

AUTHOR MINDSET SUCCESS FORMULA

Part Three: Turning Pro

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Welcome back to the *Author Mindset Success Formula*.

In part one, we discussed how important it is to remind ourselves why art matters, and in part two discussed approaching our art with the mindset of a scientist.

In part three, we are going to discuss the process of turning pro.

Turning pro is a concept discussed extensively by Steven Pressfield in his two excellent books, *The War of Art* and *Turning Pro*. I would highly recommend you check out both books.

Steven Pressfield argues, “Turning pro is a mindset. If we are struggling with fear, self-sabotage, procrastination, self-doubt, etc., the problem is, we’re thinking like amateurs. Amateurs don’t show up. Amateurs crap out. Amateurs let adversity defeat them. The pro thinks differently. He shows up, he does his work, he keeps on truckin’, no matter what.”

I have my own definition of turning pro. For me, turning pro means doing the work even when it stops being fun. It’s not

about being inspired by the muse. It's about showing up and doing the work on a regular schedule.

There is a saying, "80% of success is showing up."

You will never achieve your goals if you never try.

I do most of my writing at the dining room table.

From where I sit, if I glance up above my laptop's screen, I can see through a window and across my backyard to the rear of my neighbor's home.

One day a couple of years ago, my neighbors were having their roof re-shingled. When I sat down at my computer to write at nine a.m., half a dozen shirtless men in cargo pants and work boots, their bodies bronzed from the blazing sun, were already hard at work.

I put in three solid hours of writing that morning, and then called it a day. In the afternoon, I sat and drank beer in my backyard while one of my daughters dug in her sandbox and the other kicked a soccer ball across the lawn.

Up above us, the roofers continued to work.

When I made dinner that evening, I did so to the rat-tat-tat sound of shingles being nailed down.

As my family finished dinner a little past six p.m., the men atop my neighbor's home finally began to wrap-up their day's work. The roof was not yet complete, but they had made significant progress on their project; I suspect much more progress than I had made on my novel that day.

The experience was an excellent lesson.

I realized that day just how lucky I was—how lucky we are—to be writers. We aren't risking our lives up on rooftops. We don't have to work ten hour days just to pay the bills. But that doesn't mean we should wrap things up after three hours either.

Being a writer doesn't mean we get to be lazy.

It doesn't mean we only get to do our work when we feel like it.

I learned that day that I could work a lot harder as a writer, and I bet you can too. That's a big step towards turning pro.

Let's return to Steven Pressfield for a moment. This is what he says a professional does: *"1) We show up every day 2) We show up no matter what 3) We stay on the job all day 4) We are committed over the long haul 5) The stakes for us are high and real 6) We accept remuneration for our labor 7) We do not overidentify with our jobs 8) We master the technique of our jobs 9) We have a sense of humor about our jobs 10) We receive praise or blame in the real world."*

I want to focus in on #8 for a moment. You'll remember earlier in the course I mentioned the importance of writer's craft, i.e. the foundational skill sets of our art form. Far too often writers try to turn pro with their mindset without having embraced the skill set necessary for success.

When you think of a painting by Pablo Picasso, you probably think of his famous cubist work, but Picasso didn't start with cubism. His earlier pre-cubist work, such as the paintings from his Blue Period, were remarkably realist in comparison to what most people generally think of as "a Picasso" painting. You thus need to learn the essential elements of

your craft, before you start pressing the boundaries. It is what Picasso did. It's what all the great artists and writers do.

And you do that by modeling. Modeling means emulating what the masters have done but bringing your own unique perspective to the work.

I saw this quote on Facebook one day: "I don't want my daughter to follow my footsteps. I want her to walk alongside the path I've laid, and then go further than I ever could." While this is a bit of a sappy way to look at parenting, I think it can be helpful for articulating how you need to approach learning to write a novel. You're the child, and the masters are the parent. You cannot simply pick up where they left off, and immediately take things further. First, you must start where they started, walk alongside the path they laid, and learn the lessons that they've left behind. Only then can you go further than they ever could.

That's it for part three. Make sure you check out part four for a special announcement.