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# STEP ONE

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MUSIC IS A RESULT OF THE  
PROCESS - NOT THE PROCESS  
ITSELF

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## Identify what art means to you.

This is something that has been of utmost importance to me and is surprisingly elusive in terms of actually coming to your own conclusion on. On the surface, it seems elementary, but through further analysis that in my opinion requires the type of self awareness that comes with discipline, it often seems the root of one's motivations is different than what initially seemed obvious. The possibilities with art are endless and wrapping your head around what it is that you're trying to achieve can be your first step to creating something of true personal value.

## In identifying your motivations, break it down: What are your basic objectives with your art? Pleasure? Money? Fame? ...?

Objectives can manifest themselves in many ways. If you search your internal motivations, maybe you'll find that you actually just want to be a musician because you think it's going to get you into a relationship or make you a load of money without having to work at a bank. Maybe you find that the lack of what you haven't received in the past – be it love, or acknowledgement, or appreciation – will be counteracted by the validation of people with whom you have no emotional investment in. Maybe though, you simply pursue music for pleasure - simply because you just want to create a statement or make a sound. Regardless of what your objectives are, (I certainly don't think anyone has the ability or the right to judge one of these things over the other) the deeper you can identify where your motivations and intentions stem, the more you can be confident in your trajectory. Don't be ashamed if your objectives are based in things that others find questionable, simply knowledge that each path has different roads to success and the sooner you can wrap your head around yours, the clearer your methods will be to define.

## Recognize that each of these motivations have separate pathways.

In my case, basically I realized that I do art because I genuinely enjoy it, but over time, and even more so: I believe from a very young age I have had real problems articulating true emotions in day to day life. From whatever reason, be it a hypersensitivity to 'feelings', childhood trauma, or something like a fear of confrontation, or ultimately a need to control my environment based on a primal fear of death, my inability to articulate or immerse myself in true emotions has been a liability that seemed to find a cathartic outlet through musical expression. So in a way, my musical vision is almost a direct link to emotional growth for me and as such, a very important and necessary avenue for me to have had access to. Of course, whatever psychological underpinnings are contributing to that are unfortunately beyond me, but just maybe I think that the idea of having art in my life is a way to articulate emotions that I find difficult in normal walks of life. Recognizing that took a

long time for me, but as a result I can easily identify where my parameters are for things such as staying with music that no longer resonates with me and the ill effects that would cause. If you find through your own analysis something similar, then what this creative academy can provide will be very literal, however if fame or money is at your root, this will apply in a more roundabout sense as the methods are similar but the pathways are different.

**If music is to be an honest reflection of your internal barometer, you must be willing to follow the lead.**

A decision that I had to come to at one point, when I realized that I was making a living from music and that I needed to sell it, is that although I don't like selling things, I need to. It's a practical reality of being a human on this plane at this period in time. Therefore: I need to embrace this and learn to not be either afraid or embarrassed of it. The idea of art being an accompaniment to my personal growth and, therefore, a type of pleasure, means that I have to be willing to follow where life leads me and do it unapologetically, and that also extends into the monetization of it. To be hesitant to adhere value to what I do is a direct reflection of a type of low self worth, and that leads again, to creative delusions and dead ends.

To flow my own internal barometer requires a willingness to be open to subtle forms of suggestion that simply living will present. Maybe I'm feeling confused, or overwhelmed, or angry...any number of emotions. Taking stock of what I am experiencing from an objective, observational point of view is what I will refer to as 'leads'. These "leads" present themselves slowly over time with "writing blocks" as the interim between their appearances.

In my experience, those writing blocks have been fundamentally very useful, because in recognizing that they're just a period of time in which I'm not supposed to be writing is something that allows me to get a lot of other things finished in the interim.

Get your house clean, cables organised, computer set up – when an idea comes, you're ready, and also you are in an emotionally healthier place in that you did not judge or fear your lack of creative inspiration when it wasn't 'ripe' yet. Never fear: It returns, but don't rush it. I can't stress that enough. We all have creative periods of inactivity. To assume these moments are 'here to stay' results only in useless anxiety. Take your time... breathe.

Getting practical things finished, the nuts and bolts of life while waiting for the creative catalysts in my life to gather momentum, has ultimately helped me create my entire body of work in a natural way.

Music is something that, (through of course, experience as well as trial and error), I've developed techniques for. But the harder parts of life are the more mundane things: keeping the house clean, making sure that all your cables are organised, your computer is set up, all your files are documented in a way that's logical enough to be able to retrieve them, your family is aware that you are not putting work above them in terms of priorities... This way, when the creative juices start flowing again, I'm ready to EFFICIENTLY utilize the time. Rest assured, the creative juices do come back, even if it sometimes takes five or ten years. You might not have any ideas in your head right now, but maybe that's great because your drawers are a mess, or you have a bunch of things that need to be handled practically with family matters, or kids, or finances, or mowing the lawn. The more you stress about not writing, the more prone you are to that creative block lasting an inordinate amount of time, so embrace it. (I sound like a broken record here, but its because I can't stress it enough)

The next step as the creative fires start to rekindle again is to identify in your life and creative world what your current "process" actually is. And be honest.

This is something that I still struggle with, but in honest, that struggle is what creates the work. A muscle can't grow without something to push back against it, and make no mistake: Your creative process is very much a 'muscle' when it comes to exercising your personal process. Struggle with identifying your process, by all means, because that will mean in a very practical way that by the time you've articulated that phase of your creative life, you will have completely immersed in and absorbed the experience... I struggle with everything, but at least I'm 25 years into it, so my perspective on it has that breadth of experience. For a long time, I thought that perhaps my reasons for writing music were steeped into some sort of altruism, like I was doing it for others, or I was doing it because I had to do it and that it was a physical, spiritual, biological yearning that needed to be actualized, but then it became readily apparent that there truly was no reason, the process in its entirety is a moment to moment journey that ends up being a definition of a life well lived, rather than any grand 'message'.

*Is it then about self actualization?*

For me, I'm finding now that it is indeed a form of that. But if you're doing it for yourself, dig deeper. Maybe it's about doing it so that you can be financially secure?

Or perhaps it is rooted in simply a profound insecurity, wherein other people are validating your emotional output and in some way validating your feeling of worthiness? The point is: explore it without judging it. The way is the way and all that...it's about observing your motivations as the phases of life roll by, and keeping check on your own frame of mind in light of it. You cut yourself a lot of slack when you can be objective about yourself amidst the drama of life.

For example: my focus in life right now seems to be about discovering who I am as I grow older. The practical application of why I would do that is because I want to be at peace with myself in an environment that is fundamentally chaotic. That's something I can see a human yearning in more than, "I want to make a million dollars, I want to play a big show, I want to be validated by people that I don't have an emotional investment in." etc.... Although modern life certainly makes those things of some value to me, at the root of it, I simply just do not want to be afraid. I want to learn to be compassionate towards myself so I can be compassionate towards others. There is no honesty in the desire to do what I do if I am fundamentally self destructive. If my mantra is 'I'm a fucking idiot...' then on some level, that's the exact sentiment my art is displaying towards others. I don't want to be uncomfortable, and in the face of relentless chaos, I want to be calm enough and at peace enough to be able to deal with it appropriately. That's self-actualization for me at this point in my life.

***"You can only cognize that which you are subtler than"***

How much of why you create is because it's where your identity lies? Are we so insecure that we need this art to define us and, without it, (if for example you went deaf, or you lost your ability to create in some way), would you cease to exist?

Identifying where your process is rooted allows you to shed a lot of the fear of if you've "lost it" or if a creative slump is going to "last forever" as it becomes obvious that creativity is a BYPRODUCT of the process of living and far from the process itself.

It's very easy to be in the midst of a creative slump and think, "I was never supposed to write. Maybe it was all a fluke." A while ago, I spent a lot of time invested in a process of smoking dope and doing things that helped me contribute to my band, *Strapping Young Lad*. So when *Strapping* ended, in the face of it, I found I couldn't create at all. I thought, "Well, I've lost this. I was never actually a musician." I thought it must of been the drugs, or the people around me. Realising that the fear of losing it was the reason why I wasn't feeling creative, was when that creative slump finally ended. I recognized that by changing my habits towards things that were ultimately

more productive for me, yes- I ceased to be able to create as I once did, but in aggressive analysis of my current frame of mind, I was able to uncover a new process that was simply waiting for me to catch up to.

When I'd previously gone to a psychiatrist and expressed how I was feeling about my creative block, they asked me why I hadn't simply tried writing without any thought or sense of where it was going to lead. I hadn't actually written freely before, I was too conscious of whether the audience would like it, or whether my band would like it, my insecurity was driving the boat... maybe it wasn't heavy enough for what was acceptable in my genre etc....

Starting to write something without a thought of if it would ever be heard or released is where I broke through. I recognized that this problem had very little to do with music. It had much more to do with *why* I was writing music. *It's about the process itself, not the result of the process.*

## Be prepared to share.

This is something that I'm still learning. This extends to making yourself open and willing to learn from your own reaction when people give you feedback for your art. In the past, I've been very closed off to other people's opinions. As soon as I heard them, I shut them down in my own mind. Why? Because my personality was so invested in me being the guy that was responsible for it all. Devin Townsend - not the smelly 15-year-old that couldn't hang at a party. Nope- A musician that people *respected* was something I could hang my hat on, and there was no way I was going to include people in that. Having objective criticism come into my life or hearing others sharing their ideas was almost like an assault in some way to this identity I was creating. Ultimately though, as mentioned above...there is an inherent lack of self compassion in that thinking, and the cause and effect of that extends to creative decisions rooted in fear of it going away rather than joy of creating.

This doesn't mean you can passively sit back and wait for these changes to occur in yourself. The hippy rhetoric doesn't quite make sense to me, we need to be proactive. As a wise friend has said to me: there is a profound difference between anger and aggression. To be assertive with ourselves and our motivations without fear or anger requires the knowledge of the subtle differences between the two. Learning to fight calmly and with peace at your core is fundamental to not giving in to the ugliness of it.

*Better to be a warrior in a garden, than a gardener in a warzone*

More than anything else, putting yourself in a position where you're out of your comfort zone enough to be open to learn – this is a practical way for the next step of your creative motivations to come through. For me, this eBook and the idea of doing these online courses is a practical example of this. I'm trying to share, because I've been hung up about it for so many years and I'm finding that by just giving a little bit, you get a lot back. That old adage seems so cliché, but practically, it actually really works.



I drew this on the back of a tax return. It's a little boy and a little girl trying to share a teddy bear, and this teddy bear is **stressed**. Metaphorically, maybe the teddy bear is your creative process saying, "Give me a break, guys." and the boy and girl are the opposing parts of your person nature. (wow man... deeeep...)

The fear of people becoming more successful than you, or others achieving more than you, can lead to creative delusion, rooted in feeling like you need to write a "hit" rather than writing what is next in line in your creative process.

Look at *Devin Townsend Project*, for example. This is a sound I've been doing for 25 years. And in many ways, I've been 'over it' for many years. I want to write a symphony. I want to play bass. I want to write weird country music. To do *Devin Townsend Project* now requires a totally different mindset. Not just to do it, but to try to do it in a way that I care about. why do I continue? Because I realize it is still fundamentally healthy. There's a practical observation on it.

Often when I start writing for a new DTP, I think, "Oh my god. These other bands that I know, they're doing bigger things. They're doing better things. I need to write

something that will allow me to be as successful as them...I need to write a 'hit'" That's a trap in many ways, and it's been very helpful to recognize this.

Because if I'm being honest: it doesn't matter to me. As long as my bills are paid, and the people around me are happy, and I have enough time to be in pursuit of a personal sense of wellbeing, then I'm okay. You need to be careful what you wish for, and being in a massive, massive band would ultimately compromise other pursuits for me. You get what you deserve in many ways, and that's not ultimately a positive statement.

Now, to fly in the face of my utopian idea that you simply have to wait for your creative momentum to just 'show up', and that until that time, you just have to garden and sit in lotus position or something, there has been certain times in my career that I have been forced to summon creativity from thin air. I've managed to carve out a career for myself doing things that are typically and overwhelmingly non-commercial, but the ramifications of that in a business sense is that to keep the boat floating, I've had to learn about finances and be cognizant of the fact that I'm not always going to have years to wait for it to appear. There's been certain times where all of a sudden, I've been in a position where I have to create a product. I've had to make a record. In order for the boat to keep floating, I've had to put out something new.

So what do we do then?

Learning to force it while remaining emotionally connected to your work is a hard skill to learn that requires much effort and is something we hope only happens 5% of the time. When it does, if we're to produce something that we still care about and isn't flippant towards our audience, I believe the only real solution is to consciously put myself outside of my comfort zone: a new hobby, getting up at a different time, exercising, or a new sound. Put yourself in a situation that you're afraid of in some way, to present yourself with a new stimulus that you can draw from. This is a last resort, but it's ultimately one that works.

**The process of being in unfamiliar waters feeds the creative flow.**

My album *Ziltoid and the Omniscient*, for me, was an example of that. I needed something to write about. By finding myself in a bunch of really new situations, *Ziltoid* presented its theme to me simply by the sheer force of new situations being so dramatic to me (sobriety, people being born, people dying, quitting my band etc)

that by following an outside interest (puppets) and being willing to follow that into unfamiliar territories, I created something that I had a true interest in, as opposed to banging my head against a wall, chastising myself for not being able to do my 'old' process effectively anymore. It became a real example of being prepared to recognize the subtle cues.

Additionally though, recognizing when the process is creating unneeded drama simply to feed the creative machine, and knowing when to pull it back is pretty useful too:

“Well, I’m terrified of spiders, so I’m going to lock myself in a coffin full of spiders until that fear goes away.” Ultimately, are you doing that to move forward, or are you doing that to punish yourself into a pants-shitting catastrophe?

## STEP TWO

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LEARN TO UNDERSTAND YOUR  
LIMITATIONS

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Part of coaxing out a unique voice in yourself involves being willing to accept what is truly in your nature rather than replicating something that already exists in hopes that people will believe that it is in fact, YOUR truth.

Look at Frank Zappa for example. When I listen to Frank Zappa, I'm blown away by his brilliance. Although it's taken me many years, I see the control and sardonic qualities amidst a type of diligence with his band that verges on military. It's easy to compare what I do in my own mind to the elements of his work that I relate to, then become bummed out that my version of it falls short. Therein lies the key though: There are elements of what I do that draws influence from that type of music, but to overlook the aspects of WHY my work is different will only lead to comparison. Truly, I cannot do what he did, but conversely, nor could he have done what I do. It's the connection to self compassion that allows one to enjoy things for what they are, vs what they are not. It's easy to look toward a band or musician and think, "If I could only be like that, I would be happy. I'll copy this, I'll ape the obvious things going on the surface in hopes that I can participate in the things people enjoy about this." That might be a good way to start out, but ultimately, it's not going to sustain a career. Frank Zappa is from LA, he's a scientific mind, he can grow a moustache. That's not me – I'm from Vancouver, I like it when it rains, I'm not a big fan of social situations. My true nature is different than it is for someone like him. I can't grow a moustache if my life depended on it...

As much as you may idolize a musical style, performer or band, it's really important that you spend a good amount of time figuring out what it is about **you** that you can present to other people, so that when they hear you, they're hearing something that they're not familiar with. Everybody has a unique voice, and it involves trusting that the things you find yourself passionate about are worthy of expressing, and believe me - they are. As much room in the musical landscape as there is for massive, dramatic statement, there is equal room for subtle ones. In fact, the absence of either would be a tragedy. Don't rue one if you possess the other, that's not your trip.

And although imitation can be *technically* good, beyond that technical copy is where your uniqueness lies, and if that's hidden from yourself through years of telling yourself that you suck, or that you'll never be as good as \_\_\_\_\_, you could resent it or reject the things that you uniquely have to offer because you've spent a lifetime suppressing it as "bad", "unworthy", or "not good enough." Ultimately, people will want to listen to something they haven't heard before, and in everyone is that. Just again, if your goal is 'pleasure,' which is what this whole thing is based on, be prepared that varying amounts of people will take interest in it. Everyone has their own truth and popular society may not be interested in yours, but if pleasure and artistic expression is the goal, you're going to have to get over that.

After I recorded *Ocean Machine: Biomech*, I couldn't get it signed. That's how I started *HevyDevy Records*. At the time the band that was really popular was *White Zombie*, and they'd just released their second record. I remember finishing the mix for *Ocean Machine* and then hearing *White Zombie* on the radio and thinking, "My work doesn't sound anything like that, so it's not cool enough. It can't fit in." I spent that night trying to add loops and raps to *Ocean Machine*, idly thinking that this would be the only way to get it heard. But even at that age, realizing that my pursuit to write was rooted in music as pleasure, I was able to hold on to the vision and create something without turning *Ocean Machine* into *White Zombie*.

Your true nature is faint at first, but over time it becomes more clear. In my experience, it became so significant to the work that there was no questioning your trajectory.

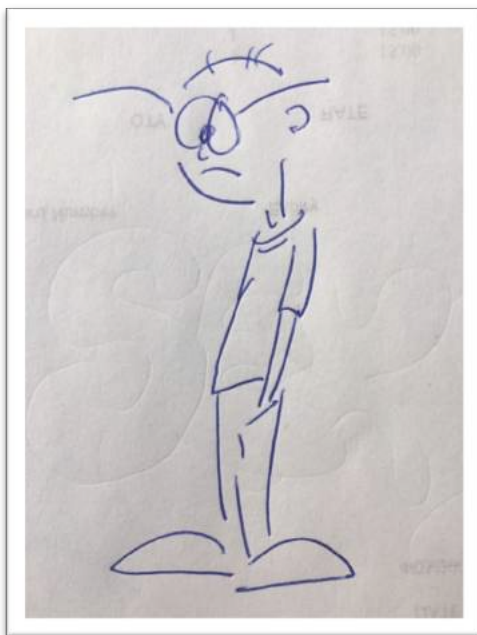
The society that we live in obviously perpetuates the idea of people not being 'enough' - There's whole industries that thrive on it. The fact that as men we're not strong, or virile, or emotion-less enough, or as women we're not thin, or pretty, or subservient enough - it's very easy to fall into that. But ultimately, your uniqueness lies beyond it all, and it's a matter of simply trying to keep your blinders on through the things that get imposed on us. If you can discover who you are, there will be a better chance people who are interested in your work, simply because we're all unique. The effort involved is being aware enough to determine when you're lying to yourself about your motivations.

Conversely, learning what you are and are not "wired to do" offers unique opportunities for teamwork, as when you can consciously identify your strengths and weaknesses, the egocentric parts of delegating work are mostly left behind.

I look at teamwork as building a bridge to get from one place to your objective. That requires different strengths - and different people, being unique, have different strengths and weaknesses. In order to be open to the suggestions of people with different personalities, objectives, and sensitivities, it's essential to learn what your parameters are, what your strengths are and what you can bring to a team. If you're somebody who's got a vision, then maybe you're going to need people who can support and articulate that vision, and your work then becomes based in learning how to communicate your needs in ways that are clearly understandable, and learning to control the waves that come with that type of creative mentality. In my

experience, being 'bi-polar' can be a creative mindset, but it's that same thing that can ruin relationships if you don't proactively learn to keep yourself in check. At that point, your skill set is only valuable to a team if you can learn to control yourself, and again, the discipline that can be learned from the 'nuts and bolts' of life, are essentially the exact same mechanisms you can employ to keep your mood swings in check (including getting that shit checked out by a doctor if need be). While another member of the team may have their work cut out for them simply by proactively learning how to not be oblivious to how their words affect others and another may have their work cut out for them learning to speak up and not get pushed around, ultimately this all again comes back to a) identifying your objectives and b) learning how to utilize your strengths to facilitate a common goal. That doesn't mean that anyone in your organisation is less valuable than the other – but it does mean that your goal is beyond the individual. The goal is the objective, versus people thinking you did it all yourself.

Recognize that within any social scenario, each person has different thresholds for stimulation: volume, workload, drama and social situations.



(And then there's me, in the figure as shown, being currently overwhelmed by all five of those things. It says 'sex' on the back too... someone give this guy a back rub 😊)

I like the term 'ambivert'. I like the idea that in certain situations, I feel very comfortable being extroverted; on stage or behind a desk writing an eBook where nobody can see me in my underpants, picking my nose, which is totally not what's happening right now. Everybody in your team has a different threshold for all of these things. I've only recently discovered, in the past year or two of needing to really step up and learn how to be a boss, that I can't continuously be upset at people because their thresholds for these things are different to mine. It's easy to be irritated at things you don't understand, again...you're not accepting it for what it is, (different than you) but more for what it isn't.

I've worked with people in the past who love stimulus. It was never loud enough, or they'd always do things to create drama when there was no drama necessary. To

think of that as being fundamentally wrong is not healthy for a team. You have to decide whether or not putting yourself in that situation can take you out of your comfort zone, and whether that can help you. Or challenge you. But know that where you are versus where they are requires a type of communication that bridges that gap, ensuring that you create a strong team that equals more than the sum of its parts. Equally important however, is deciding if the energies between you and someone that is fundamentally different than you is creatively healthy friction, or simply unhealthy full stop.

Work to find not only what your thresholds are, but what you are in the face of only having yourself to answer for.

I used to think that I loved social situations, and that I really want to live downtown in an apartment or something -go out at night wearing sunglasses. It seemed like the cool thing to do. However, over time I recognized how I really felt. Now in the face of my own objective criticisms and observations on myself, I'm a lot more aware of I who am, and then in turn, can be able to express those needs to others. I find in honesty now, that I'm somewhere in between most extremes. Ambi-everything in some ways. As much as I love coffee, I also enjoy tea from time to time even more so. Allowing yourself that liberty as well can be helpful, then when you react, it's not from a preconceived place of bias.

At that point, music and art can be relegated to the soundtrack of your life, rather than your life itself. **If your identity is so heavily invested in what you do, versus who you are, eventually you're going to run out of things to say.** And you're going to run out of people who have interest in what you have to say. The things that allow your **music** to flourish are the nuts and bolts of life; taking time to go see your folks, taking time to go on vacation, taking time to know when enough is enough. Then importantly, know when you need to knuckle down and get it done. Know when to give more of yourself than you're comfortable with, and then at other times know when giving anything is too much. That's where the material comes from.

Recognize that as you age, you change, and be ready to accept the critiques that come from people who may have an investment in who you once were.

This is fundamental to the process that has provided me with a career. When I was doing *Strapping*, for example, it meant everything to me. It was exactly what was going on in my head at the time. It was exactly what I needed. And then eventually it

got to the point where it was no longer functional for me, no longer healthy for me, no longer something that I had the fuel to draw from in a way that could continue to create music with any emotional authenticity – which is what I believe people seek in music of this sort of style and trajectory. I had to leave, there was no question. When I recognized that what I wanted to proactively attract to my life was in direct opposition to the content I was creating, the path was clear. It was not clear to much of the audience, or even the other members of the band but again: You have to be strong enough to take care of yourself or you end up playing the martyr role, which is a self flagellating place to end up. And of course, there were people that had an investment emotionally in that period of my life – fans who loved it. When I walked away from that, the amount of people who had supported me for many years that I lost in that transition was frightening. But ultimately, I recognized that it was what I had to do. And by doing so, I was able to find the next step, and put myself in the position I'm in now as a much more self-aware and happier person.

Conversely, learn to “force” art out when absolutely necessary by stepping outside of one’s comfort zones.

At some awkward points, I’ve been faced with the need, as you may be as well, to produce content when my creative energies were depleted. At this point, the method becomes about finding ways to challenge yourself, do expose yourself to new situations that can inspire emotional reactions where there may currently be none. Exercise, a new hobby, learning to adapt to new and unfamiliar situations etc can force you through mild friction to unearth new emotional and thus creative avenues.

Realize that on some level, music plays less significant a role in some peoples lives as they get older. Work to become aware enough of your own subtlety, to hear where the inspiration is calling from next, and allow yourself the leisure if you can, of not writing if you’d rather not.

Who knows where it comes from? You might get to a point where you don’t feel like doing music anymore. And maybe that's a decision you’ll have to make in the future, but in the interim, follow your heart.

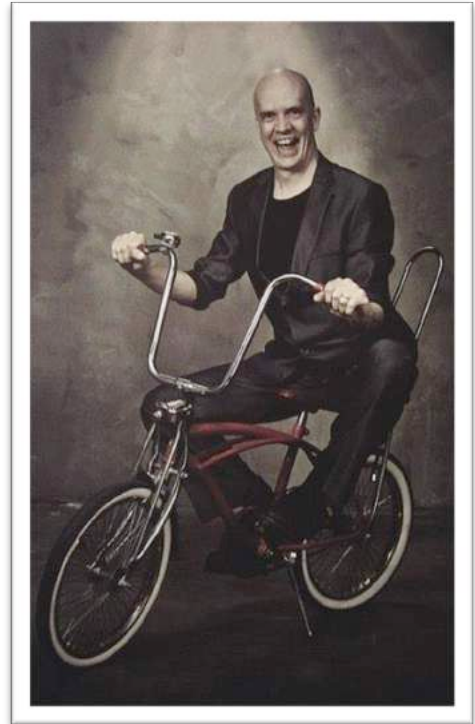
## STEP THREE

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LEARN THAT YOUR CREATIVE  
DRIVE IS PRIMARILY  
SUBCONSCIOUS

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This picture is of me being a jackass. I admit I often have thought of myself as such and it has served me in terms of deflecting certain things, but also has hindered in that the more I say negative things to myself, the more I believe it. I have had a fear of truly being seen as a human being in most situations other than sonically, so this is how I have tended to react. Learning that my creative drive is primarily subconscious has made the recognition of this easier to deal with. Your subconscious comes out in many ways – analyzing why its self deprecating can be helpful too. Often its not one's insignificance that we fear, its that we fear we are greater than all measure, so perhaps self deprecation is often a reaction to not be seen as thinking of oneself as too cool for school. Step 4 is about listening to your subconscious.



For many years now, I have always wondered what I was actually feeling at the time, only to find out later, once I listened to the record that was written at that time, that objectively it all made sense. Surrendering to your inability to see yourself as you are “happening” is a way to keep your creative fires alive. Understand that being “naïve” about your creative process is not to be feared, but to be treasured as it keeps it interesting. This “goldfish memory” allows the love of music to continue.

When we write music, it starts as just sounds. But eventually, by following what those sounds want to do in relationship to the other instruments, your subconscious presents exactly what it is that you're talking about. Being willing to submit to what it is that your subconscious is trying to say will allow the creative process to be interesting. In my case: Sobriety helps me currently, as I feel uninhibited by being creative and I don't fear any of the corners of my creative mind now. I've accepted that I'm a decent person, so inevitably, whatever comes tumbling out is going to be healthy in some way.

I've been doing this for so many years, and I still love it, more so now than ever, because I don't know what's next. Trying to sell that to the record label is a pain in the ass, but as a creative, that makes it sort of an unexpected bonus.

Themes can become sketches that allow one to color in art during times of creative stagnation – identify what is relevant to oneself, and then use a theme as a metaphor for trying to understand a certain period of time.

I often find myself fascinated, as each section of my career has gone on, by what it is that was pertinent to me at each point. (I'm going to use the album *Ki* as an example of this). Right around the period of time of that album, I was spending a lot of time, for whatever reason, walking in the forest. I liked the moss – the color of the moss and the idea of moss in general. From there, I found that the aesthetic was involving Native North American aboriginal art, and then from there I developed an interest in the idea of aliens in the forest, purely on a fantasy level. All of these things were interests that I had at the time. In hindsight, I realized that the Aliens represented new people or situations, and the shadows were the fears. The aboriginal art was rooted to a more primal attraction to my life, and the colors were in line with that. The same goes for any record I've written. *Synchestra* is orange, and there's an idea of sunset, and an indoor garden – things that I was interested in at the time. You collect these things subconsciously, and then eventually, names start to appeal to you. Not because you're forcing it, but because you'll be interested.

All of a sudden, from that, it starts to refine itself, and all of the cues and clues of a certain period of time end up pyramiding to a real singular vision. It's like an archeological dig where you may see a bone sticking up from the ground and as you carefully excavate it, you begin to see what it is that you've found. By understanding this process, and where these things are pointing at any given time, I'm able to make a theme out of it. When I'm asked about the themes of each album afterwards, my answer is usually, 'well, the theme isn't important to the listener. The theme is there for me, because without something that glues all the disparate elements of a period of time together, it just becomes a collection of songs, rather than a synopsis of a certain period of time'.

### How distraction while working can be embraced as a way to let the subconscious take control while you are forced to tend with life.

There'll be times where I have what I consider to be a great idea, and I'll think to myself, "This is the one, this is the one that I need to buckle down and really focus on," but then any number of things happen. All of a sudden, I have to do an interview, or my parents call me and they need my help, or I've got to go to a school meeting. Any of these things that, many years ago, would have been strictly impossible to cause me to break away from my art, I have now learned to relegate the same sort of importance to as the art itself. By removing the immensity of significance from the idea of the work, the fear of losing it also falls away.

I've that found allowing myself to give the same amount of importance to any of these things in my life that I would put on my music, allows my music to be relegated

to a point where I'm not afraid of it. I'm not afraid of that idea going away or being lost in the churn of it all. But by finding and cultivating creative and efficient ways to document those moments, so that I *don't* lose them, allows the capture of them without letting them take over my life, is the best way for the music to come out freely. Don't put too much importance on it – "This is the best riff I've ever written. This is the best song I will ever write. This album is the most important thing ever." It's not. Because as soon as you hold it too highly, it jeopardizes the actual human part of us that requires nourishment by stripping away the importance of everything else in your life.

## Let go of the fear of failing creatively, as a means to fruitful improvisation.

People are often afraid of playing the wrong note, or playing something that isn't cool, or doing something that's contrary to their investment in what they do. A practical example of this is me, making records over the past ten years. They were all as perfect as I could make them, with the vocals dead-on in tune in ways that I, as a human being, am not. At the time, it was exactly what I wanted to do. In hindsight, I recognize that I also was looking to not be criticised. I didn't want people to know that I do fail and that I can't always use high singing voice techniques consistently. In the ways that you present yourself, I've learned to be careful not to put myself across with the impression of being superhuman.

Learn how to fail efficiently in creative endeavors. Put yourself out there because there's a 50/50 chance of whether you're going to fail when you're improvising versus whether you're going to succeed. Really, what have you got to lose by failing? That way, when you're finally in a position where someone who's arguably a much better musician than you might say, "Okay, go for it. Play a solo" you're not going to baulk and just say, "No, I can't because I'm not up to your level." What you'll end up doing is saying, "Okay. Me, the person who likes the rain, and nature, and silence, what do I hear over your song? I hear this. Whatever note I choose is going to be the right one." Why? Because having failed so many times creatively means that you'll be much more familiar with the feeling of getting back up when you fall down. The ones who succeed are the ones that continue when the effort becomes uncomfortable.

## Improvising in a static environment (recording studio etc.)

It's nice to improvise when you're playing with great people in a liberating atmosphere, but what happens when you're put into a practical situation where, like

most of us, you're in a studio? And by studio, I mean alone with a laptop. How do you incorporate a sense of improvisation into that?

Learn how to improvise in controlled settings (like a DAW) and have templates set up for creativity so as to be ready to change gears immediately.

I make templates for myself and, depending on the DAW; whether it be Logic, Ableton, or ProTools, I set it up so I'm ready. If an idea comes from any number of places – maybe hitting a wrong note – I follow that stream of consciousness to where it leads me. Now, if you're not set up with an efficient recording situation, you'll spend all your time simply trying to get your gear to communicate with itself. If you have it set up in a way that provides you with easy steps from demoing to editing to mixing, you can follow your ideas quite quickly and with a relative amount of ease you can determine if an idea is worth following.

Set up a minimal, ergonomic and effective workspace so as not to lose the creative flow through the steps that it involves; from demoing, cataloguing, deciding what goes where, and then delegating and finalizing the final selections.

That whole process is something that requires a sense of self discipline, which is fostered in a very practical way by allowing yourself to put the song aside if you're needed, like I talked about earlier. When something comes up, don't submit to the idea that you have to complete the music you're creating and there's no way around it. By learning that yes, you can break yourself away from it and, yes, you should practice breaking yourself away from it, is really important I think. That practice also includes finding efficient ways to document your work so that you don't lose it.

Find organizational systems in your computing environment to where you may have folders for your overall sessions, and then within that, you've got folders set up for new demos, various random ideas, and then five or six folders, like in my case, that have tentative project names that could come down to a color or a vibe, such as "Bass Project" or "Soft Rock Project", "blue wobbly euro dance' for example. Then my templates are set up so that if I have an idea in one of the several ways that ideas come to me, I document it quickly. I'm able to efficiently follow improvisational themes in a stagnant environment this way, and then when I'm done, I don't labour it. I put it away. I forget about it. Then, if a time comes in the future when I feel inspired, I can recall it and build from there.

Realize how to recognize which "key words" from particular moments will end up becoming part of the 'collage' of a period. (i.e. you may find yourself at some point interested in a new hobby, or a new language, color, food, or aesthetic.)

I can't stress enough how big of a part of my creative process is about becoming aware of the faint cues of where my current interests lie, and then finding a way for the collage of those things to make sense with each other. Because through that, the subconscious presents itself exactly where it is. Trust it.

**How these things subconsciously are connected are not random, however they require the ability to recognize patterns.**

That ability is not a talent you're born with. It's something that you foster through all of that Karate Kid, 'getting your shit together' stuff.

## STEP FOUR

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ALLOW YOURSELF TO BE  
VULNERABLE WITH YOUR ART

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A goal is to reverse what is typically seen as “strength” in modern society, and recognize that your true voice requires, above all, the willingness to be honest with yourself about your personal and creative motivations. Calling yourself on your own BS. A practical example is to watch how addictive tendencies migrate when you think you’ve found your answer. A need for control can manifest in many ways and often once you’ve got it under wraps in one area, it springs up in another.

Strength in modern society, now more so than ever, is considered of the utmost importance. To be seen as vulnerable in any way, as a male or female, is a one-way ticket to people thinking that you’re weak. And it appears that we’re simply not allowed to be weak. You may even disallow yourself small luxuries as well in light of that, recognizing that sometimes you might need to put your feet up and binge watch Star Trek, or something like that without feeling the guilt about not being productive. These sorts of things even prevent me from recognizing what's really going to make me happy at each moment. Whether that be harps and beautiful female voices instead of blaring metal. Maybe a nice cup of tea instead of a fifteenth coffee.

If a period is nihilistic, joyous, afraid or absurd; being vulnerable to your own needs is the key.

Conversely, you might want to create something that isn't cerebral. Maybe you just want to hear verse, chorus, verse, chorus and some ludicrous lyrics. If that's what you need, take the time for yourself and recognize when you need those moments.

Learn also, that a key to progression is to know when one is feeling sorry for oneself. This can be a twisted form of comfort – “the devil you know”. Establish ways that, through those dark moments, you can pick yourself up and get back on the horse.

You might find yourself in a situation where you feel like everyone in your life is so busy that no one's stroking your forehead and saying, "Poor you, everything's going to be okay. You're a good person. People like you." You might be looking for that in yourself, for whatever reason.

Above all, simply know that your life becomes the raw materials for your art. So once you have decided on your intention, it is important to understand the cause and effect of decisions you make, including the decision to abstain from everything you enjoy as a martyr. It all equates to the art. The goal is to find yourself, amidst any preconceptions of what a ‘perfect you’ may or not be, its about digging to your root,

through all the idiosyncrasies and hang ups, forgiving yourself for what you need to forgive yourself for, and moving forward consciously.

And the devil you know? it's that twisted sense of doing things for yourself, patting yourself on the back, and establishing ways you can get through those dark moments. Even if what you need to do is to say to yourself, "Nobody understands me" and kick a rock down the back alley. I still do that. Recognize what's going on, and once you're finished moping around, you've got to get back up and get back on the horse. It goes back to knowing how to fail efficiently. You need to cut yourself some slack.

### Learn which fears are worth pursuing vs. pursuing things to make a point to yourself.

Being so scared of confrontation that, in attempting to get over it, you put yourself in harms way in ways that you are ill equipped psychologically to handle, makes zero sense. That becomes a masochistic pursuit. It's about challenging yourself to do the things that important to do, not ridiculous for the sake of bravado, and there's a good probability that you do know what those things are. And here's the thing, if you've decided that you're a masochist, that's fine. However, if what you're finding is that you've got no desire to impose that on yourself or others, then recognize it and then pull it back. Maybe your ways of confronting your fear of confrontation is better pursued by seeing where the root of it is. I truly believe there are fairly universal 'lines in the sand' for positive and negative behaviour.

### Lyrics and the process in which they can be born through various techniques:

It starts with sounds. I may be writing a riff and then after a while the whole sound slowly becomes obvious, and I'll think, "Okay, that word works because the S in that is something that's really important. And this works because the D gives me the ability to really hammer home that last thing, but what is that I'm trying to say?" By simply massaging it and then collecting all of these aesthetics from certain periods of time, all of a sudden it becomes clear. There's an S there, there's a D there, and I'm really interested in the desert, so maybe the word is 'sand'. That makes sense and also compels me to continue because it plays into my interests.

Learn not to get hung up on fostering self love, but rather decrease self-loathing. It's like reversing the polarities on two magnets – the same thing but one way sticks without effort.

This is really important because all of that new-age rhetoric about learning to love yourself is seemingly very true, however it doesn't work for me in an obvious way. What I have discovered that works for me is rather learning to decrease self loathing. It's the same thing but it's flipping the polarities of the magnets around. One way is productive and the other way makes me feel like I'm always failing.

I recently started meditating, and the single greatest piece of advice I received for that was that the whole exercise was one of 'failing, recognizing its part of the process to fail, then starting again...and again and again and again...'

I've never had a burning desire to walk around and tell myself that I'm a 'great person'. That doesn't really work for me as it smacks of arrogance. For whatever reason, what tends to work better is saying to myself, "You know what? I'm doing pretty good. Taking stock of where I was, I see enough improvement on objective reflection that I'm going to be kind to myself where I'm still struggling" That's my example for decreasing self loathing. Give it a shot the next time you're down on yourself for not living up to your internal high expectations. Maybe it'll work well for you too.

**Being good to yourself, and the things that process can do for others – the “put your oxygen mask on first before you help others” idea – and how that flies in the face of the fear as being seen as an egoist that is typically looked down upon in society. Learn when guilt is simply a crutch and remember to listen closely to your needs.**

I typically find the idea of doing good things for yourself is viewed by a good portion of society as selfishness. It's very easy to get caught up in the idea that any time you do anything for yourself, you're an asshole. That's a hard pill to swallow too, especially in our Auber-productive society. The thought that all our efforts should be towards a goal is hard to break. Well...maybe change what the goals are. 'I will actualize my art, and become a better version of myself SO I CAN BE AT PEACE.

There are certain points where, in order for me to do my job efficiently for an audience or my band, and to be objective enough to know when I'm being at fault,

I'm required to take myself away. To have a moment to myself – get a massage, go out for diner, do something that in the past I wouldn't think I was worthy of. To work relentlessly in hopes that someday somebody will say, "Wow, you do a good job. Good for you", if that's why you're doing it, you may not be doing music for pleasure, you may be doing it for validation.

Realize that "giving" is where we find ourselves. To hold all in fear of it going away results in repeating old successes in hopes that it will stay fresh and you can continue to "have it all".

Bravery (artistic or otherwise) is not a lack of fear, it's being shit scared and doing it anyway.

Listening to your needs is your responsibility. Say for example there's a band that sold 10 million copies of their first record – 'Joe Blow and The Blowing Joes'. After which they think to themselves; "This is great. We're all driving Maserati's around and we've got big houses. My dad doesn't think I'm as much of a schmuck as he always has." It's very easy once all of that is over to feel like, "I'm not into our big hit anymore, I actually hate that song. It reminds me of a point in my life that was steeped in confusion." In order for you to continue down the path that is one of creative pleasure versus commerce, then you've got to be able to let it go. If your idea of doing music for commerce is your underpinning for all of this, then yeah, go for it. Make 'Joe Blows Joe 2, The Re-blow', and do the same thing with a minor chord in it. But again, this course is then probably not of much use to you in that case, as I clearly don't have a knack for that scene.

Who knows? You might have been able to put that second record out with enough time in between the first one that people still care about it, but there's a good chance that it's going to be short lived. Again, this is not a judgment, if that's what you want to do – if your motivation for doing this is fame and money, then that might be the best possible solution. But you're going to have to talk to somebody other than me about it because I couldn't do that if I tried. I tried. I wasn't very good at it =)

## STEP FIVE

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DON'T FIGHT YOURSELF –  
SURRENDER TO YOURSELF

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Here's the hard part.

We're constantly told we're supposed to be more than we are.

To be better, to be stronger, prettier, more talented, more successful, more wealthy, to move differently etc....

To be honest, your own self-actualization is what is going to allow you to create music that the rest of us, (including me), want to listen to. Don't listen to what it is other people want you to be, listen to what your soul sings. Often people want you to be things they can understand and not to follow your own inner voice because they are afraid to do it themselves. It's threatening to some people if you choose something off the beaten track rather than on.

As a result, we become so hyper critical of ourselves and our faults that we risk never singing our own "unique song" in fear of not fitting in.

If you don't fit in, then where do you fit? In some ways at that point, you may feel that you run the risk of not existing at all. The internet is great for fostering insecurity as well, because all of a sudden everyone feels they have a voice, and all of a sudden those opinions can get reactions, and reactions equal attention in a society where being anonymous is equated to non existence in an environment that insists we all need to be more than we are.

Ultimately, the songs that we have to sing are rooted in recognising that expressing oneself is really just a simple human need. Someone approached me after a show recently, and said, "Hey, this song you wrote is better than anything I'll ever be able to write." Well, in many ways, that's not the truth. I wrote a Devin song better than you could write a Devin song because you're not Devin. But you can write a YOU song way better than I could because I'm not you. Although it will take much time to find yourself, the rewards of that effort are great. Try to be patient.

Some of us aren't meant to be leaders, some of us aren't meant to be followers, but there is truly need for both. To find a place where you can be of value requires finding honesty where your comfort lies. When you find a place that you can

surrender to, you can then truly begin to hear your own song. (And it's often much different than you expect.)

"Surrender" implies that new-age ideology, but it's actually the same principle I'm speaking of. 'Surrender' meaning, you've got to give up. You've got to let go. Its similar to loving the ocean so much, you want to own it in some way, obviously, you can't drink the whole ocean, but you can swim in it. The idea is to merge with something much bigger than you, at which part, you are simply a part of it and participating, as opposed to being separate from it and trying to keep it contained.

Your own song may often much different that you expect as well. You may think to yourself, "When I finally get my band together, we're going to be like *Gojira*, but heavier. Or we're going to be like *Mutemath*" But then you'll find out through that process that really you actually want to do opera, or you just want to paint, or maybe you don't want to play music at all and volunteer at a social centre instead. Ultimately, unless you can truly get to the point where you understand what it is that you need, you're never going to truly be at peace with yourself, and from that place of stillness, or 'potential' lets call it, is where the music lies. A big part of it is also being prepared to give it all up. Be prepared to know that at the end of the rainbow, there might not be a golden toilet. Be prepared for whatever it is, though, because ultimately, if you end up in the place where you should be, you're going to be happier than you would of been after having all the gold toilets in the universe.

Learn to recognize your fears, and your reactions to them. Be conscious of why they exist, and cut yourself some slack.

Here's an example: Lately, I've been trying to exercise five days a week and meditate 15 minutes a day. A bunch of things happened the other day and unexpectedly, my furnace blew up. I had to fix it and I didn't think I'd have time to exercise, but I did! Against the odds, I found time... yet then all I could think to myself was "Oh, I'm failing because I didn't also get a full meditation in", and at the end of the day I was so bummed out at myself that I ate a six pack of doughnuts and felt like shit.

It's funny how expectation can negate all the things that you're really working hard to achieve and you wind up perpetually dissatisfied. Cut yourself some slack, and maybe just focus on the things that you're doing well. Say to yourself, in the same way as getting back on the horse for failing improvisational, "Today, I may have fallen off, but that's okay." The whole point is to fail and start again. Fail and start again. Fail and start again. Don't be afraid of that.

Realize that judging ourselves in comparison to others is a creative dead end. There will always be people “better” and “worse” than you – finding more success, getting the things you hoped for – learn to be happy for other people’s successes.

I've been doing this for many years. There are musicians and bands that I started out with that are now wildly successful. There's people that at one time, I was technically much more successful than, but all of a sudden, they blew up after one record. In the past, my tendency was to feel confused about why it wasn't me instead. The fault with that is that the next thing you know, you're kicking rocks down the back alley again, repeating the same old mantra about not being good enough or whatnot. Recently though, through really thinking about this hard, I'm exactly where I'm supposed to be. My path is different than everyone else's, (and yours) and fundamentally, I'm also realizing that massive success was never my goal, and any comparison to people more successful than me is just a competitive hang up rather than a true need.

Teach others by example, not to be “the teacher”, but to see people do great things.

Just be happy for people. It's simple. Somebody's doing something that's successful? Good. Because, ultimately, it's about all of us succeeding, rather than you being the person that is the successful one. If you're not at that point, your head is just above water and your reasons for doing what you do are not art. Your reason for doing it is to be seen as successful.

Through all this, our voices are heard in many unexpected ways, and when we are able to hear our own voice, as surprising as it may sound, we can learn to be comfortable with who we are vs. who we think we ought to be.

Ultimately, all other people have their own unique voices, that's billions and billions of unique voices. Having a wider pool of talent helps the species. All 100 of you have something unique to say, and ultimately that makes much more sense to me than a hundred Katy Perrys. (Although, Katy Perry is pretty cool).

Learn to fail efficiently.

You're going to fail. Those who fail and use that as a reason to not ever try again get stuck. Move on. Get over it. Forgive yourself. Anyone you see who has found success has learned to fail. The ones who make the grade are the ones who don't give up, long after it has become convenient to do so.

### Go on vacations.

Vacations are an analogy for anything. A vacation could be as simple as turning your phone off for an hour, or going out for dinner one night. Take your family away. Do things that are good for you. Because ultimately, that's what's going to define your personal progress. When you're comfortable and confident enough with yourself, that's when the next phase of creative inspiration comes. Your life is the raw materials for your art, and you'd be surprised at how far a little bit of self compassion goes.

### Do what compels you.

Fail, get over it, move on, take care of yourself, and eventually things will fall into your legitimate interests that compel you to move forward creatively. If you have the strength to be yourself in the face of adversity, that will shine through your art.

**Above all, SHINE. Don't be ashamed of your potential. Don't worry if no one cares or wants to listen, do it for yourself first. Trust me.**

The Devin Townsend Creative Academy.

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