



# *THE SHATTERING*

HOW WE GET FROM WHERE WE ARE TO WHAT AND WHO WE NEED TO BE—  
A NON-ILLUSTRATED GUIDE TO BECOMING HONEST ERIKA NAPOLETANO

# The artisan and his vision are nothing without the materials... and an appreciative eye.

It's a rare day where I don't spend at least a moment thinking about The Day My World Shattered. At the time, I described its sound as, "A wail. A thousand banshees crawled in my ears and ravaged my brain... Silence shifting on a squeaky chair, Loss tearing through the hallway and slamming face first into a wall."

I'd forgotten how to breathe.

The Shattering is the moment where everything familiar slips away. Our protective facades of familiarity spontaneously combust and we shun faith, deny comfort. We're left voiceless, regardless of our need to scream. We tread water in an ocean filled with every brilliant memory of what was only moments ago. Life has a cruel way of serving up The Shatterings, too. Nary a Google or Outlook Calendar would deign to accept the meeting and we're left simply wondering:

*What. The Fuck. Happened?*

Over the past seventeen months, I've become a student of that question. In the process, I've gone through even more Shatterings. And I've come to one invaluable realization:

I've been asking the wrong question.

I shouldn't concern myself with what *happened*. I should be asking *What's happening?*

The Shatterings are incidents of brutal honesty and the only ones in life with the power to transform us from Glass Walkers into lovers of the pieces that crumble as we fall.

Embracing The Shatterings is how we become honest.

*“The Shattering is the moment where everything familiar slips away.”*

## What good is honest?

I float around day to day in a world filled with buzzwords like authenticity, engagement, overarching ideas, and pivots. There's nothing honest about any of those words. They're lazy. They're words we've adopted as crutches because we've forgotten how to speak and wrapped ourselves in cocoons of familiarity, using the words of others instead of finding our own to describe what did, what should, and what must happen.

In business and our personal lives alike, we're on a singular mission for things we can trust. People, brands, ideas, situations, skills... components of a madcap world presented to us in a neat package that we can accept as truths. Honesty fuels every relationship worth keeping, worth saving. And it's the one quality we can't arrive at on our own. We can't decide to be honest.

In fact, we spend a great majority of our lives being anything but—with others and ourselves. We live as Glass Walkers, afraid to walk with purpose out of fear of shattering the path. We're afraid to be ourselves (if we were, who would love us?); afraid to go against the tide of Me Too businesses for fear of drowning in the undertow; Afraid to jump, for the force with which we'd land would certainly send that glass into a gazillion bits not even a Merry Maids franchise would tidy-up.

With fear at the helm, we'll never embrace life's most terrifying, humiliating, demoralizing, unsettling, exhilarating, and unknown moments. We'll never steer towards honesty. And while

I can only speak for myself, becoming a student of The Shattering has taught me the five simple steps that lead towards honesty. They remove fear and put our feet on a path where we welcome the fallout, reinventing ourselves a bit every step of the way.

**Observation** | Before the shattering, we see what we'd like to become. We see other people's truths and say, "Hey, having a bit of that myself sure would be swell." And naturally, we say it in our best Pete Campbell voice. We see all we *could* have, everyone who could love us, and what we want to create. Our journey begins by walking in the shadows of others. Our only version of the truth at this point is knowing that we don't quite know. We see what we want to see—those shellacked exteriors of everyone else's dreams. And we don't walk towards them, because everyone we're following is taking the long way round.

**Trepidation** | We follow their footsteps out of fear and become immersed in the rhythmic drone of feet that leads us in directions that aren't our own. There's the occasional spark—a disruption when someone shoots off from the harmony of the group and dares to pound out a new rhythm. Disruptive. Hated. Despised. Mocked.

*Uppity. Asshole. Bitch.*

We're quick to call names and layer-on scorn. How dare they make us think—if only for a moment—that this rhythm we're in isn't *good enough*? Words hurt. That's a lesson learned on playgrounds

the world over every day. But life isn't something that can be lived 24/7 on the slide, on the swing, in the sandbox. Those are the places we find comfort and company, though.

We seem to be safe, but at the same time, we're going nowhere. We're Bill Murray in *Groundhog Day*, living a scripted life full of motions but devoid of movement.

Life in *Trepidation* is choreographed with light steps designed to keep the glass intact. *Don't throw stones, we beg, Don't take a swing at me.* We stay in step, errant glances peeking beyond the herd every now and then. But keeping the glass in a single, satisfying piece is the task at hand.

**The Shattering** | For as much we would like that glass to remain intact, the Universe would have it otherwise. A part of us has known all along that the Universe is more honey badger than sloth. The Universe is about to make sure that every part of us knows its true nature.

Shatterings aren't erosions. They're interruptions. Instant redefinitions of what we thought we knew—everything we thought was honest and true. *Now* becomes *then* in a flash. The Universe comes along and says to hell with the YKK-tagged pull on the soul's zipper and instead rips it open with two (or more) clawed hands. Metal tearing from metal—a hole opens up and we are left exposed.

It's an instantaneous state of failure. There is no remedy or course. We're left a shell—every feeling we knew, gone. Accomplishments we'd stocked up in life's bank, withdrawn. We're no longer human. We are alone and beyond comfort.

We're left staring at a pile of pieces—what's left of ourselves mixed in with shards of glass—sure to cut us as sure as they just Shattered. The one thing that is for certain is we can't breathe, move, or do anything that puts us back in the place we were in only moments before—the place where we were safe. The place where we were still walking on glass instead of where we are now... mixed in with it.

**Becoming Granular** | The Universe, in all of its assholeian (yes, that's a word) glory, has moved us from walking on the glass to being tangled with it. We've become pieces. Granular.

We are, in no uncertain terms, walking on and *in* shifting sand—that from which glass is made. And damn it all if every piece of Us isn't mixed in with the shards. The only way out is through. Sand's a bitch and will suck you down and under if you sit in it long enough. The shards don't make for a comfortable seat, and we scramble to sort out the bits of Us among what's left of the glass and sand. By collecting ourselves, we feel there is hope for getting back to *then* instead of having to live in this entirely unfamiliar *now* that is nothing short of hell.

So we begin to pick up the pieces—the oddly-shaped bits of who we were. Mixed in with the glass, it's impossible to grab onto every single bit of the Us that was. We see one and it slips out of sight. We reach for another and get cut, causing an instant recoil. We grab what we can.

And here's where the glory comes in.

“*For as much we would like that glass to remain intact, the Universe would have it otherwise.*”

Some bits are metallic hues of indigo and others rough like unpolished granite. We discover bits that were so far buried by the rhythm of others' footsteps that it's a miracle they survived so long without seeing the light of day. We pick up pieces and throw them back. Perhaps we once loved (or just liked) them, but now they've gone the way of the wall-mounted trout that spouted Christmas Carols back in 1983.

We discover choice—*we don't have to keep all of the pieces.*

We rediscover our pieces—and how supremely excellent we are at *burying*, yet simultaneously exceptionally shitty at *excavating*.

And we notice—the people whose footsteps we were following and whose shadows we were living in have left us. In our hands, we hold the pieces of Us that remain and were saved. Without a herd to follow and no one standing in front of us ready to spout of what's best for goose and gander, we see opportunity again, perhaps for the first time.

We become self-propelled.

**Accepting (and Celebrating) the Pieces** | The Shattering does us an incredible service—it's an instant emotional weight loss plan. Taking only the pieces that serve us *with us* makes us lightweight, more nimble. There's more oxygen for the pieces worth saving since the pieces we no longer need aren't hogging it all. Our new, lightweight, sprightly selves are moving under our own power because, for the first time, *we can*. And it's all thanks to the pieces.

If we choose to go around the Shattered pile of Us and glass, we'll never discover the beauty of the parts. The Going Around is why we see some people stuck in the rut of asking *What happened?*

We've chosen to ask, through picking up the pieces, *What's happening?*

*Happened:* It's past. Done. Over with. Immutable.

*Happening:* It's active, ripe with potential.

Look around you right now. Anything that is *happening* is a curious and sometimes inexplicable amalgamation of pieces. *Happenings* aren't sheets of glass we're sentenced to tread on, fearful of The Shattering. Happenings are tidal waves created by The Shatterings. They're symphonies of pieces—some strumming, others bowing, while the odd ones blow, and the insistent drum.

And when we find ourselves in the midst of something *happening*, the only thing we can do is announce a newfound appreciation for all of these seemingly disconnected pieces coming together to make it all happen. The sound. The vibration. The machination we are in that creates one thing and one thing only.

Honesty.

What we sought when we followed others was someone else's truth. What we feared was falling out of step. What was broken—Shattered—needed breaking, else we wouldn't have started sorting out the pieces.

We found the pieces. The *right* pieces.

That's how we become honest, discovering for ourselves which pieces are worth using to create our lives, our businesses, our families. We create our own life-long symphony, and while solos are the occasionally welcome and stark contrast, we grow weary of them.

We need the pieces and what they create when they coalesce. The pieces need Us, our attention and our breath, to come to life and thrive.

“*That's how we become honest, discovering for ourselves which pieces are worth using to create our lives, our businesses, our families.*”

**Inviting The Shatterings.** We think that truth in all we do lies in the finished product. The bauble—whether it be ourselves, our business, our relationships—that shiny, finished, seemingly coherent piece stands as our opus.

But thirty-nine years on this blissfully imperfect orb leads me to believe (not think) that the truth lies closer to the *pieces* than the bauble.

The opportunities in *The Shattering* are infinite. The discovery that honesty lies not in the baubles, but in the collections of pieces so exceedingly flawed yet spectacularly arranged. Collections that will be appreciated by those who will love us for all that we are and everything we are not. We've dismissed the fear of being unpopular, of falling out of step, and come to revel in helping others find their own right pieces and rhythms.

We don't arrive at the truth by walking on glass. It's a futile art that many—myself included—have tried to or continue to try to master. I'm not a writer so arrogant enough to think that my journey should be yours. I will, however, offer up that my own time spent walking on glass over multiple decades did nothing to lead me towards living an honest life.

It was *The Shattering* that gave me hope. Bits no longer needed fell by the wayside, making room for the ones that were meant to persist. Finally—they could breathe. Finally—I understood why I couldn't breathe when *The Shattering* happened.

Because not all of me needed to breathe anymore and my breath had been taken to fuel what had to survive. The pieces.

I find that today, I am much better in pieces. Successful businesses and brands are no different. When we can live by the pieces and love them for their quirks—that is the path towards ongoing truth. There is no piece of art that is one single thing. An artist and his vision are

nothing without the materials he uses to make his dream manifest. Pieces create and are the reason we should celebrate.

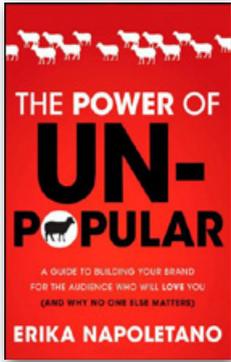
This? It's how we become honest.

And it's the only way we can build relationships built to endure their own inevitable Shatterings, emerging together with a collection of pieces that creates a symphony like no other and melodies to inspire us to embrace the next Shattering—wherever, whenever, however it comes.

I don't know about you, but living among the shards and dwelling on the question of What happened? offers me zero inspiration. I'm dedicated to a life filled with repeatedly asking What's happening?

**And I'm exceedingly anxious for the answers—which will never, ever be the same, and will always and forever keep me honest. 📖**

# Info



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**ABOUT THE AUTHOR** | [Erika Napoletano](#) holds no fancy titles and is an expert at nothing except screwing up royally and learning from her mistakes. As the person behind the [RedheadWriting](#) online persona, she's been hailed by *Forbes* as a “spinless spin doctor” for her bullshit-free perspectives on business, marketing, branding, and life in general. She's also a columnist for *Entrepreneur Magazine* and speaks at conferences across the U.S.—uncensored—on the inherent power of truth in business... or as she refers to it, the power of unpopularity. You can connect with her if your modern sensibilities allow on [Twitter](#) or [Facebook](#).

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