REFRESH YOUR MINDSET

A Clear-Minded Creative Publication
By Milo McLaughlin
Welcome..

...to the Refresh Your Mindset micro-guide, the first in a 6-part series, as promised in the Career Masterplan for Mad Geniuses micro-manifesto.

So I’m sure a few of you are asking what exactly makes me such an authority on refreshing one’s mindset.

The truth is, I’m not. Let’s face it, it’s easy to write about this stuff online, and pretend to be an expert, even if you don’t actually follow your own advice.

I’ve heard it said more than once that aspiring authors should “write the book you want to read yourself”.

Well, this is the “micro-guide I need to read myself”.

I’ve done the research – more than enough. But am I putting it into practice?

I’m trying. I don’t always succeed.

But I do believe that what I’ve written about in this guide will help others, and that’s what has motivated me to put it out there.

Despite this, I still had a lot of resistance to putting it out into the world. Why?

Perhaps because it’s pretty personal in places. Perhaps because I sometimes feel like a fraud offering advice when I’m far from perfect myself.

But.. I’ve done it anyway.

Sometimes you have to take a leap of faith.
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8 Incredibly Obvious Ways to Refresh Your Mindset
You know what it’s like – you get up, shuffle reluctantly to work, survive the day on a combination of strong coffee and illicit internet surfing, only to arrive home an exhausted shell of your former self and be faced with a list of tedious but necessary chores.

You then go on to complete these in a zombie-like trance before collapsing on the sofa to watch the latest mindless dross that passes for entertainment in the modern age, obliterating your increasing feelings of existential panic by eating an entire chocolate cake and polishing off a bottle of red wine by yourself.

Before you know it you’re lying in bed staring at that unsightly crack on the ceiling wondering where the time went and why you just wasted another 24 hour period of this precious existence we all have only one shot at.*

*I’ve never claimed to have it all sussed but after reading James Altucher’s entertaining book How to be the Luckiest Person Alive, in which he suggests a daily practice which he claims will dramatically improve your life (you can also read it on his blog though you will notice a gender bias), I thought I’d come up with a similar checklist that would act as a reminder of all the positive things you can do each day to stay clear-minded and creative.

As you might have guessed, I haven’t got a 100% track record of doing all eight of these every single day but I will be giving it a damn good go from now on and I strongly suggest you do the same. I even made all 8 suggestions rhyme so you can easily memorise them!

And yes, a lot of this is incredibly obvious, but are you doing it? No. So it won’t hurt to remind yourself.

1. Focus on Positivity

Being positive doesn’t come naturally to everyone but it’s the one thing all successful creative people have in common so it’s worth working at it every day and making sure you don’t default to negative thinking.

- Keep a gratitude journal
- Read/watch/listen to something inspirational
- Use positive self-talk
- Focus on goals
- Dream big.
2. Exert yourself physically

Creative thinking doesn’t come from sitting around forcing out good ideas. Most of our thoughts are habitual and circular and keep us stuck in a rut.

Creativity comes from energy, movement and action. So get out there and break a sweat and your day will be 10 times more productive and positive.

- Walk
- Swim
- Run
- Yoga
- Martial arts
- Dance
- Etc. Even 20 minutes is better than nothing!

3. Prioritise creativity

Pretty obvious, right?

Yes, but if you’re not clear-minded that doesn’t make it any easier to actually implement. You have to make a firm decision and commit to practicing your art each day, even if only for 20 minutes.

Not to do so is a crime against your own potential and the surest way never to achieve any creative success.

- Complete daily practice, preferably first thing in the morning – 750 words, photo a day, drawing, painting, play a musical instrument
- Learn one new thing – improve your skills
- Progress on a current project
- Create/pursue new opportunities.

4. Eat healthily

What you eat has a direct affect on your mental state and energy levels. I personally have a sweet tooth and I enjoy good grub and fine wine as much as the next man (what do you mean the next man is obese!).

I’m not suggesting you make life a misery by starving yourself or falling for the latest fad diet but it’s worth a little extra effort to eat a varied selection of fresh and wholesome food for the positive impact on your mental and physical health.

- Fresh foods
- Varied diet
- Healthy snacks – don’t starve yourself!
- Treat yourself to an indulgent pleasure now and again. Being miserable isn’t healthy either!
5. Connect with humanity

Most of us encounter plenty of other people throughout the course of the day but are we actually connecting with most of them in any deep and meaningful manner?

Even with our loved ones we are often too busy and distracted to really show them how much we care. But all it takes is a bit of extra awareness to improve our existing relationships and make exciting new connections.

- Get in touch with family and friends
- Let loved ones know you care
- Thank people for their kindness and support
- Treat everyone with respect
- Make new friends
- Help & support people whenever you can.

6. Appreciate nature's majesty

Connecting with nature has a grounding effect that’s essential for peace of mind and wellbeing.

I'm no scientist but I think it’s fair to say that as the source of all existence, nature is worth acknowledging and celebrating at least once a day.

I'm lucky enough to live by the sea and thoroughly enjoy walking along the shore on my way to and from work.

But even if you’re landlocked and live/work bang in the middle of a big city or suburban sprawl, surely you can find a nearby park where you can feed the ducks at lunchtime, or a tree you can sit under:

- Go for a walk in nature
- Look up at the stars
- Take a deep breath
- Admire the beauty all around you
- Look for wild creatures
- Drink a fresh glass of water or eat fresh fruit and vegetables
- Take your dog for a walk or play with your cat when it has its mad half hour
- Take photos or film a video (it’s a good excuse to get out and about and involves creativity).

7. Rest and relax Sufficiently

Watching the latest reality TV freakshow whilst tweeting hilariously barbed criticisms of those involved may be fun but it isn’t real relaxation.
Neither is surfing the internet for hours to find out which shiny gadgets you can’t afford this week when you’re too tired to see the screen without squinting.

Shut off those screens and get some proper relaxation or you won’t function to the best of your ability or have the energy to be creative tomorrow.

- Turn off technology (computers/TV etc) and give your mind a rest
- Get enough sleep
- Spend time with friends and relax
- Listen to music
- Read fiction
- Dance
- Meditate
- Take a nap.

8. Err on the side of frugality

I’m not trying to be a killjoy but unless you’re absolutely loaded, spending more of your hard-earned money for a short term consumerist buzz that will end up in inevitable disappointment will not bring you peace of mind – it will have the opposite effect.

Plus the more cash you can save the more financial independence you have, which will allow you to have much more choice in the future if you want to make changes to your life.

- Don’t buy anything you don’t need!
- Walk instead of catching the bus or driving, get the bus instead of a taxi
- Look for simple pleasures that don’t cost as much
- Start reducing debt
- Start saving and building a freedom fund
- Don’t drink as much – you’d be amazed how much you’ll save.

So there we go. Still here? Good. Now that the brutally obvious stuff is out of the way, let’s go a bit deeper:
The Uncertain Creative
Is it normal not to know what you want to do when you grow up, when you’ve grown up? When you’re 35, 45, 55, 65?

Because uncertainty is all we know for sure. Uncertainty is all we can be certain of.

Society expects us to decide definitively what we want to do with your lives before we turn 30, or even earlier!

But being a ‘clear-minded creative’ doesn’t mean you know exactly what you’re doing. It means you accept that you may never know but keep trying and experimenting.

The Rules Have Changed

I used to want to be a journalist, a musician, a novelist.

But the rules have changed, and they continue to change.

The sands are shifting under our feet.

I have been feeling my way through this life like a blind man.

Only when I bump against something new will I know if it’s sharp, heavy, or soft.

A decade ago we didn’t hear much about multimedia content producers, probloggers, social reporters, or wealthy self-published novelists.

So how can we choose ‘what to be’ when the goal posts keep moving?

Maybe we can’t, not entirely. But we can commit to persevering, to following our hearts/gut instincts, and to fighting to achieve the freedom to choose.

Perhaps some people just aren’t meant to know. Aren’t meant to see the path laid out in front of them.

But we can get clarity about ourselves. About our likes, our dislikes, our predilections.

What makes us shine, what makes us thrive, what surroundings, people and situations make us feel most alive, and which ones shut us down.
The Art of Not Knowing

Freedom comes from letting go of the need to know. From listening to your heart, your gut instincts and feelings, and ignoring the constant chatter of the monkey mind.

Freedom comes from letting yourself ‘be’.

Accepting who you are.

Not forcing yourself to be something you’re not.

Caring for others, but not living up to their expectations if they aren’t in alignment with who you are and what you want out of life.

Freedom comes from accepting that we are in a constant state of change.

As our cells replenish, our bodies are recreated.

As our life experiences affect us, so we become new beings, with new desires, new needs, new curiosities.

Much has been made of the ability of musicians to ‘reinvent themselves: Dylan, Bowie, Madonna.

This is natural. It seems absurd to suggest that it is normal to stay forever the same, like a relic frozen in time!

It saddens me to see successful musicians, now middle-aged or older, still conforming to the image that made them famous when they were teenagers.

It may well work out fine for them financially, but think how much more interesting they might have become if they didn’t slavishly live up to the expectations and demands of their more conservative fans.

Not naming any names of course.
Accept Yourself
One of my favourite autobiographies is “Things the Grandchildren Should Know” by Mark Oliver Everett of the Eels.

It’s a brutally honest account – Mark’s father, mother and sister all died when he was very young, so he had more than his fair share of tragedy – but thankfully he also had the upside of his amazing experiences and accomplishments as a musician.

Even whilst he was alive, Everett, or E’s father was not really present in his life. He was a renowned scientist who invented the concept of parallel universes (E also recorded a great BBC documentary about his father’s life and work), and spent most of his time deep in thought as part of his work.

In a moving passage near the end of the book Everett reflects on how he has come to better understand his father’s behaviour thanks to the passage of time:

“One morning, while I was brushing my teeth, I looked in the bathroom mirror. My father was looking back at me. I realised I could identify with him in a lot of ways now. I was learning more from reading about him. How he was depressed from feeling under-appreciated or misunderstood, how he wanted to be left alone. How he wore the same clothes all the time, just like me.

I realised that I had been feeling that same thing he must have been feeling all those years when he couldn’t be bothered because he always had some crazy ideas he was trying to sort out in his head. You’re just about to crack the code and the kid wants to play baseball. I get it now. We’re both ‘idea men’ and anything outside of those ideas is a distraction.

I had been angry at him all these years, but, now that that I saw so much of him in myself, it became easy to identify with him. I let him off the hook. And life immediately got better. My parents didn’t have a clue how to raise children, it’s true. But I can see that, given what they were given, they gave it their best shot.”

I related to this because I tend to get lost in my own thoughts and ideas too, and it’s definitely a character trait that can lead to depression if you don’t have ways of dealing with it. I also hugely admire Everett’s willingness to understand and forgive his father, and also to come to terms that he himself has many similar traits.

Whilst we can all of course try to be “our best selves” and improve our behaviours towards others, perhaps we all have innate characteristics that we can’t change, and maybe we need to accept that, and be less hard on ourselves for not being “perfect”. For example, as a freelancer it’s a lot easier for me to have an off day. I can still get my work done without all the other unnecessary details (showering, wearing smart clothes, making small talk with colleagues I have nothing in common with).
You must believe in yourself.
Refresh Your Mindset

What Are Your Beliefs About Creativity?

As a creative person, your mindset is hugely important. Hence the name of this guide! One of the major disadvantages you may be struggling with are self-limiting beliefs.

Let’s consider some of the typical self-limiting beliefs that plague artists of all kinds and contrast them with a more positive Clear-Minded Creative belief system:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-Limiting Belief</th>
<th>Clear-Minded Creative Belief</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I'm not talented enough</td>
<td>Talent can be developed over time with practice – clear-minded creative types never stop learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being an artist means being poor (aka starving artist syndrome)</td>
<td>Creativity is highly valuable. Creative people/artists deserve to earn a living from their work if their work is valuable and unique.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being self-destructive is part and parcel of being creative (and evidence that you may be a genius)</td>
<td>For our creativity to be sustainable, we need to look after our mental and physical health.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t have time to be creative</td>
<td>Making time for creativity is always possible if you prioritise it. Sacrifice may be involved, as it is with anything you prioritise – you cannot do everything.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Success as an artist is completely reliant on one big lucky break</td>
<td>“Luck” depends on taking responsibility for your own success, clarifying and defining your values and goals and taking persistent and consistent action towards what you want.</td>
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</tbody>
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Money Mindset

There are few self-limiting beliefs as crippling for creatives as those that centre around cold hard cash, or lack of it.

Many of us have negative connotations around the idea of ‘selling out’ and ‘the man’ – basically we can see those who have the money as being everything we are not.

However money is not inherently a force for evil or good, it is simply a currency and can be used for whatever purposes we choose.

There is no doubt that money increases our freedom of choice, and for those who value social good, we can use it to massively improve the lives of those less fortunate.

The success of initiatives like Kickstarter shows the appetite for great creative work and the willingness to help fund it.

It all comes down to the fact that if we value ourselves and our own work then we should be happy to be paid well for what we do.

Tara Gentile speaks very eloquently about this in her ebook *The Art of Earning* and Mark McGuinness’ Lateral Action blog has a course called *Money for Creative people* which has a similar message as well as more practical advice on managing your money as a creative freelancer/entrepreneur.

The book *Career Renegade* by Jonathan Fields also has some great ideas for how creative people can think differently about their talents in a way that will enable them to make a decent living.

The key is to think about how what you can do would help other people achieve their goals and dreams – and finding people who are willing to pay you for that service. Ultimately in this scenario everyone’s a winner. But you can’t be half-arsed. You have to be a professional.

We’ll be talking about the pro mindset more in later guides.
Your Voice Matters
Being creative is in many ways about having a voice and wanting to express ourselves.

We all have a unique perspective, and we can share that with the world through our creativity.

Don’t underestimate how important it is that you do this.

Turn on the news, and you’ll likely hear about something bad that’s happened. A lot of the bad things that happen in the world are down to two things: Ignorance & Hatred.

Those of us who stand for something more, something better than those things, need to stand up and be counted.

I’m not suggesting that what you create has to be all happy and smiley and rose-tinted, but if you share the truth, then there can only be less ignorance.

If you spread positivity, passion and love, then there can only be less hatred.

In a crowd-sourced world, where everyone can contribute, no matter whether they’re an expert, or trustworthy, or psychopathically insane – don’t let the negative voices, the ones coming from a place of ignorance and hatred, drown out your own.

Speak your truth, and share your creativity with the world. You are needed. Every moment, every thought, every situation is a chance to stand up and be counted and not to let the negativity win.

And each time you choose the creative, the positive option, not the destructive and negative one, you are training yourself, developing a stronger, more positive mindset. You will feel different. You will change yourself, and you will help change the world.
Above All Else, Know Thyself

How well do you know yourself? Most of us believe we have a pretty good idea who we are – we know what we like in terms of music taste or food; we know what our political opinions are and we probably have a good idea what we find attractive in a partner.

But our complex, beautiful human brains also include a seemingly limitless capacity for self-delusion.

We don’t even always understand what’s driving our own behaviour:

If you’ve ever sat procrastinating on pointless activities when you could be doing something more rewarding and then cursed yourself afterwards for wasting time, you’ll know what I mean.

A lot of our actions are driven by subconscious beliefs or habits which we don’t even realise we have.

Everything You Believe Is Wrong (Maybe)

What if one day you realised everything you believe is wrong?

Don’t worry I’m not trying to provoke a major identity crisis here.

But we’ve all had “discussions” with people who have the opposite view to us. Whilst both parties in an argument believe that they are completely, without a shadow of a doubt, right and cannot possibly be wrong, the odds are that one of them is.

So to extend that example further, what if your beliefs about yourself are flawed or inaccurate?

We can all have overly negative, ‘limiting’ beliefs about ourselves for various reasons, such as ‘I’m not good enough’ or ‘I’ll never be able to get paid for work I enjoy’.

These could have been programmed into us at an early age by our parents or peers, or just because of the culture we grew up in.
For example, we may consider Americans to be more entrepreneurial because it is seen as a positive trait more widely in their culture than it is in Europe (which is a huge generalisation but you get my point).

Or if your parents and eleven siblings are all successful working artists, perhaps it’s more likely you’ll have confidence that you too could earn a living from your creative work.

Thankfully, you are not your beliefs, and if you’re not getting the results you want out of life (and know deep down that you’re capable of), you can take steps to change your outlook on life.

I’m not saying this is easy of course. I can’t blame you if you’re sceptical of techniques such as hypnosis, NLP, or cognitive behavioural therapy, but they have been proven to work. I’ve used some of them myself. I would however recommend you choose a practitioner very carefully as, like every field, there are both skilled and less skilled people offering these services.

Other ways to ‘reprogram’ your outlook on life are simply reading and listening to new viewpoints.

I look to successful people who have achieved something I wanted to achieve myself, or whose accomplishments I generally admire.

I study their philosophy, their approach to life, and take from it those aspects which appeal to me most.

These people don’t have to be millionaires. The Clear-Minded Creative Types I’ve interviewed on the blog are all inspiring people, even though they may only be on the first steps of their journey. What’s important is their attitude and belief in themselves.

You are bloody talented. Yes, you!

Creative people, especially those who lack confidence, tend to overlook the value of their natural talents and abilities.

For years I didn’t really value my writing ability because it came naturally to me.

I tried to learn lots of other skills which weren’t really suited to my personality, not realising I would have been better trying to improve the skill I already had and that if I did so I could actually earn money from it.
Refresh Your Mindset

Personality? What Personality?

The more we can understand ourselves, the easier it is to set realistic and achievable goals.

If you’re unsure what you want to do as a career or feel like your current job is unsuited to your skills, the best thing you can do is identify what your strengths are so you can look for a field or job more suited to you.

I Know Your Type

Once we realise that we are a certain personality type amongst many, the less we feel the need to compare ourselves negatively to others – after all they are just made up of different characteristics to us.

And it makes dealing with other people easier because we can more clearly communicate who we are to them once we know that they are more likely to respond to certain stimuli, and we can seek out like-minded people who may be facing similar problems to us.

Some people are very clear about who they are already and won’t find this necessary, but for others there are some great resources out there.

Now I was initially sceptical about the idea of personality tests but I myself have found the ones below helpful. I definitely recognised the truth and accuracy of them and it was a big help in confirming that clarifying what I should focus on in the future.

I’ve shared some of my own results below in order to illustrate what I mean:

1. The Enneagram

The thinking behind this seems to be pretty complicated, but the test itself is very easy, just a sequence of questions that you can fill out online and be shown your results immediately.

However although you will be identified as one predominant type, the two types you are close to on the enneagram are also significant and can weight the negative and positive characteristics of your type one way or the other.
Creativity coach Mark McGuinness has a brilliant free ebook you can download giving you more details about this.

My results

I was predominantly the ‘romantic’, ‘individualist’ or ‘independent’ type (different websites call these slightly different names) the description for which is:

Type Four – The Individualist

The introspective, romantic type. Fours are self-aware, sensitive, and reserved. They are emotionally honest, creative, and personal, but can also be moody and self-conscious. Withholding themselves from others due to feeling vulnerable and defective, they can also feel disdainful and exempt from ordinary ways of living. They typically have problems with melancholy, self-indulgence, and self-pity. At their Best: inspired and highly creative, they are able to renew themselves and transform their experiences.

As much as I hate to admit some of that, it does sound eerily accurate.

How this has been useful for me

This was mainly confirmation of what I already knew, or at least suspected about myself. There is definitely a huge value in recognising this though, because it brings increased awareness of your strengths and weaknesses, meaning you can adjust your life and future plans accordingly.

2. Strengthsfinder

This is another, substantially longer online test but in order to take it you have to buy the Strengthsfinder book which contains a unique code you can use to access it.

In my experience this is worth it, as the book also emphasises that it is more important to build on your natural strengths, rather than trying to “fix” your weaknesses which can be counter-productive, and it offers ways to utilise your results in order to do so.

My results:

The Strengthsfinder report identifies 5 key themes. Mine were:

Input
Intellection
Futuristic
Ideation
Deliberative

The report then goes into detail about what these are, for example, below are a few extracts from the Input section...
which I found uncannily accurate:

"By nature, you yearn to increase your knowledge by being kept in the information loop. This explains why you gravitate to people who converse about ideas at a deeper and more thoughtful level.

You probably carry reading material with you just in case you have to wait in line, eat alone, or sit beside a stranger. Because the printed word feeds your mind, you frequently generate original plans, programs, designs, or activities. You thirst for new ideas and knowledge."

It then goes on to ask some questions relating to this theme and also to provide possible action steps. So for input again, it advises:

"Look for jobs in which you are charged with acquiring new information each day, such as teaching, research, or journalism.

Devise a system to store and easily locate information. This can be as simple as a file for all the articles you have clipped or as sophisticated as a computer database. As you gather and absorb information, be aware of the individuals and groups that can most benefit from your knowledge, and be intentional about sharing with them."

Hmm, sounds a bit like blogging, no?

How this has been useful for me:

Again this wasn’t exactly a revelation, but what it did do was give me a better understanding of the reasons that I have always been attracted to writing, journalism and blogging.

It also allowed me to think of how my skills could be transferable to other mediums and activities, rather than just identifying myself in the extremely vague category of ‘writer’.

At the time that I did it, it helped me to better understand why the job I was in wasn’t suited to me, and what kind of jobs might be more suited.

For more info see the Strengthsfinder website.

3. Myers Briggs

A psychometric test based on the theories of Carl Jung which uses a number of questions to determine your combination of psychological preferences, like the others this is to be taken with a pinch of salt, but again seemed to me to
be fairly accurate in its “diagnosis”.

My results

Like my famous counterparts Nelson Mandela, Robert Burns, and er.. Tom Selleck, the Meyers Briggs test identifies me as an INFJ.

Apart from the fact that comparing myself to these fellow INFJs has given me an inferiority complex, a lot of the description did ring true. Well, I’m not going to argue with the description ‘profoundly creative’!

The below extract also struck me as highly accurate for myself.

‘INFJs often feel happiest and most fulfilled when helping others understand themselves and their problems. INFJs are least content when they become too caught up in themselves and their own personal grievances. This is why healthy relationships and/or a well-suited career are so important to INFJs’ satisfaction.”

It’s good for me to remember this as I can too easily get caught up in my self and my worries instead of thinking of other people. It also perhaps explains my obsession with finding a creative career.

Of course there is the danger that we could each cherry pick the aspects from each of these descriptions that we are happy with and ignore the rest- or that it could become an exercise in self-congratulation or a source for excuses.

But overall I have found doing these tests useful as a reference and something to keep in mind when making certain decisions.

There are a number of different sites offering Meyers Briggs tests. I used a free one. Here’s more info about the different personality types.
You are Not Alone
Clear-minded creativity is possible, if you’re willing to work at it. The fact is though, it’s a work in progress, not a permanent state of mind.

Most importantly though, and here is the real secret to being a clear-minded creative – you cannot do it alone.

Neither can I, or anyone else.

Clear-Minded Creatives share what they learn, because they want to help their community evolve and grow.

Clear-Minded Creatives know that people are everything. People are also fragile, difficult, desperate and amazing. They are the fabric that connects the world.

People are to be cherished, nourished and encouraged.

Without other people, we are nothing. I’ve learnt this the hard way, because for too long I lived as if only I mattered, and it wasn’t a life worth living.

The secret is – you need to ask for and be willing to receive help.

It’s such a huge relief to know that I can ask for help and that the help is there, and that it really does make things 100 times better.

So if you take one message from this guide, if you remember one thing about how to be a Clear-Minded Creative, it’s this:

You can’t do it alone.
I wish I could find a new job I enjoy/am passionate about!!!
Your Important Work

The Clear-Minded Creative knows that they themselves are not more important than anyone else, but that they have important work within them, waiting to get out.

Desperate to get out.

And their whole existence depends on this important work being created.

The Clear-Minded Creative will not be happy if they cannot fulfil this purpose. They cannot let anything trivial, whether external or internal, stand in the way of it being brought to fruition.

The Clear-Minded Creative may not even know what this important work is yet.

But they will feel it in their heart. They will know that they have the potential to create great work. And they will know that everything else pales in comparison to their achieving the goal of creating and sharing it.

They know that their lives must be designed in such a way that this important work can be produced.

They must look after their health, simplify their life, and prioritise peace of mind so their work can come forth.

The Clear-Minded Creative may know little about their ultimate destination, yet have a strong and powerful sense of purpose.

They have a deeply held faith, a gut instinct, a strong drive to create. Because they know that they have important work to do.

What it is though, is probably a complete mystery.

And so they must act as a private detective, piecing together the puzzle as they themselves produce it.

And isn’t that what makes it so much fun?

Accepting that the ever-evolving mystery is part and parcel of the deal, of the commitment we make, is what allows us to finally let go and enjoy the ride.

Taking each day as it comes may be a way of life shared by the recovering addict, but we are not forbidding ourselves what we crave — instead we are finally giving ourselves permission to go after what we really need.

Only by allowing our art to come forth can we unearth the answers in our own heart.
Nothing Is Wasted
If you’re creative but feel like success has so far eluded you, it’s important not to forget or discount the things you’ve already learned or achieved – even if they aren’t things that would impress anyone else.

The fact is that they are part of what has made you what you are now.

For a while though I was caught up in regrets about the past, and my creativity and general happiness suffered.

It’s not healthy to wallow in these things, but sometimes it’s difficult to get past them.

For an artist of any kind, pain and suffering can help further our understanding of other people’s situations and compassion for them.

I know I have acted like an idiot so many times in the past without realising it at the time so it makes me a little more patient and less judgemental about other people who do idiotic things.

I would probably still try and avoid them if possible but at least I’m not being as judgemental as someone else might!

Also it means our creative work itself is infused with more soul and depth.

Anyone who has seen a great soul singer pour their heart out in a performance, compared to a highly marketed pop act with no depth, will know that this is one of the true differences between great art and throwaway or forgettable art.
QUESTION EVERYTHING
Start with Why – and What You Value

Simon Sinek’s book Start With Why explains the importance of clarifying our motivation. Not only does this help us make better decisions and take action more easily, but if others share a similar motivation and purpose, and believe in our mission, they will be much more likely to want to be part of it.

We need to remember what it is we actually want at a deeper level. Why do you really want to be creative? Because achieving/producing something makes you feel good.

Admittedly, so does eating a massive slice of chocolate cake and drinking half a bottle of wine, but only creativity has a lasting result. Your creative output can also make other people feel good, and even earn you a living.

Ultimately we all want to feel good, and be happy. But what is your driving force? The thing that you are so passionate about that even if you weren’t paid to do it, you would dedicate your life to?

Whilst becoming a creative entrepreneur and having financial and location independence is certainly a worthy dream why do we want it in the first place? Because we want freedom of choice and freedom of movement.

We all have a different set of values and discovering our own value hierarchy is essential.

Identify Your Values

If you’re feeling stuck, it might be because you have conflicting values, e.g., your no.1 value might be family, and your no.2 value might be career.

But you are working day and night and never see your family. That means you’re not living in alignment with your values.

When I went through this exercise again recently health came out as my top value, however not only was I not exercising regularly, I was also binge drinking on a regular basis. So now I have to really rethink the way I was living my life as it is clearly not fitting in with the way I really want to be.

Identifying and prioritising your top 5–10 values brings a deep sense of clarity to your life and you can use them as a
tool to guide you through tricky decisions.

Tim Brownson is a life coach extraordinaire – as well as having an excellent sense of humour he also has a brilliant technique for ensuring his clients pick the correct values that takes into account our natural ability to fool ourselves. He’s even written a book all about the topic called *Aligning With Your Core Values* which is recommended if you want to explore the topic further.

Steve Pavlina also *writes at length on the topic* and provides a *list of common values* you can peruse, and the blog Simple Marriage provides a *very handy web app* which you can use for free to help sort your important values. It’s more difficult than it sounds (oh and you don’t have to be married or want to get married to try it).

**Convert Your Values into Goals**

Simon Sinek also says that values are important, but for him just having a list of words isn’t enough – he suggests that turning them into verbs or instructions works best.

For example, one of my values is, unsurprisingly enough, creativity. But it’s a broad term – what does it mean to me in practise? For me it is:

To prioritise the creation of original, innovative work and commit to working on it consistently in order to produce a body of work that I can be proud of.

Another value of mine is spirituality. Now I do not subscribe to any particular religion, so this is quite a vague category also. However by converting it into an actionable instruction for myself it becomes:

Be grateful, and appreciative of the miraculousness of existence and the beauty and love all around me, and find a way to connect with my own spirituality on a regular basis, e.g. through meditation.

For you, that could well be a load of ridiculousness hippy nonsense, in which case spirituality probably isn’t one of your values. Which is fair enough!

So you can see that by taking this simple step, your values have become much more actionable. Now you can take that one step further by creating specific goals out of these values.

So for creativity a goal could be – spend 30 minutes a day writing, or painting, or taking a photo. For me, I might add some “brainstorming” time into my routine so I can increase the chances of coming up with original ideas.
Optimism

A few years back I went to see a little-celebrated movie called The Wackness. It’s not a classic by any means, but I could relate to it quite a bit. The main character is a drug dealer (that’s not the part I related to) who got dumped a pretty girl who he was besotted by (ok that was the part I could relate to).

There’s a moment when they’re sitting together, and she says to him:

“Know what your problem is, Shapiro? It’s that you just have this really shitty way of looking at things, ya know? I don’t have that problem. I just look at the dopeness. But you, it’s like you just look at the wackness, ya know?”

And despite not being particularly knowledgeable about NYC street slang, what she said hit me like a ton of bricks, because that’s the way I’ve been for most of my life. I’ve had a really negative outlook on life, myself, the universe.

And if you’ve got a negative mindset, people who are positive seem like a different breed. People who are optimistic seem deluded, foolhardy, or just luckier in life.

But as psychologist Shawn Achor writes in his book ‘The Happiness Advantage’, people who are more positive, optimistic and grateful for what they have, are actually more happy and successful than their cynical, downhearted counterparts.

Happiness, he says, is what leads to success, not the other way round.

Even better, he has the research to prove that we can change the way our brains work, and that anyone willing to make a concerted and continuous effort can:

“...cultivate the mindset and behaviors that have been empirically proven to fuel greater success and fulfillment. We can rewire our brains to be more positive, creative, resilient, and productive—to see more possibility wherever we look.”

And if that’s not cause to be optimistic, I don’t know what is.
We live in the era of ever-changing culture, the ever-shifting sands of rapidly advancing technology, ever-evolving media and communications and uncertainty over the economy and climate.

We’ve witnessed the complete destruction of commonly held beliefs about the way the world works.

Luckily we have a secret weapon: clear-minded creativity.

Clear-Minded Creatives are career chameleons who are heavily invested in their own personal and vocational transformations, and who thrive at the cutting edge of culture, media and technology – where the opportunities are.

They are committed to following their path, even though the road ahead may not be well lit.

Clear-Minded Creatives have a mission, something to say, and something to prove. They want to be part of the action, take a seat at the table, make an impact, and contribute to their community.

They – we, even – see the bigger picture. We have an international outlook, refuse to recognise artificial boundaries, and are aware of the long-term impacts of our own behaviours and creative work.

We want to make a lasting impact on the world.

Clear-Minded Creatives commit to moving forward, regardless. We will always be flexible in our approach, but relentless in our mission.

You are not creative until you are creating

Creativity is not a state of being, but a state of doing. It’s the results that count, right?

So to genuinely be creative, you need to have a project, and be actively working on it. And no, talking about it in the pub DOESN’T count.

Let’s get started together:

Are you willing to make a commitment to Clear-Minded Creativity?
Hi, I’m Milo. I’m 34 years old and live in Edinburgh, Scotland.

I founded the Clear-Minded Creative blog in 2011 in order to help creative people fulfil their true potential and improve their lives and careers.

In February 2012 I took voluntary redundancy after ten years as a civil servant and am currently freelancing as a copywriter.

If you’re a fellow mad genius in the making, I’d love to hear from you. You can get in touch by emailing me at milo@clearmindedcreative.com or via Twitter – I’m @milomclaughlin

And please do visit the blog at: www.clearmindedcreative.com

“The Clear-Minded Creative Career Masterplan for Mad Geniuses

About Clear-Minded Creative

“Milo McLaughlin’s fascinating blog does exactly what it says on the tin – help creative people stay focused.”

The List Magazine: Scotland’s Best Websites
This is the first of 6 micro-guides in the Mad Genius series.

To refresh your memory about the other 5 steps, download the micro-manifesto [HERE.](www.clearmindedcreative.com)
The End.

Many thanks for taking the time to read it.

Please note: this micro-guide is not to be taken too seriously. I am but an ordinary man, trying to make my way in the world.

If you are genuinely mad - seek proper help!
If you are genuinely a genius, congratulations!

Seriously though, mental illness is extremely complex, and reading this guide won't help if you have serious problems. Check in with a counsellor or other qualified pro.

In the meantime if you have any feedback or just want to get in touch for a chat, email me at milo@clearmindedcreative.com

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