of time, when a billion people are connected, when your work is judged (more than ever before) based on what you do rather than who you are, and when credentials, access to capital, and raw power have been dwarfed by the simple question "Do I care about what you do?"

We built this world for you. Not so you would watch more online videos, keep up on your feeds, and LOL with your high school friends. We built it so you could do what you're capable of. Without apology and without excuse.

Go. 

Info



BUY THE BOOK | Get more details or buy a copy of [The Icarus Deception](#).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR | Seth Godin is a bestselling author, entrepreneur and agent of change. Godin is author of multiple books that have been bestsellers around the world and changed the way people think about marketing, change and work.

→ **SEND THIS** | [Pass along a copy](#) of this manifesto to others.

→ **SUBSCRIBE** | [Sign up for e-news](#) to learn when our latest manifestos are available.

This document was created on November 14, 2012 and is based on the best information available at that time. The copyright of this work belongs to the author, who is solely responsible for the content. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs License. To view a copy of this license, visit [Creative Commons](#) or send a letter to Creative Commons, 559 Nathan Abbott Way, Stanford, California 94305, USA. Cover image from [Stauber Design Studio](#). You are given the unlimited right to print this manifesto and to distribute it electronically (via email, your website, or any other means). You can print out pages and put them in your favorite coffee shop's windows or your doctor's waiting room. You can transcribe the author's words onto the sidewalk, or you can hand out copies to everyone you meet. You may not alter this manifesto in any way, though, and you may not charge for it.

About ChangeThis

[ChangeThis](#) is a vehicle, not a publisher. We make it easy for big ideas to spread. While the authors we work with are responsible for their own work, they don't necessarily agree with everything available in ChangeThis format. But you knew that already.

800ceoread

ChangeThis is supported by the love and tender care of 800-CEO-READ. Visit us at [800-CEO-READ](#) or at our daily [blog](#).



Explore your knowledge further with [KnowledgeBlocks](#), a new project from 800-CEO-READ that lets you turn what you know into knowledge you can use.