

AUTHOR MINDSET SUCCESS FORMULA

Part One: Why Art Matters

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Welcome to the *Author Mindset Success Formula* training series.

I'm writing coach Kevin T. Johns. I work with aspiring authors from all around the world to help them get ideas out of their heads, onto the page, and into the hands of readers.

Thank you for joining me on this training series. You have made an awesome choice. We are going to learn a lot, but we are also going to have a lot of fun.

Step Number One in our formula involves reminding ourselves why art matters.

In order to do that, I want to take you back to 2013 and tell you a story about how I discovered my pneumonia angels.

I was lying on the dirty blue couch in my living room.

I could barely move.

It felt like sand filled my lungs, and it hurt to breathe.

I thought I was going to die, and the worst part of all was that I thought dying might be a good thing...

I just shared with you one of the lowest moments in my life.

I had completed my Master's degree in English Literature, and shortly after graduation started a job with the federal government to make some money while I waited to submit my Ph.D. application.

Around that same time, I also began working on my first novel.

Cut to eight years later . . .

I was still working for the government, the Ph.D. was never going to happen, and the book I had begun writing nearly a decade earlier was incomplete.

Somewhere along the way, my life went totally off-track.

I grew up performing in punk rock bands.

I was a lover of cinema, a poet, and storyteller.

I'd always been an artist and a creative person, yet as I entered my 30's, I found myself working a soul-crushing cubicle job entirely devoid of creativity and excitement.

Sacrifices had been made, and the problem with sacrifices is one day you wake up and discover there is nothing left of your authentic self -- you've compromised everything that makes you who you are.

That was exactly where I found myself in the winter of 2013.

I'd sold out and given up on my dreams.

When I caught a severe case of pneumonia, it seemed like I might die... and I was OKAY with that.

But then something happened as I lay on that couch gasping for breath...

Something that changed my life forever and vaulted me into an entirely new and utterly rewarding territory as a professional author.

I hope you've never had pneumonia, but if you have, you know it is pretty darn bad. You can barely breathe, you can hardly move, and it goes on for weeks.

There I was lying on my couch thinking I was going to die, feeling about as down as I could get, and believing that dying might be the best thing that could happen to me.

I was all doped up on the drugs the doctors put me on after my chest X-rays, and I was just flipping through the channels. I was staring at the television, but not watching anything, when I stumbled upon the talk show Ellen right as the band Tegan and Sara began to perform a song.

For whatever reason – I still can't explain it precisely – their performance touched my soul.

In that moment of total despair and dire illness, Tegan and Sara appeared to me as angels.

It was as though they were metaphysical messengers sent from Heaven to tell me that there was a reason to get better and that I could pull through this sickness & turn my life around.

You see... that's why art matters.

It's why I'm passionate about helping people get their books written.

I know for a fact that art saves lives... because it saved mine.

The beauty of Tegan and Sara's song inspired me to not only get well physically and mentally but also to complete (finally!) the novel I had been working on for eight long years. I wanted my writing to save readers the same way Tegan and Sara had saved me.

Less than a year later, my debut novel *The Page Turners* was published to rave reviews, and everything in my life changed.

The crafting of a novel, the creation of any work of art, is a battle between the forces of life and the forces of death. There is something creative within all of us, and it is our duty to our fellow human beings to get that something out before death claims us.

This isn't just some hobby you're starting on here. You're not just creating escapism for your readers. We're talking about a real battle between the forces of life creativity and the forces of death and destruction.

The creation of art is a hugely important act.

Art is what keeps us going through our darkest days. Art is what we turn to for aid in our most desperate hour. Art is what shows us why life is worth living, despite the despair threatening to crush us into dust. As you read through this

book and as you engage in your own writing, I want you to always keep that in mind.

Consider the following quote from the film *Point Break* for a moment. The movie isn't very highly regarded, and it's a bit of a silly film, but it's got some great pedigree behind the scenes in that it was directed by Katherine Bigelow, the first woman to win a Best Director Oscar, and produced by James Cameron.

In the film, a team of bank robbers, who also happen to be passionate surfers and thrill seekers, discuss why it is they do what they do, and their leader says the following:

“This was never about the money. This was about us against the system. That system that kills the human spirit. We stand for something. We're here to show those guys inching along the freeways in their metal coffins that the human spirit is still alive.”

This quote is a fictional character talking about why he and his friends rob banks, but I think it's relatively easy to argue that this is also Katherine Bigelow and James Cameron explaining to the audience why it is that they create art.

Another great quote that I often come back to is from Kurt Vonnegut's book *Time Quake*:

“I say in speeches that a plausible mission of artists is to make people appreciate being alive at least a little bit. I am then asked if I know of any artists who pulled that off. I reply, 'The Beatles did.'”

Hell yes, The Beatles did.

And so did Kurt Vonnegut.

These artists are the authors of our culture, and the books and music they create are the language with which we weave our cultural narratives.

Unless you think the society you live in is perfect, you have a duty to contribute your unique perspective to the cultural discourse. If you want the world to change for the better, you need to write about how it could be better. Or, if you like it the way it is and you think its current state needs to be protected and cherished, you need to write about that.

As a novelist, you must never forget: you aren't just a writer. You're an author of your culture.

It takes guts to define a culture. It's a big responsibility, but I know you are up for the challenge.

Here's what happened to me when I took on that the challenge.

I published a book called *Smash Fear and Write like a Pro* and an instructional writing book for authors, *The Novel Writer's Blueprint*. In 2017 I published a third book for writers, *Novel Advice*.

I've also published three novels, *The Page Turners*, *The Page Turners Economy of Fear*, and *M School*. And I have three young daughters, so for them I wrote and published a children's picture book, *Rocket Princess vs. Snaggletooth the Dragon*.

I also created several online courses for authors, produced and hosted over 50 episodes of *The Writing Coach* podcast, launched a ghostwriting and author coaching business.

Every single one of these opportunities came into my life after that moment on the couch with Tegan and Sara.

That's the power of art!

Now how was I able to do all these things after struggling for so long on my first novel?

And how can you do the same?

That's what we are going to discuss in Part Two.