



# Crafting a Life

*the best of Scoutie Girl 2010*  
*by Tara Gentile*

# Introduction

It is not an exaggeration to say that my life completely changed in 2010.

What I learned is that there is more prosperity in doing things my own way than in allowing others to define my success.

I learned that wealth - both internal & financial - comes from understanding the unique talents I possess and the results that they can achieve for those around me.

What you will find in this compilation of short essays is a narrative of change & self-discovery. It is my own personal journey but it is also something you can experience for yourself.

Your work is not the same as mine. It's your responsibility to embrace the experiences, struggles, and challenges that come from crafting your own life & work.

My hope is that my own journey empowers you to craft your life from raw materials and not consume it ready-made.

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Beauty itself is the language to which we have no key;  
it is the mute cipher, the cryptogram, the uncracked, unbroken code.  
-- Annie Dillard, Pilgrim at Tinker Creek

Crafting yourself &  
your community.

# You Are Already an Artist

Sometimes I wish I was an artist like my brother. He turns graphite & pixels & film into art without effort. He sees the world with an artist's eyes and renders the world onto paper & into light.

I surround myself with beautiful things – great works of design, uncomplicated sketches, photographs of the natural world – and I wish that I could make these things. My art is made with words and thought. I'm okay with that. It's just that sometimes my desires wander outside the bounds of my talent. Sometimes I don't "feel" like an artist because my medium doesn't involve color & texture.

Nonetheless, I am an artist.

If you are waiting until you "feel" like an artist to do remarkable things, you might be waiting forever. Right now, you possess the vision to become the artist you dream of being. Right now, you do things that are art.

Seth Godin is fond of saying that art does not require paint or brushes. Instead, art is the work of heart + mind that helps to change the world. Science, engineering, and logic are also art & craft, as is organization, management, and parenting. Your passion is your art.

Artists are people who make change, people who touch others, people who create work that matters. If you design a new interface, you're an artist. If you

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create a story for a non-profit that spreads around the world and raises awareness and changes lives, you're an artist. If you look a kid in the eye and teach her algebra in a way she understands, you're an artist.

So why is it difficult to be an artist?

**Because artists break things. Breaking the status quo, the established rules, the way things usually are.**

- Seth Godin, [good experience](#)

Regardless of the manner in which you want to help others – express yourself – and change the world, you are already an artist.

Do you see the world as your canvas? As the statue set in a block of marble waiting to be set free?

## You are already an artist.

It's easy to look at people who create beautiful masterpieces with paint or clay and ignore our responsibility to share our own art with the world. It's easy to put the happy burden of creating art on a talented few. It's easy to pass the task of self-expression on to a narrow view of art.

But, what you do – what you want to do – your life's passion – is already art. You have a unique perspective and something beautiful to offer to your fellow (wo)man. Waiting indefinitely to embrace that truth robs us of your vision.

Your yoga practice, your classroom, your user interface, or your non-profit organization – it's all art.

It's easy to look at people who create beautiful masterpieces with paint or clay and ignore our responsibility to share our own art with the world.

The world is your gallery (you already know it's your stage). Your friends are your patrons. Your opening party can be tonight.

You are already an artist.

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# Living a Creative Life :: A Brief Manifesto

Living a creative life is taking joy in thinking outside the box. It's finding [abundance](#) in the most simple things: basic ingredients for a healthy supper, uncut fabric, dirt, a camera, a crayon, a thought. A feeling. It's the [happy medium](#) between haves & have-nots, finding joy in both. It's taking a little and making something that's [more](#).

Creative living is not being satisfied with boredom. It's seeking stimulation and not escape – well, seeking stimulation to escape from the banal. Even finding the [wonderment in the mundane](#). It's about being spontaneous and having a [passion](#) for life, the process of living. It's the struggles – writer's block, tech failures, blank slates, [depression](#), misunderstanding, being outside the norm – and it's the moment of clarity when passion overrides pain.

It's a [mess on the kitchen table](#), supplies strewn around the floor, an open door to studio that's a little less than neat.

Living a creative life is being satisfied while always craving more. It's the [independence](#) of knowing you're not reliant on the status quo.

It's about finding joy in the similarities of friends and finding excitement in the differences.

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writer's block, tech  
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It's savoring each moment, making it precious – but still always wanting more.

# A creative life is one to call your own.

A creative life is one lived in conversation with yourself, your surroundings, your community, and your raw materials – whatever they may be. Living a creative life is a philosophy, a way of thinking, not a label, an education, or a profession. Living creatively is knowing the rules and occasionally – or more often – ignoring them. It's coloring outside the lines and sometimes on walls. It's daring to be different when everyone tells you to be the same.

It's a good reason to wake up on Monday mornings. And a great reason to celebrate the weekend.

Living creatively is not separate from the everyday – it happens in between the couldas, wouldas, and shouldas.

# It's not dependent on being an artist, a designer, or a maker –

although I know that you are all  
of those things.

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# The Dangerous Spiral of Criticism & How to Claw Your Way Back Out

**We've been socialized to prioritize harmony and not create conflict.**

**– Tara Sophia Mohr**

Being creative – [being an artist](#) – opens you up to criticism. Presenting unique ideas to the world, telling a compelling story, or sharing a work of art will always unsettle people who are comfortable with the status quo. Unsettled people say unkind things.

Tara Sophia Mohr offers two excellent questions to consider when [dealing with criticism](#).

1.) What am I making the criticism mean? In other words, are you accepting the criticism at face value & analyzing as such? Or are you turning it into an accusation against yourself?

2.) How does this criticism touch upon a negative belief I hold about myself? Does the criticism hurt more because it affirms something you already believe is a deficiency?

But when dealing with your creativity, there's a third question to consider.

3.) How can this feedback improve my idea?

Criticism stings like a bee. And the anaphylactic shock that follows can shut you down. But criticism can also help you kick start a better idea, a more meaningful personal expression.

Criticism can help prepare you for the conflict that true brilliance will always bring.

As an artist, your work – your ideas – your style are an extension of your deepest feelings about yourself, a tangible representation of your YOUness. Even the most well meaning criticisms – from friends, family, lovers – can feel like they're tearing you down. And we are adept at scratching our own wounds.

When we don't examine criticism for at its face value, it leads to self-consciousness.

**Self-consciousness, however, *does* hinder the experience of the present.**  
– Annie Dillard

Instead of reaching for big, bigger, biggest, we reach for safe & allowable. Self-consciousness refuses to let you create art. It only allows for "nice." Ew.

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prepare you for the  
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# Self-consciousness veils our experience, deadens our vision.

To create your best work, you have to shake off the veil of self-consciousness and become open to the world in a way that is fresh & new.

Every experience is an opportunity to inform you life's work of art.

Self-consciousness feels icky and it forces us to do things we don't really want to do. Just say no to self-consciousness and you're on the way to a freer creative experience.

**Instead of thinking about what you would do if you knew you wouldn't fail, maybe a better question is... what's truly worth doing, whether you fail or succeed?**

– Chris Guillebeau

Whether dealing with criticisms or self-consciousness, our main [fear is failure](#).

If your wildest dreams succeeded, you wouldn't be concerned with the occasional criticism or a nagging self-consciousness. You would revel in your success and begin planning for your next success.

## But creative people fail. A lot.

And criticism & self-consciousness remind us of that. This paralyzes us, we are helpless to act, create, or express ourselves.

Inaction – or safe action – doesn't change lives. Inaction doesn't make dreams come true. Inaction doesn't even lead to small successes.

Inaction leads to mediocrity – mediocrity just causes more criticism and self-consciousness.

It's a nasty cycle. But you can claw your way back out. And you'll have to. None of us are immune to the ravages of the cycle. It's a disease that infects our creativity and sickens our spirit.

You can work against each segment of the cycle as you recognize it. Or you can work on creating your own upward cycle as part of your creative process.

Step 1. Accept that criticism is a necessary and welcome part of the creative process.

Step 2. Shed the self-consciousness that comes from negative perceptions of criticism. Experience the world with wild abandon.

Step 3. Recognize failure as part of the process and act on your ideas as if it doesn't matter.

At one time or another, we all find ourselves sucked into the dangerous cycle of criticism. Criticism leading to self-consciousness leading to inaction. But we can (must!) claw ourselves back out, reclaim our own freedom to create, and make peace with the criticism we receive.

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How have you been affected negatively by criticism? And how have you turned the experience into a positive one?

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# on being stuck, feeling fear, and not giving in to depression

Living a creative life has many struggles, mine has been one that many others share.

Since I was about 12, I have struggled with depression. It runs in my family – both sides. There were times when my depression manifested itself in anger, other times it takes the form of crippling sadness, still others complete lethargy.

Most often, my depression has been the result of feeling stuck and a dangerous cocktail of feminine hormones.

I was often depressed in high school, a place you could not pay me enough money to return to. I was rarely intellectually or creatively stimulated and was certainly on the outside looking in of the social scene. In college, my depression returned only once: during my senior year when I felt stuck approaching the inevitable collide with “real life.” In the years after college, I suffered while working in a dead end job with no local friends and again, after I became pregnant and felt the “stuckness” of not knowing how I was going to care for myself let alone another human being.

There have been times when being stuck felt final. That there was nothing else and I was without hope of being unstuck. Needless to say, these have been times

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**final.**

when I was full of fear, even if I couldn't feel many other emotions. Many times, I was very self aware of these times: standing in the stock room knowing I couldn't make another Christmas in retail, being at the grocery store when I was 12 weeks pregnant knowing I had to eat but just not having the will to make myself eat. Other times I have suffered in a cloud.

## But I have always bounced back.

I have taken medication, met people, found creative outlets. Getting unstuck, I've stretched & expressed myself back into life even when the odds were against me returning home from work safely. Somehow I end up harnessing the awareness of my depression to get unstuck & reclaim my own creativity.

I'm sure this is no great revelation to many of you. So many ambitious, intelligent, creative people experience debilitating bouts of depression.

Somehow, this pain informs & inspires the very thing that seems to cause us to suffer: creativity. We channel our experience into art, writing, social action, craft, music. We latch onto the one thing that brings life – true life – back into focus. Even as our creative self beats us down for being stuck, our creativity makes us see the world more clearly, hold our heads up high, and smile. [It's a story that is not new](#) to history and certainly will not be erased in the future. I know that I am a far more passionate writer, mother, designer, and business owner because of the deep down stuckness I have felt and the desperation to continue to nurture my creativity, leaving "stuck" in the past.

Living a creative life is not without struggle. We are not always happy people covered with tacky glue & acrylic paint & threads of a newly sewn dress. I challenge you to share a struggle from your creative life – whether it's about the pressure to create, your talent, lack of time, meager education, etc...

What do you fear holds you back from living the creative life you aspire to? What do you struggle with in living creatively?

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**Living a creative life is not without struggle.** We are not always happy people covered with tacky glue & acrylic paint & threads of a newly sewn dress.

# (L)Earning What I'm Worth

originally appeared in [The Daily Worth](#)

## Bye-bye retail

In the fall of 2008, when my maternity leave was over, I quit my dead-end retail job and decided to explore work of my own making.

A few months later, I was earning about \$1,200 a month as a fledgling blogger and website designer.

Today, nearly 2 years later, my income ranges from about \$6,000 to \$10,000 per month; I'm booking jobs weeks in advance; and every day I take another step toward the financial security and abundance I once believed that I didn't deserve –and might never achieve.

## From starving to thriving

How did I go from making \$14 an hour in retail hell to creating actual personal and professional prosperity? Believe me, I never thought I'd be the one to raise my hand and say I'd crossed the line from starving artist to thriving artist. Even now I feel nervous saying so.

But in the last few months, I've had a revelation about my own worth, and the worth of my work. And because DailyWorth was part of that, thanks to its trademark "kick in the pants," I wanted to tell you what happened.

I'll never forget when I was working 50 to 60 hours per week at a well-known bookstore chain, earning about \$28,000 a year.

The company justified its low wages by providing "an ideal work environment." Being surrounded by books and cheap coffee everyday is indeed wonderful but it doesn't pay your bills, help you realize your dreams, or bring you a deep sense of self.

I've always had a high idea of my personal worth, but I didn't put a lot of thought into the worth of my work, my innate skills or the things that I can produce.

At one point, I said to my co-manager, "I feel like I should be making more." And I remember feeling ashamed and embarrassed. What did I have to offer? Y'know, other than experience, passion, skills, and a knack for sales?

I stagnated. I even started to believe that despite my education and experience I wouldn't be able to find another job. So when my daughter was born in July 2008, I took it as an opportunity to start fresh, learning about myself as I learned about her. I quit after my maternity leave was over and never second-guessed my decision.

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## I bought a business

I found myself drawn to writing and to my own creativity again. I began blogging, built a web presence, and learned web design. I learned everything I could about beginning a web business and I invested more time than my husband would have liked! Exactly a year after my daughter's birth, I bought an existing business, with a loan from our credit union and a huge leap of faith.

I now had a huge audience to entertain, edify, and enrich. I took those responsibilities seriously, and soon several business owners started inquiring about other services I might offer: web design, coaching, development.

## You mean I have to charge people?

Then came the dreaded question: what is your fee?

Uh... um... Well, I know I'm pretty good at this, but I don't have much experience so how about \$25 bucks an hour for me to revolutionize your business or \$150 to do this whole website. Heck, \$25 an hour is double what I was earning before, right?

I certainly don't begrudge the people that took me up on those rates. I appreciated the income and the experience. And my business grew.

By January 2010, I had more inquiries than I could handle. I also received a link from a friend that showed I was leaving about \$1,200 on the table every time I worked with a client.

## Rates-raising time

What's a girl to do who's been reading the DailyWorth daily for eight months? I raised my rates. At first, slowly. Then, steeply. I researched what others who were doing what I do made per hour, per project, per client and I decided to charge something much closer to that.

Guess what happened? I haven't lost clients. My client list continues to grow, and now I'm scheduling jobs six to eight weeks ahead. Not only am I making a lot more money, I'm securing my income. I'm putting money into our savings account. I'm reinvesting in my business.

Over at Scoutie Girl, I've been writing a series of posts on [embracing abundance](#) and making the "[kick the door down](#)" decisions that create financial opportunity. I think artists and creatives (and maybe you, too?) often need that extra push. We tend to think that anyone could do what we do if they tried. We think that because what we create is often a luxury, that others won't buy if the price tag is too high.

I've even found myself worried that my colleagues and peers might resent me, that my success might be unfair to other people. There is almost a stigma around earning more.

What I realized, through the constant prodding of DailyWorth, is that my skills are rare, and that people are willing to pay for them. My skills are valuable—in terms of the time, peace of mind, and return on investment—to business owners. What sense does it make to not charge the true worth of these services out of some unfounded idea that it's too high or not fair?

Despite my new and improved mindset, I still get a bit anxious telling you this story. I am proud of what I make and what I'll be making by the end of this year but, because so many women in the creative community are mired in a scarcity mindset, I am worried that they will look at my income as "not fair" or "not justified." I'm learning to move beyond that. And I'm also doing my best to empower the creative community to accept their own worth.

My success is your success—and your success reminds me that my own is possible.

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# Community. There's Room for Us All.

Community. There are few things better than the feeling of belonging. Of being surrounded by support & trust & love.

I've built [communities](#) (and [here](#) and [here](#)). I've weaseled my way into communities large & small. I've felt on-the-outside-looking-in. And I've looked out from the inside with a smug, knowing smile.

Becoming a part of a community can feel as natural as falling in love.

Becoming a part of a community can also be a long, winding road on a cold, windy day. The walk is pleasant enough – if it wasn't for the fact that your ears are numb and your breath is short.

At the end of the road, there is a door – although the hinges might stick a bit. A welcome sign. A warm fire.

While the “creative community” online may be vast, it is also difficult to truly feel included, to feel home. There are many sisters & brothers and getting mom or dad's attention can be frustrating at best.

But you can feel at home here.

There is food & shelter for us all.

# This creative community has responsibilities. And so do its members.

The community has a responsibility to be open, supportive, responsive.

It has a responsibility to be trustworthy, edifying, expansive.

It has a responsibility to grow within reason, flourish without measure.

Community members have a responsibility to bring something new to the table. To start conversations and not end them. To seek help when they need it and offer help when they have it.

Want to be a part of the creative community online? Don't wait for an invitation – although there are plenty. Concentrate on how you can improve your own little corner of the creative world. Focus on the love you can share with those around you.

Find one friend and then make many.

Keep talking even if no one is listening.

Be who you are and don't try to be anyone else.

This isn't a place for strategy or techniques or tricks or business models. It's a place to break bread. There is room at the table for you.

Pull up a chair.

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# The Art & Business of Crafting Your Online Self

Who are you online? Who do you want to be? How do you want others to perceive you? I spoke at my [alma mater](#) in February about my personal journey to an online career and about the theory behind making a name for yourself online.

If you search around the “social media guru” blogs, you’ll find plenty of 7 ways to this and 5 tips for that. But not nearly as much in the way of theory. And this was college, right? So I wanted to really consider the deeper workings of social media. Why it works – how it works – and how we communicate the essence of our selves & personalities to a network of thousands of strangers. In short, how we form our online identity.

How do you communicate the “essence of you” to people who’ve never met you before? If you create a persona that you will ultimately tire of or that you cannot maintain, you’ll lose interest and so will others. your life “wired” must be a true representation of the person you are and hope to become.

For me, I lost touch of my “true self” while I was working for “the man.” I lost touch with my love of learning, the part of me that loved to read & write. I rediscovered that when I took time off when Lola was born. That’s the identity I choose to share online. A positive, successful, optimistic, and driven self.

I hope that's the person you know.

## You are what you share.

Your online identity becomes the sum total of the information you share online. For me, it's sharing beautiful handmade goods, connecting artists, finding helpful blogging resources, & recapping special events. I immerse myself in this online community so that I can have access to the best information to pass on to you as readers & followers.

Once I started to share, my value & influence grew by sharing the most interesting & helpful information I could find. That cultivates authority. As authority grows, my network – and my online identity – grows because of the value you provide to the community.

Greater authority + larger network = more people exposed to the information I share

The sum of the tidbits – information, art, people, beauty – that I share creates an image of the virtual me. the “person” that you know.

The space between those shared bits, the juxtapositions, and the connections complete that virtual image. you probably don't know me as a “person” – you know me as the words I write, the information I share, and the people I introduce you to. I am all those things, put together, and examined.

Your **online identity** becomes the sum total of the information you share online.

# But I am nothing without relationships.

If its not for you, the people who I work hard to cultivate relationships with, I am nothing. Scoutie Girl is nothing. My online self may be built by the information I share – but it's propelled by our relationship.

I don't know exactly where my own journey is headed, what new challenges & opportunities await me. In the end, my success – my ability to maintain this life that I love, hinges upon my ability to maintain my “wired” self image and my relationship with you.

My online self may be  
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# Priorities, Choices, and the Nagging Desire for More

I know you.

You want to finish the project you started last month. You want to have the next great idea. You want to stretch your creative muscles and energize your imagination.

You want to stop making conventional choices and start making ones that make the rest of the world question your judgment.

But you don't have time.

Or enough money.

Or maybe your kids sometimes get in the way. And I mean that in the nicest, most honest way possible.

You struggle.

Not with who you are but what you've become. You struggle with responsibilities that aren't glamorous, thrilling, or interesting in the least. Is this what you signed up for when you played make believe under the tent in your purple bedroom?

You prioritize your responsibilities. You choose to uphold your end of the big girl

Is this what you signed  
up for when you  
played make believe  
under the tent in your  
purple bedroom?

bargain.

Wait, who is this a bargain for?

I know you, because I am you. Or I was. I've been caught in the rut of feeling like I don't have time or money – and I didn't even have kids then. I've been caught feeling that the real world was not what I wanted to live in. That the promises I was made in school were lies. Like creativity was nice but not necessity.

Even still, I made surviving in the “real world” a priority.

And what I prioritized I had time for. What I prioritized I found the money for.

What I didn't prioritize I didn't have time for. What I didn't prioritize was too expensive.

But something nagged at me. And I asked myself why I had no time or money. Why I wasted energy on things that were common. Why I never seemed to move forward with all my grandiose plans.

You feel that nagging, don't you?

That desire that nags you, tugs  
at the hem of your shirt like a  
4 year old you don't actually

# have, is waiting to be made a priority. And that desire is you.

You are not your responsibilities: rent, mortgage, cable bill, PTA, carpool, dinner parties, appointments, children, husband, boyfriend. You are the sum of your desires and your talents.

You prioritize your responsibilities. You find the time and the money. You can prioritize yourself, too.

Priorities come down to choice.

Each barrier, problem, concern originates in a choice to accept it or to reject it. Each day we make thousands of choices that mean the difference between moving forward & shirking back into the shadows of our own hang-ups.

Choose to prioritize yourself and answer that nagging feeling.

What will you choose today?

What can you let go of?

What is less important than your own self? What can be put off until tomorrow so that you can prioritize yourself today?

Want to know what you're capable of? Want to know how far you can stretch yourself? Grow yourself? Build yourself? Start prioritizing yourself.

Each barrier, problem, concern originates in a choice to accept it or to reject it. Each day we make thousands of choices that mean the difference between moving forward & shirking back into the shadows of our own hang-ups.

Forget the way you've always done it. Forget the way the Joneses do it. Make every choice anew. Find help, find peace, find abandonment.

Find joy in doing things differently: for yourself.

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# Embracing Abundance :: Breaking the Scarcity Mindset

When I was 10, my dad left our family.

And while broken families would soon become quite normal, in my grade & group of friends, I was the first to go through the process. One of the greatest lessons I learned from this time in my life was how to embrace abundance. Even though my dad leaving took the vast majority of income away from our family, even though we were forced to down size from a beautiful newly built home to a home bought out of bankruptcy court that my mother & community moms spent weeks cleaning to make fit for habitation, even though shopping became a vastly different affair, I never felt that resources were scarce.

## My family lived a life of abundance.

[My mom](#) never said “we can’t afford that” or “that’s too expensive” – or if she did it’s certainly not the part i remember! I went to basketball camp and softball camp and church camp and music camp. I had piano lessons and new trendy

clothes. We always had a computer. And I never doubted for a second that I would go to the best college that I could get into and wanted to attend.

## Scarcity wasn't even an option in my mind.

Now my mom isn't a lawyer or a doctor or even an assistant with a steady job. She was a seamstress who worked from home & was her own boss (a luxury that was her own abundance). She learned to never accept no – or “too much” – as an answer. I learned that I could have whatever I wanted and go wherever I wanted to go as long as I was creative about it. I learned that when you gave a lot you got a hell of a lot more back in return. I learned that if you embrace abundance, you'll be more abundant than you can imagine!

As I've grown, I've continued to embrace abundance – and that's why I get to do what I do here everyday. I never thought for a moment that this wouldn't work. I didn't let my husband get me down, I didn't let friends get me down, I didn't let myself get me down. I knew I could create success and I lived every day as if I was already successful (with a smaller budget, of course!). When I made one level of reality a success, I focused on a higher level and I embraced that abundance & embodied that success.

Embracing abundance gives us the mindset that we can live our goals while we're achieving them.

Reading Dave Navarro's post on [Breaking the Scarcity Mindset](#) reminded me of a perennial problem in the creative community. While there is so much positivity in our community, I just can't help but get caught up on the scarcity mentality that I hear from so many artists trying to breakthrough.

Stop trying already. Kick the damn door down.

These are the four beliefs that Dave uses to outline his path for escaping scarcity:

- \* First, the specific belief that there are plenty of people out there who are willing to exchange money for something of value.
- \* Second, the specific belief that you can offer something of value.
- \* Third, the specific belief that you can communicate that value to

the people willing to pay for it.

\* Fourth, the specific belief that you can make an offer – right now (or very soon) – that can generate the money you want to have.

Now, perhaps your goal isn't money. Side note: we all need to make a living – so if your goal is money right now, embrace it and don't let others tell you that's not okay. Perhaps your goal is clout, authority, friends in high places, exposure, gallery space, art classes, etc... you can substitute any of those things that you wish you had in abundance into those four beliefs.

Forget all the I-wishes and if-onlys and make a choice today that embraces the abundance that you already have and the abundance that is right around the corner. And then walk around the corner and pummel that abundance into submission too.

[Click to view the original post.](#)

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already have and the  
abundance that is right  
around the corner.

# Disposable Culture & Our Fear of Commitment

We live in a disposable culture. Our lives are like giant landfills. We're surrounded by junk.

We pay 99 cents to download disposable music. We drive through "restaurants" making disposable food. We wear disposable clothes so we never have to be without the latest trend. We create relationships – families even – that have disposable bonds. The entirety of our culture can be thrown away and bought anew.

**“There’s a reason we say “put your money where your mouth is.” Where we put our resources – time, love, cash – on a daily basis creates, demonstrates and confirms our [commitments](#).” – Kelly Diels**

Kelly says, [money = commitment](#). I couldn't agree more. We can't commit to quality, to things that last a lifetime. We can't commit to things that nurture us instead of make us sick. We have a serious problem with commitment.

And so we have a serious problem with money: the way we earn it, the way we save it, the way we spend it.

There's nothing wrong with stuff, with consuming. But when we treat out stuff like it has no value – because it doesn't – that attitude creeps into other parts of our life. Our "commitment problem" doesn't just reflect outwardly – we stop even committing to ourselves.

We don't commit to our education, our creativity, our bodies, our psyches, our circumstances. We are

# constantly looking for the cheap way out.

Goods that do not nurture our homes, our lives, or our families are disposable. Food that does not nurture our bodies is disposable. Relationships that do not nurture our souls are disposable. We don't have to commit to them. And we owe them nothing in return.

Deciding we're going to commit to spending money on an art class or music lesson, a vine-ripened tomato picked from the farm in the next town over, a professional to service our business, or a piece of handmade clothing is not so much a commitment of money, it's a commitment to yourself and to the rebuilding of our culture. It's choice to consume something of real value that nurtures others as much as it nurtures you.

What are you committing to today? What have you decided is indispensable instead disposable?

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You do art when you make change that matters,  
and do it via a connection with an individual.  
Art isn't the job, it's the attitude you bring to the job  
and work you do when you're there.

-- Seth Godin

# Crafting the Handmade Movement

# An Open Letter to Oprah

Dear Oprah,

Your business empire has excited and empowered women for many years. We appreciate your humble beginnings and your never-say-die attitude in making your way to the top. Whether harnessing your television audience, your crazy good business sense, or wide-reaching network, your big ideas and passion for change are a big inspiration to me and my community.

My community, you ask? That's the very purpose of this letter!

My community is the creative thinkers, makers, and designers of the indie craft & design movement. And Oprah, we're ready for you.

It's time the lid is lifted off this goldmine of passionate, empowered, and assertive women (and dudes). It's time that the world knows that China isn't the only place that things are made. It's time that consumers begin a love affair with the things they buy and not the quantity of stuff they buy.

And the makers & designers of the indie biz movement make great stuff. They produce beautiful products with engaging stories – original designs with innovative ideas – clever stuff with thoughtful details. You can shop in a variety of online venues – including my favorites [Etsy](#) and [Supermarket](#) – where you can buy directly from the maker. Many artists also run their own stores. Others sell at craft markets or in independent galleries & boutiques.

Although these women are working hard at promoting their wares & services, they are facing an uphill battle against big box stores, mass production, instant gratification, and a society that values quantity over quality. Oprah, these women need your help. They need your inspiration, your thumbs up, and your ability to shift the tide of American consumerism.

Your suggestion, word, or endorsement would do nothing less than change the lives of hundreds – thousands – of creative women (and dudes) who are seeking a more meaningful way of doing business, making a profit, and creating social change. It's change we can believe in – the kind of change that lifts people up spiritually & financially and the kind of change that makes the world a more beautiful place.

We would be happy to open our community to you – and anyone who is interested in becoming more [mindful of the things they consume](#) and the way they spend their money. We want to share our stories & our passion with the world. We want to find a place in modern society for handcrafted, thoughtfully designed wares.

Your suggestion,  
word, or endorsement  
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creative women (and  
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seeking a more  
meaningful way of  
doing business,  
making a profit, and  
creating social change.

Thanks for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Tara Gentile

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# “Buy Handmade” Doesn’t Work

A few years ago, there was a little digital badge that was all the rage. We put it on our blogs, in our shops, pinned its pixels to our Facebook profiles and felt good that we were making a difference. [BUY HANDMADE](#) it said. And we took a pledge too.

**I pledge to buy handmade for myself and my loved ones and request that others do the same for me.**

I took the pledge pretty seriously. Of course, I would have bought the same amount of handmade gifts for myself and others regardless of my digital signature. But now, I have a badge.

It was a neat campaign. You could see the support for buying handmade grow through the craft blogosphere and I’m sure it touched people who had no idea about the possibility of buying goods from independent craftspeople. But in the end, the movement lost steam.

# In the end “buy handmade” doesn’t work.

It takes more than a directive to change behavior. Without a greater narrative and convincing benefits, “buy handmade” is just something you utter to people already in the know.

Yesterday, Seth Godin wrote a piece on the [business of software](#). Software and craft, while on the surface seem completely disparate, are two sides of the same coin. Software and craft share many of the same challenges and economic attitudes:

- There’s a lot of good stuff cheap.
- There’s a lot of not-so-good stuff available at a premium.
- Much is available for free.
- With the right resources and skills, you can make it yourself.

He explains that In-The-Beginning software only needed to run to be successful. If it didn’t crash, you could sell it. So it was with the advent of online craft sales. If you put it on the market, someone would buy it. If your t-shirt, bracelet, button, mug wasn’t made in a factory, it was good enough. There was demand, a market. Or at least, the supply was dwarfed by the demand.

Now the business of selling software is downright hard. Oh, there's still plenty of demand but the narrative has changed. People think it should be cheap or free and mindblowingly useful. Software developers have it rough.

And so do crafters and artists. The supply grows exponentially even as [we work to increase demand](#). People get frustrated, feelings are hurt. The game has changed but the directive has not: BUY HANDMADE.

## Godin's Prescription

So what does Godin prescribe for software developers who want to work in this new market? So glad you asked and, yes, it applies to craft as well.

First he asks software companies to communicate to users. Crafters and artists must learn to speak for their goods in a way that communicates the benefits of using their product. "Buy Handmade" isn't enough. No one is going to buy something because its made by hand. Consumers buy things because they are beautiful, useful, communicate their personal style, hold a deeper meaning.

How is handmade optimized for the end user? What is the story that gives a handmade object meaning? What makes this trinket more beneficial to the owner than something else? Handmade is not enough. Handmade can't compete on price, nor can it compete on a moral high ground, but handmade can compete on the way it is uniquely designed for real people.

Godin's next point is that software must now enable communication between users. There must be a "network" effect. While handmade goods may not enable communication between anything more than two cans & a string, the handmade movement can play into the network effect.

**Handmade can't  
compete on price,  
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for real people.**

Wearing, using, and displaying handmade goods continues the narrative. It gives the consumer the chance to be part of a bigger story. But only the crafter or artist can write the narrative. We just live in it.

Art, craft, and designer products work best when the consumer becomes a storyteller. They become part of the network, a hub that passes on the message.

Finally, Godin tackles the \$64,000 question: how do you get people to pay for this stuff? With software, he presents two models: freemium (try it out, pay after you like it) and market-based conditioning (sell your software where people expect to buy – like the Apple App store).

While Etsy provides a market where people expect to buy, the [culture of the community](#) has driven prices down in many areas to unsustainable levels. That's not Etsy's fault nor is it the hobbyists' faults. It's just the way it is.

So how can craft compete? Handmade goods need to provide a choice. Not between higher & lower prices, not between commercial or handmade, not even between ecofriendly or not – the choice is about whether Product A is more beneficial to the consumer than Product B. Does the story of that product communicate its value? Does the product allow the consumer to become a part of the narrative?

Craft won't compete on price. It won't compete on how-manys and how-fasts.

# Craft competes on you.

“Buy Handmade” doesn’t work. It’s a directive not a narrative. It doesn’t speak to me; it speaks at me.

Talk to me, involve me, listen to me, guide me. Take me by the hand and explain what exactly it is that I’m buying when I buy your product. Tell me a story. Just don’t tell me what to buy.

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# 3 Reasons to Pay More for Your Stuff

When I was young, my mom taught me that nothing should be purchased at full price. That, when you walk into a store, you beeline for the sale rack in the back of the store. Nothing is worth retail price. Hey – it was the 90s! The more you had, the better you were.

But here we are in the second decade of the twenty-first century and it's time to rethink the value of stuff. Sometimes stuff costs more because it's worth more: the person who created it is skilled, the design is innovative, the materials are longer lasting... Yes, it costs more but the true cost is so much less.

Not convinced? Here are three reasons you should pay more for the next thing you buy:

## 1. support an individual.

When you pay for something – say \$30 for a [t-shirt](#) instead of \$10 – you are paying a real person, who lives in a community very much like yours, for their time and skill. You're opting out of the system of poverty that allows corporations

to pay so much less than a living wage (whether in America or abroad). You're choosing to pay someone what you'd like to get paid for the same work.

## 2. support an economy.

You know that global recession we've just started coming out of? I am convinced that part of the problem is our unwillingness to recognize the true value of the stuff we consume. When we inflate the value of executing the management of a company and put little to no value on the products it produces, most of us lose out. And when people like you and I lose out, we don't have the money to consume much of anything – creating recession.

By choosing to pay more for better products, we help support job creation throughout the economy.

## 3. support yourself.

Ugh. The need to consume is so draining! When you pay more for better products, you're less likely consume quite so many in the never ending cycle of "I need this." You'll feel free be more conscious of each buying decision you make. When you cut out the \$1-here or \$5-there purchases you can purchase quality, design, and uniqueness. You can complement your life with stuff that reflects your value[s] instead of filling your life with stuff that has none.

I was recently introduced to the [story of stuff](#), an internet video phenomenon, that describes the exhausting cycle of working to buy and buying to feel good about yourself. Annie Leonard, the writer behind the story of stuff, says she's not

looking to get rid of stuff. She says, "I want us to have more reverence for our stuff."

Seems like a good reason to pay more to me.

To get started paying for real value try buying handmade. You can browse around Scoutie Girl or try a marketplace like [papernstitch](#). If you'd prefer to go straight to the source, I recommend starting at [Etsy](#) and [Supermarket!](#)

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# (Re)defining the Craft Movement

One of the goals of Scoutie Girl is to provide a platform for the spread & discussion of the handmade movement.

One such discussion I've tried to spark, rather unsuccessfully, is what we actually think of when we think of "the handmade movement." To me, this isn't a semantic argument but rather one of great importance. How we define ourselves, our community, and our movement is how we will be judged by others. It is also how people will decide to identify with us or not. The way we define ourselves creates an opportunity for buy-in or opposition.

I have no qualms about the fact we will never reach consensus on what does and what does not qualify as handmade – or craft – or art. But the act of discussion, of discourse, helps us to define ourselves and our interactions, thereby strengthening our cause.

As for myself, I come at this discussion as an outsider. I am not a pro crafter or artist – nor am I even a talented DIYer. I was brought up with a deep appreciation for craftsmanship and design. And while this may hinder my ability to relate directly to the artists featured here, it does give me a unique perspective on the creative community and the movement around it.

As I see it, there is no line in the sand.

Let me say it again, there is no place that we, as a movement, can say that's not "handmade enough" without questioning our own integrity & vision. At each level of creation & craft, there is an opportunity for purity – at one point or another, we all fall off the wagon.

So here is my stab in the dark:

Craft is vision, purpose, and idea that has been beautifully executed.

Let me explain.

Megan's [cozy/cuff](#) is an original design. Its conception is Megan's and hers alone. Her company, from accounting to design to marketing is just her, along with her insatiable need to do things the smart way. The cozy/cuff is laser cut by a manufacturing company in the United States that specializes in working with designers.

Her craft (aside from amazing jewelry) is the design, the conception, the blood, sweat, & tears that goes into creating an object that screams self-expression and artistic voice.

Her craft is an idea, beautifully executed.

[Jan's fabrics](#) are her conception and hers alone. Her fabric exudes the independent spirit that they are born from. No one I know more [carefully sources every part of her production chain](#) – ensuring that each decision makes smart business sense, is eco-friendly, and is of impeccable quality.

Her craft is an idea, beautifully executed.

Craft is vision,  
purpose, and idea that  
has been beautifully  
executed.

Fiona, of [Cartolina](#) (left above), and Lori, of [Marzipan Inc](#) (right above), create an amazing array of paper goods & gifts each in their own distinct style. Their goods are designed by them but brought into being by a printer.

Their craft is an idea, beautifully executed.

Clearly, a narrow definition of handmade does not apply to this kind of craft. Would you still buy it? Do you support it? Is it part of your handmade movement?

Let's flip the coin over.

Many people take manufactured beads & findings and create jewelry pieces by hand. Wire is bent & snipped. Pieces are strung & tied. And one crafter's piece may bear no discernible difference to the next crafter's.

I am in no position to call this not handmade, clearly. But I do ask, where is the vision? Where is the independence in that craft?

As a movement, I believe we seek exactly what Grace said in her [keynote to the IDSA conference](#):

**To see the maker's hand.**

And, not only do I seek to see the hand of the maker, I seek to see their vision & their purpose. I want to consume goods that are conceived not out of marketing meetings but of needs, and beauty, and ideals, and purpose. For me, the maker may be a designer or an artist or a craftsman. For me, their personal mark – and unique vision – on the product is what confers the title of maker.

I want to consume  
goods that are  
conceived not out of  
marketing meetings  
but of needs, and  
beauty, and ideals, and  
purpose.

I seek to identify with the maker's worldview.

I seek to support the maker's independent ideas.

I seek to see a spark of the divine in the objects I buy, just as I see that spark in you.

Goods can be manufactured or wrought from flesh & bone and still have that spark of the divine. If you support the vision of artists, designers, and makers, you support our movement. If you are concerned with the purpose of what you consume and not the consumption, you are a part of this movement. If you support the independence of personal aesthetic and the inherent beauty of a maker's touch, you support this movement.

This movement is a response to an evermore dull aesthetic of commercialism. Questioning that aesthetic and what it stands for – or doesn't stand for – is the responsibility of this new Craft movement. Our response is one of steady progress towards our ideals, knowing that purity will not be reached in our lifetimes.

Art & Craft is an experience and an idea that cannot be held by narrow definitions. Art & Craft is where execution meets personal experience and where conception meets the divine spark of being.

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# The Danger of DIY Culture

On one hand, DIY culture teaches us that it's better to make than buy, better to do than accept. On the other, the New Economy tells us that we can [embrace our entrepreneurial spirit](#), do what we love, [profit from passion](#).

In the middle there is a choice – buy or make – where the two collide and threaten our happy little arrangement.

## in practice

On Saturday, I had the privilege of speaking to the [Pittsburgh Craft Collective](#) about blogging. As part of my shtick, I asked them to think about their ideal audience. Often, when I ask people this question, they just describe themselves.

“Wrong!” I say. “You wouldn’t buy from you, you’d create it yourself.”

And not only that, DIYers not only do their own work, they do others work. On purpose. Not maliciously, of course, but out of a distinct desire to do it themselves. Which means, [they’re not buying](#).

I'm generalizing, of course, but isn't always easy to see things when the picture is painted in broad strokes?

## new direction

The thing is, I have a lot of faith in folks at the Pittsburgh Craft Collective to figure out how to use their creative talents to make an honest living. Perhaps, the most honest living that can be made – one that emanates from your own passion & skills. A job where there is no pink slip except the one you give yourself.

As the old economy withers away and a new economy is born, we have more freedom than ever to do what we love. To approach the world with the eyes of an entrepreneur. To create our own career. Answer our vocation.

Heck, even [Suze Orman](#) agrees:

With one in six Americans currently unemployed or underemployed, the competition for work is fierce. So focus on what is in your control—selling yourself and your skills.

But you can't do this if people aren't buying. This is the quintessential case for [mindful spending](#).

The [new economy](#) is a cycle in which our dollars are spent in our communities – whether local or virtual – and then come back around to our wallets as we sell our own skills & services. The new economy relies on creativity & innovation from a whole class of people and not just the creativity of an individual.

The new economy dares us to sell what we love to do and purchase what others love to do.

If you want others to support you with their dollars, you have to support them with your dollars.

We've learned SO MUCH from DIY:

- how to sew
- how to remodel
- how to grow food
- how to build
- how to cook

I am so thankful for all that knowledge. And at the same time, I'm thankful for the people who do each of those things professionally. I am thankful that I can seek out high quality and save myself time by paying for it.

At some point DIY falls a little short and it pays to be aware of that fact.

That might mean buying that painting for above your sofa instead of trying to recreate it – sorry, Martha. Or it might mean hiring an [accountant](#) instead of trying to keep your books yourself – sorry, Quicken. It might mean purchasing custom invitations instead of trying to design them yourself – sorry, Photoshop.

I'm of course thankful that, with the myriad of DIY websites out there, many people choose me to [build websites](#) for them.

The danger of DIY culture is that we can lose track of where we fit into the bigger picture of the new economy. We concentrate on becoming less commercial, more "by hand." And so we stop buying and start making. But buying keeps us all in business and it allows others to try their hand at selling their craft, whether it be quilts or technical writing or biomechanical engineering.

When we do everything "in house," we miss out on the expertise of others. Not to mention their passion & enthusiasm.

I want to continue to make a living doing what I love so I choose to support others who do what they love.

Embrace DIY when it comes to expression. Embrace [conscious](#)

consumption when it comes to  
expertise.

Which way do you turn in the intersection of DIY and the new economy?

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# Worksheets

# energy inventory

Part of truly living a creative life is taking inventory of what leaves us feeling dissatisfied. The rest of the world is content to merely tolerate those things that leave us feeling wiped out and unenthused.

Of course, we'll never completely rid ourselves of life's mundane tasks. There is much to be learned from the things we just "have to" do. But being mindful of what drains our energy and generates foul moods can help us to reclaim a positive, fruitful outlook faster.

## **what are the 3 things you spend the most time on?**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

A large part of our energy reserves are reflected in the amount of time we have available at any given time. Of course, we must make time for the things we "have" to do. But the time that's left over, the "free" time, is parceled out in bits & chunks. Each minute has a certain amount of our energy associated with it.

## **what are the 3 things you spend the most money on besides housing & electricity?**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Money is another indicator of the way we spend our energy. When we make large purchases, it can often be emotionally exhausting. When small amounts of money escape in unnoticed patterns, a slow leak of our personal energy reserves can leave us drained.

## **what are 3 things you do that someone else could do?**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

A common side-effect of "DIY culture" is the feeling that we can do it all ourselves. Women are especially prone to this attitude. Forget doing it all and concentrate for a few moments on what others can do FOR you, even if it's uncomfortable.

## **what are you 3 things you don't do regularly but would like to?**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

I find my own energy being wasted when I spend time thinking about the things I'd like to do instead of actually doing them. Naming these activities helps me to become more mindful of when I have the time or energy to do them.

## **what are 3 things you do that give you more energy?**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Often, we think of action as being draining. I find the opposite to be true. When I am accomplishing more and doing more of the things I love - even when fitting them snugly between chores - I find my energy reserves replenish themselves.

**name 3 things you find yourself doing and then asking yourself,  
“why?”**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

So often, we finish an activity - or finally pull ourselves away from one - and feel guilty that we've spent so much time or energy on something so unfulfilling. Time sucks are okay. They can even be fun and lead to unexpected surprises! But patterns of “why did I do that?” behavior really cut into the energy you have available for more important things.

Now that your energy inventory is complete. What patterns do you notice? What short term changes could you make to create more energy to achieve your goals? What long term changes could you start working towards to make a greater impact?

# creative action road map

*"It's about the journey, not the destination."*

Really? I don't think so.

I mean, sometimes I get in the car without any idea of where I'm going. But nothing much comes of those trips. Sure, I love the wind in my face and the joy of the open road... but I'm left feeling a little flat after random road trips.

Having a destination makes all the difference. You can find a map. You can plot out your journey. You can look for the landmarks that help you find the proper turns.

Use this worksheet to create your own road map to the goal of your choice.

## **What is your goal?**

I want to \_\_\_\_\_ by (date)

\_\_\_\_\_.

**What is the smallest single task you can accomplish to begin your journey towards this goal?**

To start, I need to \_\_\_\_\_.

**Name 3 landmarks that will help you know you're on the right path.**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

**For each of these 3 landmarks, name 3 smaller actions that will get you closer to those landmarks.**

Landmark 1

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Landmark 2

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Landmark 3

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

**What are the final actions that carry you from Landmark 3 to your destination?**

Once I \_\_\_\_\_, I will need to \_\_\_\_\_,  
\_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_.

## **Who will greet you at your destination?**

I can look forward to seeing \_\_\_\_\_,  
\_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_.

## **What else will you be able to accomplish when you've reached your destination?**

Once I've reached \_\_\_\_\_, I will be able to  
begin on the road to \_\_\_\_\_ or  
\_\_\_\_\_ and I'll have a better idea of how to get  
there.

# About Scoutie Girl

[Scoutie Girl](#) is the outside-the-box manual for creative living & mindful spending.

It's both a practical & philosophical look at how creative people work in the real world, shown through the lens of the indie craft movement.

We believe in the power of independence, the power of creation, the power of handmade to change the world. We believe that mass-production and rampant consumerism have created a culture that is hungry for "more" & "cheap" – we believe that handmade can change that, reconnect us with our fellow (wo)man and put life back into a bit of perspective.

We also believe that blogging is an art form – that creating a friendly, personal space that inspires & moves you is a lofty goal and a delicate process. And we hope you find that here.

# About Tara Gentile

[Tara Gentile](#) is the writer, thinker, and entrepreneur behind Scoutie Girl.

She came out of college with a great education, many commendations, and absolutely no idea what to do with her degree – a bachelors in religion. She's always had a great affinity for craft – and a love of writing – when she discovered the handmade blogosphere, she found her home.

# More from Scoutie Girl

To request an interview, inquire about a speaking engagement, or begin consulting with Tara, please email her directly.

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To find out more about advertising on Scoutie Girl, submit your work for consideration, or inquire about writing a guest post, please email Carrie, Scoutie Girl's assistant.

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Scoutie Girl also has a variety of products available including the signature series [52 Weeks of Blogging Your Passion](#).

Finally, Tara is available for custom Wordpress website design on a limited basis. To find out if she's the right designer for you, fill out this [inquiry form](#).