



NEWS

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# SXSW Pokes

50 stories  
about making a ruckus



## About *Poke the Box*

*Poke the Box* is Seth Godin's latest book and the first book coming to you from The Domino Project, a pioneering publishing venture launched by Seth and powered by Amazon. *Poke the Box* is a book about taking initiative, a first step toward creating change.

## About this eBook

*SXSW Pokes* includes 50 of the best anecdotes about taking initiative from ambitious doers at SXSW. People who start projects, make a ruckus, and take what feels like a risk.

These juicy anecdotes are written by leaders from around the web. Each contributor is responsible for her own story, and no endorsement or fact-checking is implied. Your mileage may vary.

Feel free to share this and send it to everyone who needs to read it. Even better, write your own riff and post it somewhere. Go, go, go.

A special thanks to **Becky Johns** and **CC Chapman** for sprucing up this eBook with their great SXSW shots.

Hint: click the cover to your left to learn more about *Poke the Box*.

**If you get in the habit of shipping things, of making a difference and of poking the box, that's your doing, and the rest of us will take pleasure in enjoying the fruits of your bravery.**

**Seth Godin**



# Rob Wu

<http://about.me/robwu>

This is my second time at SXSW. I expected the usual—interesting sessions, lots of networking, and good ‘ol Texas BBQ.

There are far greater things.

On the morning of the first day of SXSW, I saw the jaw-dropping photos and videos from the Japan tsunami disaster. The news agencies were reporting that hundreds of people have died and thousands were missing. In addition, earthquakes and potential nuclear reactor meltdowns posed serious threats to an already disaster-torn country.

Something needed to be done quickly. Without hesitating, I set up an online fundraising site to rally the SXSW community around the cause.

Later that afternoon, we launched a full campaign at [www.sxswcares.org](http://www.sxswcares.org) with a few collaborators. Our hope is to leverage the influence of the SXSW community to raise \$10,000 for disaster relief.

At the close of the second day, we’ve beat our goal and have raised over \$12,000 through the SXSW community. It’s hard to stay what the end result will be, but this could be the start of a movement.



# Thomas Edwards Jr

<http://www.theprofessionalwingman.com>

Through spending a lot of time working on becoming a better person, many people looked to me for advice on how they could do it themselves. I was so passionate about personal development I just wanted to help as best as I could. I didn't realize there was an opportunity to make a living from it - until one night in Austin, Texas.

While I was at SXSW 2009 (first time), I was out with a friend at a bar. He saw a really attractive woman across the way, wanted me to be his "wingman" and introduce him to her. I couldn't understand why he couldn't do it himself but I wanted to help him.

Jokingly, I asked him if he'd pay for my next drink. He responded, saying if he was able to get her number, he'd pay for my drinks the rest of the conference. With more of an incentive, I introduced him to her, he got the number and went on a lunch date with her the next day.

My drinks were paid for and a business was born.



# Clay Hebert

<http://www.dailysense.com>

Two words can change everything.

I love playing basketball. I remember being 11 years old and going to the local playground. A bunch of older kids were all just shooting around at the two hoops and not really playing.

I asked a simple two-word question that changed everything, “Wanna run?”

They all nodded excitedly and we started a full-court game that lasted for hours. More players showed up. A group of girls showed up just to watch. Everyone had a great time and we didn’t leave until they shut off the playground lights. We started playing every night at the same time.

The sad, surprising tale is that this same scene has repeated itself hundreds of times in my life. I show up to a court and everyone is just shooting buckets, like they need an 11-year old’s permission to organize a game.

“Wanna run?”

Minutes later, we split up teams and we’re immersed in a competitive game, whether 3 on 3 or full-court 5 on 5. In 23 years of doing this, it has worked every time. Never have the other seven people said “no, I just came to shoot”.

Thousands of hours of fun and exercise for hundreds of people from two simple words.

So what’s stopping you? You have dreams, ideas, that book you want to write, that blog you want to start, that trip you want to take. So why are you standing around shooting at the hoop?

Wanna run?



# Brian Schechter

<http://www.howaboutwe.com>

In the spring of 2009, we were hiking these goat paths along the Aegean Sea in Turkey. We'd just turned 30 and after a decade of directing 99% of our focus towards urban education and meditation, we decided to do something totally new. Our discussions were about two things: 1) building a social network that would be all about making life better, (not a new outlet for narcissism) and 2) modern romance.

These two ideas intermingled, at times. But mostly, our time was spent designing a website (in our minds and on butcher paper) and writing a play about relationships. Through it all we started to see an underlying theme: our generation — the generation that nurtured Facebook, made political activeness “cool” again, and who is shaping a fundamentally new way to disseminate information, hasn't managed to modernize one of our most precious pursuits: finding love. While our lives were busy, vibrant, and active, the process for finding love hadn't been updated to match our needs: our friends were getting older and the traditional dating sites felt too formal and staid—it was nothing either of us could ever see ourselves actually doing.

So upon returning to the states and having the reality of time — which sort of freezes while traveling — become urgent, one of us turned to the other and said: “What if there was just a dating site where people actually just posted the dates they wanted to go on?”

“Um, that's a really good idea.”

And so, HowAboutWe was born.



# Dane Sanders

<http://danesanders.com>

The college offered free photography classes to professors, so I signed up...er, signed my life away. One day you're 30-something working stiff with a secure Ivory Tower gig and a growing family and the next you're a struggling photographer fumbling in the dark. But, I used my insecurity to my advantage. I interviewed photographers and businesspeople who were better at the job than I was. I wrote up the interviews and posted them online. I listened. I learned. People appreciated my candor. My chin lifted. I was booked. A few years later, I woke up in the middle of the night with a story about a professor who became a successful photographer who wanted to help people like him through transitions into the creative world. I self-published the book and then Random House published it too, and its sequel. Step to the ledge and you will be seen.

**If you are the only  
one getting in  
your own way of  
going after your  
dreams, stop  
and realize that  
you are the last  
person who should  
be doing that!**

**C.C. Chapman**



# Melissa Pierce

<http://lifeinperpetualbeta.com>

Three years ago, I had questions about living a passionate life without a plan that nobody I knew could answer. Most of the thought leaders I contacted referred me to interviews they had given or books they had written, which didn't really help answer my questions either, but did give me a great idea.

Without any journalistic or filmmaking experience, I picked up a camera and started to make a documentary film about my search. I met and interviewed amazing people about passionate living, creativity, serendipity, and the benefits of living an unplanned life, all while homeschooling my three children.

Today, my documentary, *Life in Perpetual Beta*, is a become a series, has screened across the country and has even won a few film festival awards! It's available to buy as a DVD and people from all over the world can watch it online for free and be inspired by something I made!





# Cindy Gallop

<http://www.ifwerantheworld.com>

I'm an action-oriented person often frustrated by too much talking around me and too little doing. I realized suddenly one day (on vacation on a beach in Belize) that the single biggest pool of untapped natural resource in this world, is human good intentions that never translate into action. My background in advertising made me realize there's another massive untapped pool - corporate good intentions. Companies find it as difficult as people to act on intention, quickly, easily and simply, but importantly in a way that makes sense for, and drives, their business. So I started IfWeRanTheWorld - a simple web-meets-world platform that turns human and corporate good intentions into collective action, one microaction at a time, and is designed to do exactly what *Poke The Box* does - make shit happen. :)



# Andy Drish

<http://www.andydrish.com>

“Boss - I want to go part time.”

That’s what I told my boss the day I got back from SXSW last year. I spent the weekend hanging out with crazy, awesome young people who were changing the world... while I was still stuck in my cube in Corporate America.

The dangerous part about a corporate job is that it’s ‘O.K.’ You have health insurance, benefits, and a constant paycheck. You’re rarely forced out of your comfort zone. Life is okay... but it’s not great.

I found myself slowly becoming more and more content. More and more comfortable. And that terrified me. I knew it was time for change...

The problem was: I didn’t know how I would make money.

Instead of quitting my job completely, I negotiated cutting my workload back to three days per week. This allowed me to keep a steady paycheck and benefits. It also lit a fire under my ass because my income was nearly cut in half.

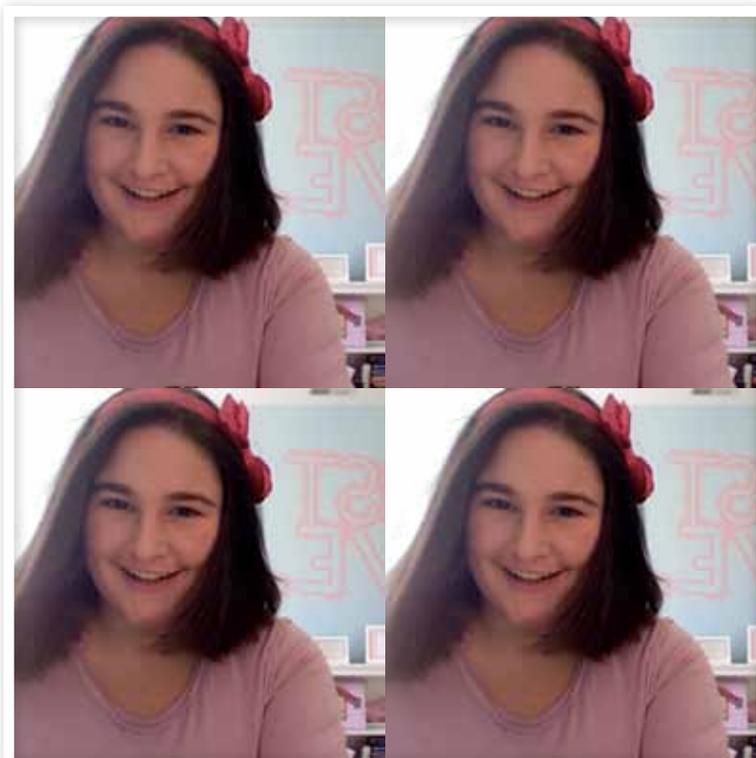
So what happened?

I hustled. I identified problems, chased opportunities, and pushed myself outside my comfort zone over and over again. I felt alive. Not only that, but a year later, my ‘side business’ generates more revenue than my job.

And then I went back to SXSW again this year. I hung out with all weekend with amazing people who are changing the world and that same feeling came back. Again, it’s time for change.

I got home from SXSW yesterday. Tomorrow I’m having a conversation with my boss that will start with...

“Boss - I’m ready to make the jump... this is my two week notice.”



# Emily-Anne Rigal

<http://emilyannerigal.com>

As a little girl, I was teased for being overweight. Each morning, I crossed my fingers in hopes that it would not be a day when my teacher would let my class pick our own partners because I rarely had someone to pair up with. It was mortifying, leading me to eventually switch schools.

Throughout middle and high school, my self-confidence gradually increased. The more I accepted myself, the happier I became.

At seventeen, I now know the benefits of embracing who I am. But memories are made to last – even the painful ones have a purpose. So my heart goes out to young people struggling with self-acceptance. I believe it is my life’s work to help others turn self-hatred into self-love.

To do this, I founded [WeStopHate.org](http://WeStopHate.org), which is now a grassroots movement changing the way teens view themselves.

I spearheaded WeStopHate by creating videos telling my personal stories. By exposing my inner thoughts and feelings, I put myself out there subject to ridicule.

However, instead of criticizing me, teens respected my authenticity and responded to my honesty. It was as if there was a piece of me in each viewer. Having been the first to put myself out there, I led by example, and now many other teens have followed in my footsteps.

This January, only six months after we launched, WeStopHate was ranked the 27th “Most Subscribed (of all time)” nonprofit YouTube channel. We have received well-over a quarter of a million total video views from over 100,000 teens across the world that have interacted with WeStopHate through our YouTube and social media sites.



# Tara Benwell

<http://www.tarabenwell.com>

After graduating from the University of Toronto I jumped into my Honda Civic with a friend and moved to Vancouver. I taught English as a second language for a few years and then moved to a small town in the Okanagan where everyone spoke English already. Since there was no teaching work, I found online work as a freelance material writer, developing content for websites for ESL learners. This was fun and allowed me to stay home with my new babies. I loved being a stay-at-home working mom, but I missed my writing students. The main website I worked for called itself a club, but it lacked a sense of intimacy. At the beginning of 2009, I helped the founder of the club connect a social network to its main website. I immediately began teaching writing through my blog by “challenging” English learners to write on a set topic and offering a model example. At first they responded in the comments of my blog. Then they started writing their own blog posts. Soon after we launched the social network, the founder of the website (who I’ve worked for 8 years but have never met in person) invited me to take on the role of administrator. Two years later we have over 30,000 members, including a group of volunteer moderators (a tribe of English learners) who help run the show. I’ve just been invited to speak about blogging with English learners at an international conference in England. I’m just a small town girl who missed her writing class.

**Signing up for “the initiative path” is not the same thing as creating a checklist from a job description. It’s a frame of mind you actively choose daily. It’s seeing something you want and going after it—not because of some selfish draw, but because it’s the right—and best—thing to do.**

**Alana Edmunds**





# C.C. Chapman

<http://www.cc-chapman.com>

I've had a passion for photography my whole life that started in the basement of my Grandparent's house developing photos with my Grandfather.

But, it took one moment walking down the street in Austin to change everything for me.

As I was crossing the street while attending SXSW I noticed a familiar face crossing the same street. I quickly asked, "Are you Marc?"

Turns out it was Wm. Marc Salsberry, an event photographer who I had been following for months online and who's photos had really inspired me. We chatted a quick bit (and moved out of the street crossing) and then the magic happened.

"Would you mind taking a photo of me and my son?" Here was a pro asking little old me to take HIS photo? When I spoke this out loud his response has always stuck with me. "I may take great event photography, but this is what you do. You take photos of people that look natural, happy and awesome. Keep it up." **I took the photo** but I also took his words to heart.

Ever since then, whenever I question if I'm good enough to do anything I think back to that moment on the streets of Austin when someone I looked up to gave me permission to believe in myself and push forward.

If you are the only one getting in your own way of going after your dreams, stop and realize that you are the last person who should be doing that!

# Sean Ogle

<http://www.seanogle.com>

In 2009 my life sucked.

I was in a job I wasn't happy with, doing work that wasn't inspiring, and then one email to a guy named Chris Guillebeau changed all of that. I met him for coffee in my hometown of Portland, Oregon determined to make a dramatic shift in my life and the things I was doing.

Chris offered up some advice and pointed me in the right direction. I started a blog, and made a big deal to friends and family about the fact I was going to do start doing something different.

Most just smiled and nodded.

In August Chris told me he was featuring me in his book, *The Art of Non Conformity*.

"You're in the book, and you better follow through so I don't have to rewrite the chapter."

This was in August. By January I'd quit my job, sold my car, and moved to Thailand to start building my new business.

A year later I'm able to do what I love full time in helping to inspire others to live a life worth living through the power of entrepreneurship.





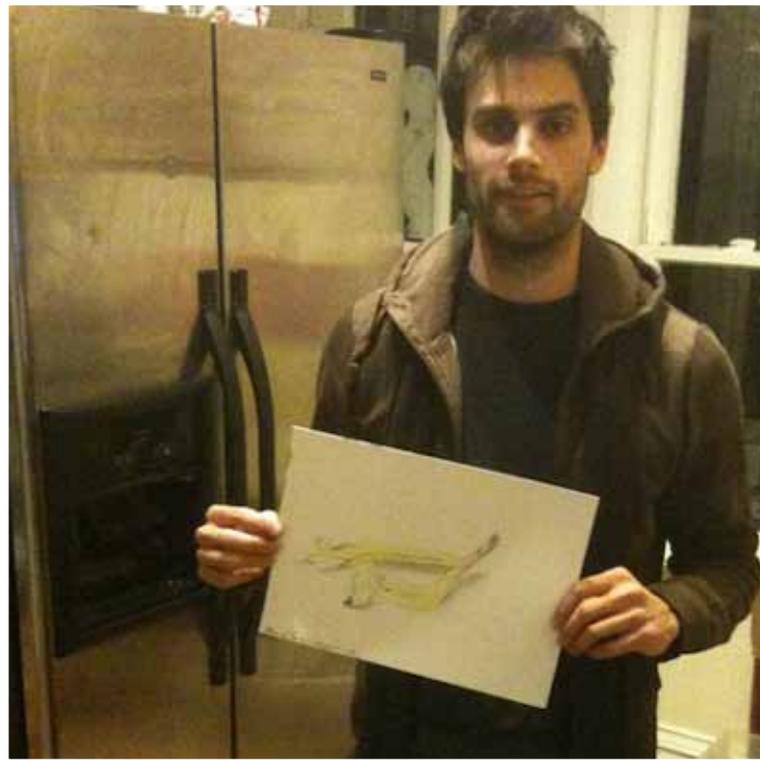
# Sandy Harper

<http://SandySpeaks.com>

“You are who you hang around.” Those words were spoken to me often by my sweet Mom before she passed away. I was 16 when she died. Decades later, I made the decision to reinvent myself. I became 100% sure I would become an Author & Speaker who would impact others. After all, it was my lifelong dream and it was time to make it a reality.

My Mom’s words came flooding back. I started connecting with Authors and Speakers who had and were impacting my life. I took the initiative to call Bob Burg, Co-Author of “The Go-Giver” and Author of “Endless Referrals.” That call led to a meeting over coffee which led to an invaluable relationship. As my first solo book, Gratitude Habit, comes to completion, I am thrilled and honored that Bob is writing the foreword.

What’s your lifelong dream? As you step out to make it real, reach out to someone you’d like to know and emulate. That one phone call may change your life forever!



# Adam Greenberg

<http://www.TonightsWatercolor.com>

Sometime between Christmas 2009 and the ensuing New Year, my sister Tara took up her own resolutions and cleaned out her closet. So it was among this dusty pile of crap pouring out into the hall that I unearthed a new and unused eight-piece watercolor set from Caldor, still with its \$0.89 price tag from circa 1994.

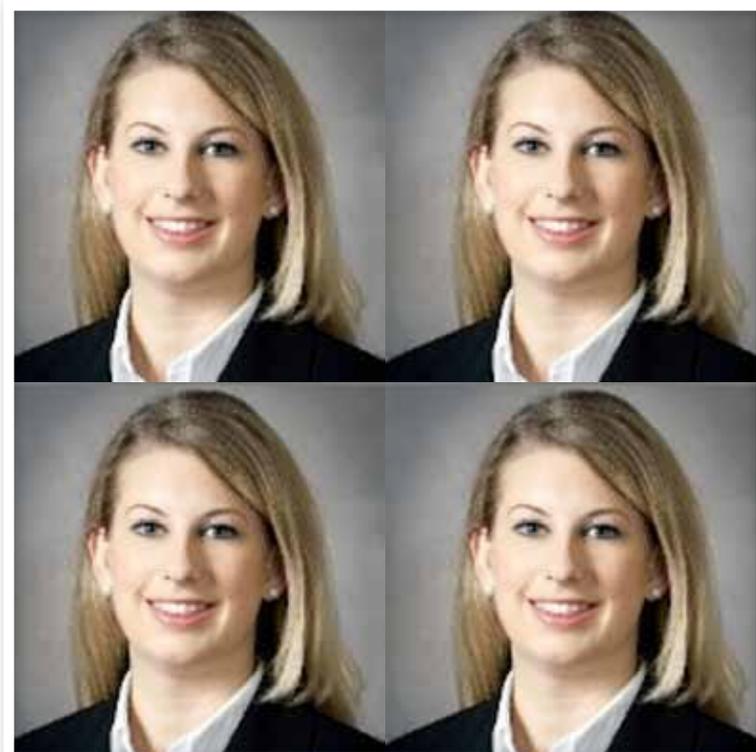
Coincidentally too, for the few days preceding my find, I had been wanting to depict a certain picture for my girlfriend - the one with the date of "Fri. 1, Jan. 2010". Up to this point though, I had only really seen the options in drawing stick-figures - before this new non-toxic, semi-moist friend by RoseArt came into my life. And so I began to paint for the first time since probably 9th grade art class.

When I finished that night, I thought I'd continue it the next day, as a series. The day after, I just wanted to see a Pirate Ship. This is how an appreciation is born.

So every day in 2010 I painted a simple watercolor and posted it at [www.TonightsWatercolor.com](http://www.TonightsWatercolor.com) that night.

Initially I gave them away for free (shipping included) to people who donated to Haiti's Earthquake Relief... now I just give them away for free anyway because - as Seth Godin writes - art is a gift.

Tonight's Watercolor! will be with intent for making my own "me time" of colorblind creation each day. I invite you to do the same.



# Alana Edmunds

<http://techyness.com>

Signing up for “the initiative path” is not the same thing as creating a checklist from a job description. It’s a frame of mind you actively choose daily. It’s seeing something you want and going after it—not because of some selfish draw, but because it’s the right—and best—thing to do.

When I graduated from Syracuse in ’08, I was, like many, energetic and ready to tackle just about anything. When I joined GE’s IMLP program that summer, I noticed one thing —we didn’t have a strong online presence.

So I took the initiative to change that, without letting my age, rank or organizational role get in the way. My idea? Launch imlpblog, an external blog run entirely by employees—not because someone tasked me with it, but because it needed to be done. Was it easy? No. Was I in PR? No.

Finding a team at first was hard—many wanted to know what exactly was required of them before they would join forces, because it was, as many projects of unclaimed territory and high visibility are—risky.

But it was out of this risk that I accomplished a few things. I learned invaluable lessons on leadership and change, and also carved both a name and respect at a young age—for something that was never on my job description.

**The initiative I took  
then for \*myself\*  
will always remind  
me that I'm the  
one driving this  
train, and that I'm  
accountable to  
the person in the  
mirror most of all.**

**Amber Naslund**



# Jenny Blake

<http://lifeaftercollege.org>

My most powerful (yet simple) lesson in taking initiative showed up when I was nine years old. I was on a Disney cruise with my family (very 90s, I know), and my brother and I were headed to lunch. We arrived at the buffet line early—we were hungry and we knew that the people who were first in line got the best crack at everything.

A small crowd had gathered. My brother and I looked around—they were all waiting for something. We checked our watches—it was time for lunch. While everyone else was waiting for some kind of permission, we decided to go ahead in. One by one, everyone followed (you can't keep people from their all-you-can-eat buffets for long). We were awed by how easy it was to lead the crowd. At that moment, our first family motto was born: "It's not the early bird that gets the worm. It's the early bird with \*initiative\* that gets it." Being early is not enough.

When I tell people I'm an author, a large majority reply by sharing their own ideas and dreams to write a book—with a somewhat wistful yet eager look in their eyes. To them (and to you) I say: stop waiting for permission. Stop waiting for an agent or a publisher or a magical blessing to tell you that it's okay to start. GO. Poke the box.





# Wesley Faulkner

<http://wesleyfaulkner.com>

In 2008 I went to my first South By Southwest Interactive Festival. Not for fun, but for work. I was working for AMD at the time, and they wanted me there for tech support. I have been to several conventions and I only met one of two kinds of people, the techie or the talkie. I have always been both and felt like a rare anomaly till that day. I met person after person that were both extremely smart and could carry on a great conversation. I felt like a veil had been lifted to a whole new world of creative thinkers and doers.

From that moment on, my life has been changed. Feeding off the knowledge and conversations like a pack of locust, hopping between social media conferences, meet ups, and clubs, devouring all that I could. I have not missed a visit to SXSW ever since.

This year, 2011, I am not just an attendee, but also a member of the SXSW Advisory Board. As such I now have the power to shape and influence the very thing that has shaped my life. Since that spring in 2008 I have gone on to fully embrace Twitter, start my own blog, lead the first ever Austin Twestival Local and soon start my own company, WordRipple.



# Lynette Young

<http://www.lynetteradio.com>

It seems my entire life has been spent trying to be different. Different than you, not better than you. I can't even begin to describe some of the fashion choices I made in school for the sole purpose of being different. After surviving a bit of teasing, the admiration that came with taking a stand about my own individuality was honestly addicting. Now that I'm officially grown up I've given up all but a purple stripe in my hair to fight conformity and any hint of 'soccer mom' that tries to creep into my life.

Heading to SXSW this week for the first time I realize that I've been struggling to separate myself professionally as well. What perfect timing, throw myself into a sea of originality right in the middle of an identity crisis. At first I crumpled a bit thinking how completely average I will be at SXSW, but now I have found a primal need to burn trails in the brush and make my own way again. Don't look around too long, and don't look back, just keep moving forward. Make friends, enjoy their uniqueness and develop my own. I have to keep reminding myself of that. I like you, but I don't want to be you. You have great ideas, but I have different ideas.

Burn your own trail.

# Steve Garfield

<http://stevegarfield.com>

I'm not the biggest Sarah Palin fan but I ended up helping to promote her show, Sarah Palin's Alaska on TLC from Mark Burnett, at Blog World Expo 2010.

Brian Solis saw that I was attending the conference, through my tweets, and asked me if I'd help him do an experiment when he did a keynote interview with Mark Burnett on stage. I was happy to help Brian out even after hearing that my participation would end up supporting Sarah Palin.

In a flurry of activity I was brought backstage just before the keynote and given **a video** to upload to YouTube.

After the video uploaded, it was 2 min. before Brian and Mark would take the stage. I saw that there were TV lights set up, so when Mark Burnett came over to thank me for helping him with his project, I asked him if I could interview him for a moment. He said yes.

I brought them over to the studio lights, asked if we could use them, and turn them on. I had my video camera and was ready to shoot the interview at a moments notice.

We did a quick interview and then off he went on stage.

I only had that one moment, took the initiative, and got **a great interview with Mark Burnett.**





# Jay Goldman

<http://jaygoldman.com>

There has to be something different about the DNA of entrepreneurs. Something in the blood that makes us look at the world through a different perspective. Something—either wonderful or terrible—that puts us very much outside the box. I come from a long line of entrepreneurs, following in the proud footsteps of both my grandfathers (an electrician and a silver plater) and my own father (founder of a series of successful software companies), and I couldn't really imagine leading life any differently.

I've been an entrepreneur as long as I can remember, starting my first business in grade five. A good friend appeared at school one day with something quite surprising: his own, personalized letterhead. He pulled it out on the playground, proudly showing me the manila file folder like it contained state secrets, then revealing the striking black and white design inside. He had made them at his dad's office, carefully lettering his name and address, drawing a personal logo, photocopying them on what must have been a fairly massive and quite new machine. He was rightfully proud of them and saw a long and shiny future of handwritten correspondence but I saw something different. I saw our ticket to untold riches.

I was wrong, of course. It turns out that our fellow grade fivers just weren't in the market for customized letterhead. And, naturally, that the world had plans that didn't involve a whole lot of handwritten letters. Never mind that, though. The important thing was that I bravely launched something, failed quickly, and learned a whole lot from the lesson. I'm on venture #3 now—4 if you count the letterhead debacle—and I've certainly learned the lesson of customer development and the value of shoot first, apologize later. Plus, I have a whole pile of unused letterhead for all those fancy apology notes. :)

**Shoot first, apologize later.**

**Jay Goldman**

**The biggest obstacle to overcome was myself.**

**Gretchen Rubin**



\* my mom started this restaurant b/c she hates to cook \*

she loved going out to eat (make someone else do the work) but found it tough to find healthy, msg free, low cal, balanced meals w/ prices within daily reach. she felt guilty for feeding ~~us~~ crap & felt sick of being a housewife, so she said -

"why not open a restaurant for people like me."





# Becky Johns

<http://becky-johns.com>

I've been playing around with cameras my whole life. I always had an eye for finding "the moment" and found that the art of photography was something that inspired me. I shot for a few newspapers and took photos of friends for fun, but never took my skill very seriously as anything more.

I moved into a new apartment and wanted something to decorate the bare walls. So, I took the backing and glass out of a picture frame and made some friends pose for photos. They loved the pictures. I loved the pictures. I named the project "Friends in a Frame" and began sharing the portrait project on Facebook, and just kept shooting.

I disciplined myself to shoot consistently for an entire summer. 3 months later, I'd done 100 shoots, become a better photographer and had built a project people were begging to be part of.

I stumbled into a freelance photography business.

Soon, I was booking portrait and family sessions, covering events and licensing my work for use on websites and publications. Less than a year later, I've been published all over the place online, in major magazines and even a book.

None of that would have happened had I not stepped up and taken the Friends in a Frame concept seriously, stuck with it and shaken my concept of how photography fit into my life.

I freelance when I want to and have plenty of decoration for my apartment. Not too bad for a kid with a camera.

# Matt Ridings

<http://techguerilla.com>

My natural tendency has always been to be a problem solver, but I've never been good at "the ask". That's what I have salespeople for.

However, I'd gotten wind of the fact that a competitors deal was looking a little shaky at a company where I happened to know someone. And while difficult, I knew it was a deal that my company could offer a lot of value to. I had no time to gather up the sales folks and put together an attack plan. It was now or never, and I'd have to reach out of my personal comfort zone to play the pushy sales guy.

With frankly little hope, I called into the prospect and leveraged a few outside references to eventually make my way to the decision maker on the phone. Within 45 minutes of that moment I was sitting in his office. Within 90 minutes of being in his office I had a 7 figure deal literally drawn up and agreed to on a single piece of handwritten paper. That was one hell of an "ask".

There is no clever, quotable moment to this anecdote. No tale worthy of urban legend status to be deposited in the annals of sales history. Sometimes, when you know you have what the customer needs, it's enough to simply get off your ass and take a chance.





# Nick Reese

<http://becomingbold.com>

Fortune Favors the Bold.

It was the summer of my freshman year in college.

At the time I was working at a large luxury real estate firm in Florida. I was the “low man on the totem pole.” The work was mindless and unfulfilling but it paid well. I had no power to make obvious decisions; I was just a cog in the machine.

One day while discouraged with my work I asked my boss if I could rework the marketing process to accomplish work faster and more efficiently.

She told me: “This is how it has always been done, just keep doing it.”

Aggravated with my lack of power, I went home determined to find a better way.

The next day, I returned to work and presented my solution. My boss immediately shot me down and told me to keep doing it the old way.

I went home frustrated and disheartened. Determined to make a change I created a brief presentation. The next day I arrived early to work and marched straight into the president’s office and asked for a meeting.

During our meeting, I suggested the company implement the new process to save hundreds of hours of work a year. I also offered to resign if we didn’t implement it because I had clearly jumped over my boss’s head.

The company would go on to implement the process and I was hired on as a consultant when I returned to college.

This simple decision to take control changed my life forever.



# Amber Naslund

<http://brasstackthinking.com>

Sometimes, initiative can be about taking your fear and excuses and kicking them straight to the curb.

About four years ago, I was laboring in a job that wasn't making me happy. That's not an uncommon tale. But yet I kept going to work every day, thinking something would change. And it didn't. And it didn't.

Until one day I took my best friend to lunch, and she asked me - point blank - why I didn't just quit. And oh, I had a litany of excuses: money, security, the typical stuff. Until I realized - smack in the middle of that conversation - that nothing was changing without my creating momentum.

So I walked in and quit. On the spot. Defying convention and the meager three months' income I had in the back. Defying my status as a single mom with a mortgage. Defying my own notions of what kind of a professional I was or should be.

Four years later I've launched a successful business, landed a job that taps my passion, written a successful blog, published my first book...and gained a definitive sense that \*I\* am my own catalyst for change. The initiative I took then for \*myself\* will always remind me that I'm the one driving this train, and that I'm accountable to the person in the mirror most of all.

I want to work for you.



I'm Ian. I'm a nominee for the 2010 TX Social Media Award and I'm looking for a job in new media. Can you help? Click here.



# Ian Greenleigh

<http://daretocomment.com>

I landed my dream job by taking out a Facebook ad.

In early 2010, I decided that marketing was what interested me, but you wouldn't know it judging by my sales-heavy resume. I had been blogging a bit, and had built up a healthy Twitter following with no particular goal in mind. I was freelancing, selling custom blog setups and doing a bit of design work for a friend. It wasn't paying well, but I was starting to be recognized locally for my social media efforts.

In the first week of my job search, I had an interview at a cell phone kiosk in the mall. I didn't get a call back. The next week, I saw a post on the Bad Pitch blog about Grant Turck, who had taken out a Facebook ad, targeted PR agencies he wanted to work for, and seen great results. I sent Grant an email and set up a phone call. He gave me a few killer inside tips, and I took out my own ad.

The ad targeted local Facebook users that were management-level and above in marketing. It featured a photo of me, the fact that I had been nominated for the TX Social Media Awards, and a link to the Hire Me page on my blog.

After a week, the phone calls, emails and blog comments started to pour in. I was talking to a hiring manager every other day, and I had spent less than \$150 on the campaign. One of the calls was from Bazaarvoice, the company on the top of my list.

Someone at Bazaarvoice saw the ad and called me up to interview for their new Social Media Manager position. Four interviews and a presentation later, I had my dream job.

**Initiative is the magic that makes a row of dominos fall. Sometimes the dominos fall beautifully, and sometimes the momentum comes to an abrupt and unexpected stop, despite all of our best efforts. Most importantly, none of it—good or bad—ever happens without taking the initiative to poke the box.**

**Bryan Johnson**





# Owen JJ Stone

<http://owenjjstone.com>

The other day I went out to dinner with the family. I sat in the back with my daughter and her mother drove. As we pulled out of the driveway, my three year old says, “L for Leiyah!” Her mother and I looked around looking for a sign or something that she could be pulling this from.

She said it again. We said, “OK, Leiyah.” Drove to the restaurant and she said, “look, Mommy, we make a L!” The position we were sitting in the car did form the letter L. WOW. Two adults out witted by a three year old.

Thinking out of the box is so important. You don’t have to be the smartest or the richest to be the best. Sometimes it just takes creativity. Get out of your box and start looking at things in your world differently and something awesome might happen to you.

# Bryan Johnson

<http://getbraintree.com>

CELL PHONES were hot in 1999. Wanting one myself, but not wanting to pay retail price, I found an independent dealer in the Yellow Pages who'd give me a deal.

After meeting at the local mall to pick up the phone, the agent said: "Hey, you've got a lot of energy... why don't you come sell phones for me? I'll pay you \$40 for each activation." As I was currently looking for a way to make money that wasn't hourly based, the proposal was intriguing.

I took him up on the opportunity and started selling. On the second day, I thought, "If I'm selling phones for him, why can't others sell phones for me?"

I stopped selling and drove home as fast as I could. I called around and, within a week, I had a wholesaler lined up, my training completed, and I was earning \$200 per activated phone. After becoming comfortable with the sales and activation process myself, I recruited college friends (and subsequently their friends) to sell for me. My first foray into entrepreneurship paid my way through college and whet my appetite for building businesses.

Initiative is the magic that makes a role of dominos fall. Sometimes the dominos fall beautifully and sometimes the momentum comes to an abrupt and unexpected stop, despite best efforts. Most importantly, none of it—good or bad—ever happens without taking the initiative to poke the box.





## AJ Leon

<http://ajleon.me>

On a random New York City evening in November 2008, I walked into a small independent movie theatre in the East Village. On this one night only, they were playing “War Child” a documentary on the life and times of London-based Hip Hop artist Emmanuel Jal, an ex-Sudanese war child and one of the so-called “Lost Boys” of Sudan.

The documentary told the story of a child who had lost everything he ever knew at the age of six, who grew up as an orphan in UN refugee camps, who was forced into a militia when he was ten years old to kill people he knew nothing about, and who was finally rescued by a brave woman who smuggled him on a cargo plane headed to Kenya. At the end of the film, Emmanuel stands on a piece of ground saying his life’s mission is to build a school in his hometown of Leer, Sudan because “the education of his people will keep his story from being repeated”.

When the film ended, there was a live Q&A session with the producers. I sat and listened to the questions, but no one seemed to care about the one question that was burning me up inside. Did Emmanuel build that school? Was his redemption complete? I was the last hand raised, and asked my question to which the reply was “no they hadn’t been able to raise the funding”.

I was stunned. A story that compelling should move mountains. When I walked outside, I saw Emmanuel, and somehow mustered the courage to walk right up to him and tell him that I had no money, but I knew how to start fires. And that I could guarantee we would raise all the money within six months. (side note: I had never raised money nor worked with a non-profit in my life)

The following day, before his flight back to London, we met at in his hotel lobby, and I sketched out on a napkin “Emma Academy Project”. Right then and there, we named the school after the woman who had rescued him. And right then and there, we decided we wouldn’t stop until the last brick was dropped.

Six months, a community of 10,000 strong and hundreds of disparate acts of fundraising later, we raised all the funds needed and broke ground in Leer. One brief moment of audacity was all it took.

And now over a thousand children a world away have access to an education that will change the trajectory of their entire lives.



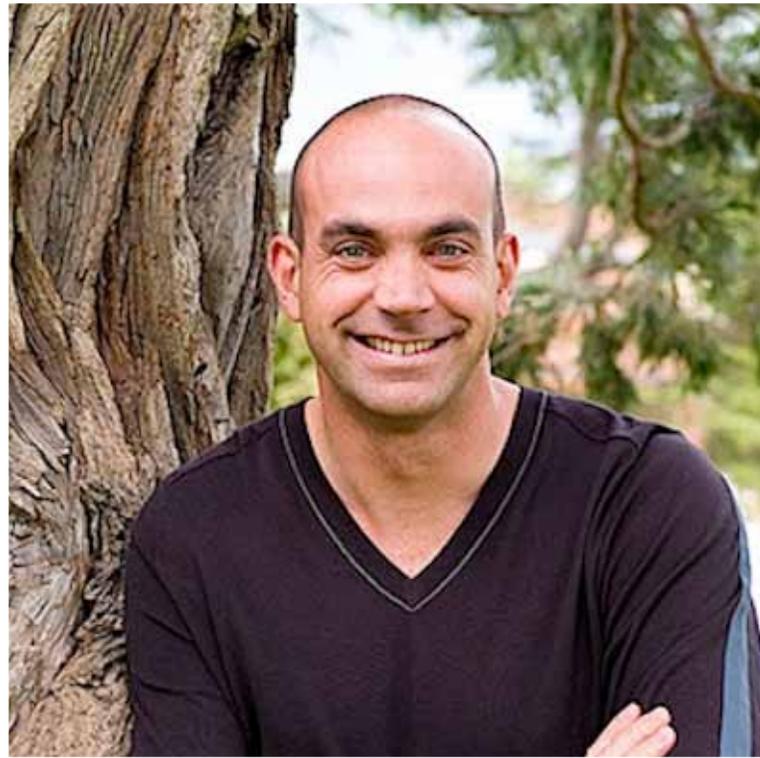
# Laurie Davis

<http://www.eFlirtExpert.com>

When I was 18, I wanted to be a rock star. As a student at Berklee College of Music, I met an alumnus who owned an entertainment company and I had high hopes of being his next lead singer. When we met, he told me more about his other business—a music education service. Through stream of consciousness, he blurted out a business challenge: He didn't have enough time to focus on the education side of things though it had higher margins than the entertainment company.

One week later, I showed up to meet him, notebook in hand, and ran through a list of innovative ideas for his music lesson business. If he did these things, I said, his revenue would dramatically climb. He stared at me, listening patiently, mouth agape as I outlined my 3 page manifesto for a business that wasn't even mine. When I finished, he said, "Great ideas. And I know exactly the person to do all this. YOU."

I didn't become a Director of Operations at 18 without taking some initiative. What I've learned is that inspired moments happen when you least expect it. I didn't scribble down business ideas in a notebook 11 years ago because I wanted a job; I was just trying to help someone out. The same happened with my first business, an event planning company—the demand came before the LLC. Similarly, what once was a hobby helping my friends date online morphed into something that no one could have expected—my internationally recognized brand, eFlirt Expert. Ideas generated by circumstances can often become the most powerful ones in your life. Being ambitious isn't necessarily always about climbing the ladder; it's about noticing opportunities and taking advantage of them.



# Loïc Le Meur

<http://loiclemeur.com>

Have you read *Blink* by Malcolm Gladwell? If you haven't you should read it, it's one of the rare books that deeply changed the way I think.

I can summarize it in one sentence: when you meet someone you get an impression in the first minute of that person and how you get along. Trust your first feelings, they're right most of the time.

Why would you need hours of interviews and references with someone you have a "positive blink" with? Just trust your first impression.

I have met the youngest person ever invited to the World Economic Forum in Davos a few weeks ago, Trevor Richard Dougherty (mind you, he's only 18 and already has his wikipedia page)

I was the moderator of the Davos dinner about social networking with leaders such as Marissa Mayer of Google or LinkedIn's founder Reid Hoffman and Trevor had his table and was one of the speakers. I was immediately impressed. When he came to meet me in a corridor at the Annual Meeting and asked:

"Do you know anyone looking for an intern" I immediately said "yes, join my company Seismic anytime".

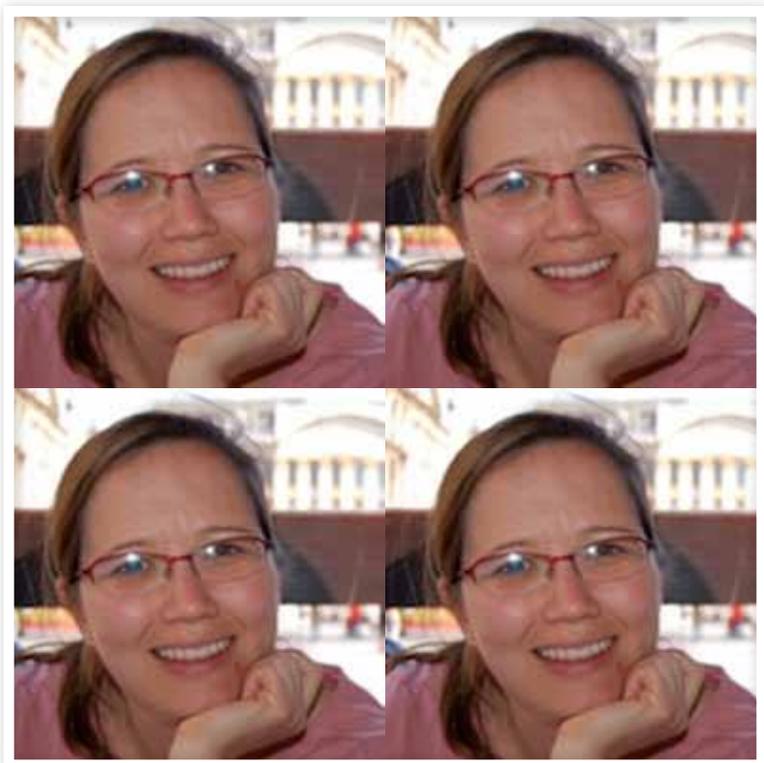
He was surprised I answered this fast as I was entering a session. We then exchanged a few direct messages on Twitter and agreed on a salary and he's joining us today, Trevor told the whole story in the Washington Post.

I knew I did not need more than a few minutes. Get a good blink about someone and try, you will see it rarely tricks you. Oh, and it's not only about recruiting of course.

**Ideas generated by circumstances can often become the most powerful ones in your life. Being ambitious isn't necessarily always about climbing the ladder; it's about noticing opportunities and taking advantage of them.**

**Laurie Davis**





# Rachel Happe

<http://www.thesocialorganization.com>

There is no reason for me to be an entrepreneur. By most measures I've had a successful and interesting career—beyond what I could have hoped for when I graduated. But I've never been happy with the status quo—particularly in the business world where organizations did not care—in a practical way—about the wider context in which they operated. As online communities started to change communications, I saw the power and economic shift that would eventually happen. That excited me because it means that the complex needs of society—whether flexibility in working conditions for employees or green energy practices—would get more attention.

At a practical level, I understand how large organizations operate, how software works, and the new communications dynamic. I saw the opportunity to help the individuals within organizations see how to transform the way they operate. I got excited about building a business that uses the network dynamic to ensure every constituent group gets more out of it than they contribute. Two years ago, Jim Storer and I started The Community Roundtable to do just that. It has been all that I expected and so much more.



# Simon Salt

<http://incslinger.posterous.com>

On 10th February 2011 I opened a box that I had been waiting to arrive for almost nine months. In that box was a dream, it also contained the previous nine months blood, sweat and tears. It contained thoughts that had consumed me night and day, sometimes to the detriment of my health and my relationships. It contained my hopes and my self-doubts.

The nine-month gestation period was both ironic and allegorical, for while the box did not contain a human child what it did contain I had both conceived and birthed. The contents of this box represented my feeble attempt to leave behind a legacy, something to be remembered by. Something to carry my name forward to the next generation.

Far from relieving my doubts, examining the contents of the box only created new ones. For I realized that the contents of the box was not an end but a new beginning, just as with a child, birthing is the transition from one phase to another, not the end of something. Now the life must be shaped and given direction.

So what was in the box that could possibly affect me this way?

My book.

# Ari Greenberg

<http://arigreenberg.com>

When I was in high school, I had the unique opportunity of being invited to be a ball boy for a charity tennis tournament at the Playboy Mansion in Los Angeles (this is what happens when you grow up in Lala land...)

As an avid reader of Mad Magazine, I knew that if you took a photograph with a celebrity holding a copy of Mad that they'd print your photo, and give you a free subscription. Since I figured that Hugh Hefner would be at the event (after all, it was at his house) I decided to bring along a camera and a copy of Mad with me.

While taking a break from picking up tennis balls, I saw Hef emerge from his house. Nervously, I ran up to him and asked him to pose with me and the magazine. Lucky for me, he obliged.

I quickly sent in the photo and lo and behold, I soon found my photo in Mad Magazine with my new best friend, Hugh Hefner.

Want proof? [Here's the photo.](#)





# Nick Seguin

<http://nickseguin.com>

In 2008 Startup Weekend was held in Columbus, Ohio. My company sponsored and I also participated. It was a great experience: my team put together a compelling company that won a \$50,000.00 grant to help continue its growth.

I was excited about the capital, but more excited about what I had just been through. In few other places had I experienced similar energy and focus on creation. I approached the then interim CEO and asked how I could run Startup Weekends. I paid my own way to an event in Indianapolis, learned the ropes, and began running weekends around the country and world.

Startup Weekend, the organization, was sold and the strategy broadened. I remained active as a facilitator and connector throughout the network. Taking weekends to travel and do the work necessary for a successful event allowed me to build a global network of founders, funders and people friendly to startups. Eventually, my Startup Weekend network made the connection to the Kauffman Foundation where I am now building initiatives that help founders and startups on the highest level possible.

Seeking to understand the source of my incredible experience and committing to facilitating that for others paved the path to the top of the ecosystem.



# Gretchen Rubin

<http://www.happiness-project.com>

I spent a year on my “happiness project,” when I test-drove the wisdom of the ages, the current scientific studies, and the lessons from popular culture about how to be happier.

Research shows that novelty and challenge bring happiness. People who go new places, meet new people, and try new things are happier. However, I didn’t think this would be true in my case; mastery and familiarity (I thought) made me happy.

But for my project, I had to test this theory.

A friend offhandedly said, “Why don’t you start a blog?”

“Oh, I don’t want to do that,” I answered. “I’m not tech-y, I don’t read blogs, I like to write long, not short.”

But I needed something novel and challenging for my experiment. Without knowing exactly what to do, I sat down at the computer and started my blog. o

Five years later, my blog is an enormous engine of happiness for me—and I came so close to dismissing the idea entirely. If I hadn’t sat down at my desk that particular evening, a March 27, I might never have started the endeavor that has changed my life. The biggest obstacle to overcome was myself.

**Trust your first feelings, they're right most of the time.**

**Loic Le Meur**

**The single biggest pool of untapped natural resource in this world, is human good intentions that never translate into action.**

**Cindy Gallop**



# Sydney Owen

<http://sydneyowen.com>

Remember that one time that my life felt like the movie, *Serendipity*? Let me give you the skinny. I went to SXSW in 2009 as a senior in college and walked out of there with three interviews and a job offer before I graduated. I met my first boss at that conference, and moved from Tampa to Chicago three months after returning home from SXSW. Fast forward to SXSW 2010. I ran into a friend who asked if I wanted to go skydiving. I said yes. In the interim, I learned how to skydive, moved to Austin for a “dream job,” and then had my dream opportunity fall in my lap. Now I am starting my own company, skydiving every day (weather permitting) and I couldn’t be happier. All because of one little conference.





# Amber Soletti

<http://www.OnSpeedDating.Com>

I was 32, single living in NYC and SO unimpressed with the dating scene. I had tried pretty much every singles event out there and then decided to give speed dating a go. I signed up for an event for singles 25-35. Upon arriving, I found myself surrounded by a sea of short, unattractive, socially awkward men. My first date started with the guy saying, "I know you, you're on Match. Com. I emailed you 10 times and you never responded to me. I paid my \$40 and now you have to talk to me for 8 minutes." That brutal experience was the catalyst for me being inspired to create my own service where I could finally meet the type of men I was looking for.

A few months later, I along with a business partner, introduced OnSpeedDating.Com. Instead of offering events based on just age range, we host over 75 niche events themed around dating "deal breakers" and preferences like "Hot for Teacher", "Men With Accents Are Hot", "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes", "Inked" for tattooed singles, "Non-Practicing Jew" night, "HOT or NOT" for attractive singles, and "Size Matters" for guys and gals with a hankering for height.

By taking matters into my own hands, I was able to raise the bar on the NY singles scene while at the same time significantly improving both my income and dating life.



# Azita Ardakani

<http://www.lovesocial.org>

3 years ago, I was finishing my Sociology degree with a staggering amount of student debt, no idea of what kind of career I would have or what my future held. I was 22, living at my mom's house, working a 9-5 that left me exhausted, empty and unfulfilled.

The 9-5 had to be done in the mean time to help with my mom's mortgage, but no one owned me after 5. For the first time I recognized that one can create another world when the one they are living doesn't serve them. I volunteered on the projects I cared about and my heart pump harder; I knew I was going in the right direction.

6 months into volunteering on the digital strategy on a project focused on the global clean water crisis titled "Summit On the Summit" my preparation met my destiny. They asked me to join their team. I quit my job, held my breath and jumped.

Fast forward 1 year. I own my own cause focused digital agency. I no longer check in and out of my life. My biggest lesson? If you would do it for free you should probably make it a career.

# Andy Traub

<http://www.Andytraub.com>

I live in the sparsely populated state of South Dakota. After reading *Linchpin* by Seth Godin, I desperately wanted to connect with other Linchpins and connect Linchpins to each other. I emailed Seth and asked him permission to use the Linchpin cover and name and he gave it to me. I started the Unofficial Linchpin Podcast and I've shipped 12 episodes connecting with members of Seth's SAMBA program and other Linchpins. To date, we've been downloaded over 25,000 times. People are shipping and connecting because of the show and that is what makes it a success. Oh yeah, I get to talk to really cool people too. One guy in South Dakota connecting Linchpins all over the world. All I had to do was ask.





# Ron J Williams

<http://www.snapgoods.com>

Labor Day 2009, NYC: I wanted to surprise my girlfriend by grabbing a motorcycle for the weekend and cruising around the empty streets of the city I love with the woman I love. Romantic. But there's a problem: even though I'd been licensed for years, I didn't own a bike at the time. I needed a weekend's worth of motorcycle but the rental option wasn't there.

So I jumped on a classifieds site and posted my very first rent/borrow want ad. "Hey, I'll leave you a deposit and pay you \$100 per day if you've got a motorcycle to lend me." An hour later a guy with the same first name as me responded that he was interested and had an old Harley that'd be perfect for cruising. We negotiated details, and set up times, and did the silent online-classified prayer: "I hope this guy isn't an axe murderer." Did I mention that I was rolling with \$2000 in cash for deposit?

That Saturday I snuck out of bed, asking my girlfriend if she wanted to go "biking" around 1pm. When I showed up, she was outside in workout gear with her 12 speed and I was sitting on a glorious machine looking like the Fonz. She broke out into a big grin and we spent the weekend exploring the city on the back of a machine I didn't own. "Oh snap!" I thought, "What if everything were available to be consumed as needed?"

So I called my friend John Goodwin and we started building SnapGoods to make this kind of network and neighborhood powered commerce safe and possible for everyone.

**Try this simple exercise today: Test your energy meter when traveling around town and talking with people. Make note of when it gets too high or too low, or stays stagnant in the middle. It's when the meter is off the charts that you know you are doing something right. Follow that.**

**Carla Blumenthal**





## Jo-Ann Tan

<http://www.squidoo.com/a-most-audacious-experiment>

Can you poke the box by leaving it? In 2009, I left a strategy job that paid nicely, but left me feeling soulless. I planned to take time to reflect on what I really wanted to be when I grew up, but in reality it was a nerve-wrecking few months living in NYC with no income, while my partner amassed grad school bills. Don't tell my parents, but I was unemployed, uninsured and at one point risked becoming undocumented (I'm not American). In desperation, I started looking for jobs like my old job because I knew how.

Then I stumbled across an amazing position at Acumen Fund. But I felt totally unqualified and on paper, I was. They wanted a web 2.0 expert, applications were due in 36 hours and also I had to build a Squidoo lens. "WTF is Squidoo?" I didn't blog, hardly used Facebook, and didn't know what web 2.0 meant. It was a lost cause. I remember walking away from my computer in frustration. Then I circled back, bootstrapped a "Get Jo-Ann a job" lens and emailed 10 people. And surprisingly, my lens actually jumped to a decent Squidoo lensrank in less than 24 hours.

I got an interview.



# Jon Thomas

<http://www.presentationadvisors.com>

One of my all-time favorite sitcoms is/was the *Cosby Show*. I'm a child of the 80's, so I grew up on the parenting of Cliff and Claire Huxtable.

One of my favorite episodes is when Vanessa introduces the family to her fiancée, Dabnis Brickey. A surprise to everyone, this prompts Bill Cosby to explain exactly why they don't like Dabnis, and it's not because of his age or his profession, or anything to do with him, but how he was presented by Vanessa. Cosby delivers a quote that would change my professional life and define me as a presentation designer.

"You see, it's in the presentation. That's the way she brought you here...on a garbage can lid"

Four years ago I was following the same presentation principles we all inherited as we went through school and business. If you're giving a presentation, use slides with titles and bullet points and maybe a few small images here and there.

Ask anyone. There's no denying that presentation visuals are terrible. We all have our horror stories of being an audience member slayed by bullet points. However, when we sit down to create our presentations, we're held prisoner inside the confines of slideware. We follow the prompts to add text because that's what PowerPoint is telling us and that's all we've ever known.

Until one day I thought to myself, "There has to be a better way." I decided to start poking that presentation design box. I went on a mission to change the way we view the idea of a presentation, and particularly how we design our visuals. I wanted to SAVE AUDIENCES, because I too am an audience member. I wanted to save presenters, because their stories MATTER. I researched, read, and attended workshops, with the faith that I would find a solution to the problems plaguing presenters around the world.

Soon thereafter, I founded Presentation Advisors to help others tell visually engaging stories. People may look at me strange when I say I'm a presentation designer, as they're not sure exactly what that means, but it only gives me an opportunity to open their eyes.

I'm just one of a few presentation designers out there, but we're a feisty bunch ready to not just poke holes in the traditional PowerPoint box, but tear that box apart.



# Carla Blumenthal

<http://carlablumenthal.com>

You can see it in people. Everyone has an aura surrounding them, emitting rays of it in every direction, almost like their skin doesn't encase their full body. Cities have it too. Workplaces, schools, even your neighborhood deli.

Energy.

I've always been an enthusiastic person, curious and hopeful about where life would lead me. After grad school, I was living in a city with a job offer at my doorstep. I had the world waiting for me, and it seemed to have landed at my feet. Despite my good fortune, my energy was at its lowest. The city was not clicking for me. I had to do something.

I knew New York City had an energy that would force me to learn about myself, about living, giving, and doing. Even when visiting, I felt at home with the streets and people. I did everything I could to find the funds and a job to move to the city, and here I am.

Try this simple exercise today: Test your energy meter when traveling around town and talking with people. Make note of when it gets too high or too low, or stays stagnant in the middle. It's when the meter is off the charts that you know you are doing something right. Follow that.



# David Spinks

<http://www.whatspinksthinks.com>

Indecision was always my worst enemy. It wasn't the risk that prevented me from taking the leaps I knew I needed... it was the uncertainty of it all. Starting a business is one of the most uncertain things I've ever done, but every step of the way has been incredibly rewarding. When you believe in something with all your heart, taking initiative is the only rational choice. I fight to make my visions a reality.



# Andrew Norcross

<http://andrewnorcross.com>

As I was cruising along with a good corporate job in investment management, I had a gnawing feeling that I wasn't doing what I was "supposed" to do. I wanted to fix things, solve problems, and basically tinker with the world around me. Not aggregate p/e ratios and chart out modified Dietz method. So in December 2009, I left my position and started out with exactly 2 clients. 18 months later, I'm turning away more work than I do. It's been nothing less than amazing.

**Step to the ledge  
and you will be seen.**

**Dane Sanders**

**Fortune favors  
the bold.**

**Nick Reese**





# Laura Fitton

<http://oneforty.com/pistachio>

I knew it would be hard to do a startup. So hard, I was convinced I would not do it.

But when I finally realized nobody else was going to do it for me I just could not let the idea go. The morning after 3 months worth of planning, investors and staffing fell through, I woke up set on getting it done somehow. I realized pretty much everyone I knew in the industry would be at SXSW. I scavenged a free couch, got a plane ticket sponsored and headed to SXSW (2009) to see if I couldn't raise enough angel money to give it a go.

I didn't know much about fundraising (I got a lot of it wrong). I didn't know anything about software (never saw it built or even worked a company that built it). I knew even less about management (never really had an employee before).

But there wasn't anyone else going to do it, and it needed done.

Somehow I've been lucky enough to crank along on it for two years now, building <http://oneforty.com> into the central resource for social business apps, how-to guides and experts that it is today.

The best part has been how much help poured in from the sidelines once people saw how determined I was.



# Sarah Wallace

<http://www.sarahwallace.com>

This may come across as bragging, but I can honestly say I've achieved every goal that I've ever set my mind to: journalist, editor, analyst, wife & mother, successful freelance writer, then analyst again.

Did I face rejection along the way? Yes. Was I persistent till I reached my goals? Yes.

My advice. If you don't take a chance, you don't stand a chance.

# Monique Johnson

<http://www.another20something.com>

I received a huge wake up call 2 years ago when I experienced 3 CEO's fired; a major takeover from another major bank; and lastly seeing people drop like flies from their cubes from the result of massive lay-offs. I am very blessed to have survived all of this but it just made me unhappy and angry. I quickly realized that I had no control of where my career was heading by working for a major bank and they could end my career with a snap! I was convinced that something else was out there and that's when I came across the blogosphere and Jenny Blake's Life After College was my introduction.

I engrossed myself as much as I could in blogs that covered various topics and that's when the light bulb went off. I discovered that I really would like to pursue social media marketing and digital media. I launched my first blog that honestly did not do well but I used it as leverage to interview some key people; gained a social media internship; and took the initiative to expand my network. The summer of 2010 I pledged to myself that I would attend as many networking/ social media/tech events possible and that's when I met the co-founders of Genjuice during their national tour. Since then, I have joined Genjuice as their Community Manager; been hired as the marketing director for Coach Jennie; and I recently launched my new blog Another Twenty-Something where I hope to inspire 20-somethings to start their next project and conquer their fears.

A lot has changed since that wake up call and I know I am on the right path to saying goodbye to my 9 to 5. Stay tuned!





# Ryan Martin

<http://www.followmeeverywhere.com>

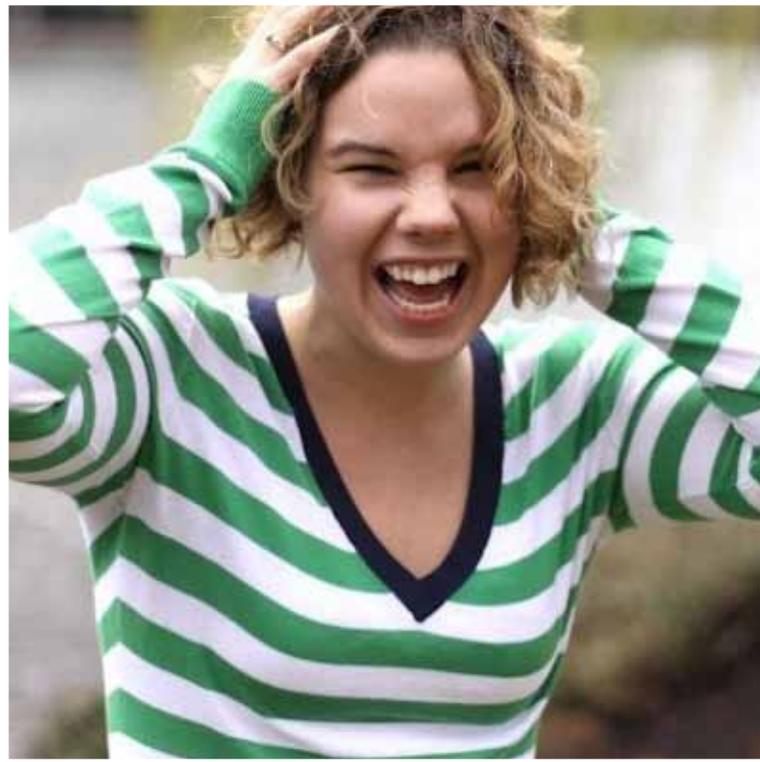
I'm a firm believer in the saying, "It's not what you know, but who you know." Seriously!

Networking, alongside with travel, has opened opportunities to me that I would've never thought possible. I'll leave you with 2 examples, one from traveling and one while at SXSW.

When I traveled through Europe in 2007, I met a couple Brazilians in Prague and partied with them for a few days. They invited me to Rio de Janeiro and in February of 2009, I took them up on their offer (whether they meant it or not). Unbeknownst to me, my friend was highly connected in Brazil and was able to get me into the actual Sambadrome to dance in the Carnival parade. What an amazing experience that I would've never had without meeting others through travel.

At SXSW 2011, I met a friend of a friend who is organizing a meet-up in Cancun the following year. After a few beers and great conversation, I was offered a free trip to Mexico in exchange for organizing the event. A pretty good trade-off if you ask me and another fantastic networking opportunity. Again, not what you know, but who you know.

So get out there and be social. Who knows what opportunities may present themselves.



# Jenna Forstrom

<http://bitesizebrews.com>

Half way through my first year of college, I realized I needed an internship. I was going to school in Boston and wanted to head home to Oregon for the summer. I sent out my resume to five business women (my only requirement) who were friends with my parents. Interviewed over Christmas break and ended up being the first intern for the General Manager of Nike Global Women's Fitness, which was formed months before I started working at Nike. Ended up with a life long mentor and had a wicked awesome summer.

**The best part has been how much help poured in from the sidelines once people saw how determined I was.**

**Laura Fitton**

**When you believe in something with all your heart, taking initiative is the only rational choice.**

**David Spinks**





Hint: click the cover above to learn more about *Poke the Box*.

## Learn More

More information about *Poke the Box* and The Domino Project at [www.thedomino.com](http://www.thedomino.com).

*SXSW Pokes* was written by the contributors and curated by Amber Rae.

Designed by Alex Miles Younger.

Thanks for reading!