

SHOW YOUR WORK!

From the
author of the
NEW YORK TIMES
BESTSELLER
**STEAL LIKE AN
ARTIST**

10 WAYS TO SHARE YOUR CREATIVITY AND GET DISCOVERED

AUSTIN KLEON

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10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

FOR MEGHAN

A NEW WAY OF OPERATING ----- 1

① YOU DON'T HAVE TO
BE A GENIUS. ----- 6

② THINK PROCESS, NOT PRODUCT. ---30

③ SHARE SOMETHING SMALL
EVERY DAY. -----44

④ OPEN UP YOUR CABINET
OF CURIOSITIES. -----70

- ⑤ TELL GOOD STORIES. ----- 88
- ⑥ TEACH WHAT YOU KNOW. --- 110
- ⑦ DON'T TURN INTO
HUMAN SPAM. ----- 120
- ⑧ LEARN TO TAKE
A PUNCH. ----- 146
- ⑨ SELL OUT. ----- 158
- ⑩ STICK AROUND. ----- 180

"FOR ARTISTS,
PROBLEM TO SOL

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THE GREAT
VE IS HOW TO
NOTICED.”

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**“Creativity is not a talent.
It is a way of operating.”**

—John Cleese

A NEW WAY OF OPERATING

When I have the privilege of talking to my readers, the most common questions they ask me are about self-promotion. *How do I get my stuff out there? How do I get noticed? How do I find an audience? How did you do it?*

I *hate* talking about self-promotion. Comedian Steve Martin famously dodges these questions with the advice, “Be so good they can’t ignore you.” If you just focus on getting really good, Martin says, people will come to you. I happen to agree: You don’t really find an audience for your work; they find you. But it’s not enough to be good.

In order to be found, you have to *be findable*. I think there's an easy way of putting your work out there and making it discoverable *while* you're focused on getting really good at what you do.

Almost all of the people I look up to and try to steal from today, regardless of their profession, have built *sharing* into their routine. These people aren't schmoozing at cocktail parties; they're too busy for that. They're cranking away in their studios, their laboratories, or their cubicles, but instead of maintaining absolute secrecy and hoarding their work, they're open about what they're working on, and they're consistently posting bits and pieces of their work, their ideas, and what they're learning online. Instead of wasting their time "networking," they're taking advantage of the network. By generously sharing their ideas and their knowledge, they often gain an audience that they can then leverage when they need it—for fellowship, feedback, or patronage.

I wanted to create a kind of beginner's manual for this way of operating, so here's what I came up with: a book for people who hate the very idea of self-promotion. An *alternative*, if you will, to self-promotion. I'm going to try to teach you how to think about your work as a never-ending process, how to share your process in a way that attracts people who might be interested in what you do, and how to deal with the ups and downs of putting yourself and your work out in the world. If *Steal Like an Artist* was a book about stealing influence from other people, this book is about how to influence others by letting them steal from *you*.

Imagine if your next boss didn't have to read your résumé because he already reads your blog. Imagine being a student and getting your first gig based on a school project you posted online. Imagine losing your job but having a social network of people familiar with your work and ready to help you find a new one. Imagine turning a side project or

crafting something

is a long, uncertain process.

a

maker should

show

her

work

a hobby into your profession because you had a following that could support you.

Or imagine something simpler and just as satisfying: spending the majority of your time, energy, and attention practicing a craft, learning a trade, or running a business, while also allowing for the possibility that your work might attract a group of people who share your interests.

All you have to do is *show your work*.

① YOU DO

TO BE A

N'T HAVE

GENIUS.

FIND A SCENIUS.

**“Give what you have.
To someone, it may be better
than you dare to think.”**

—Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

There are a lot of destructive myths about creativity, but one of the most dangerous is the “lone genius” myth: An individual with superhuman talents appears out of nowhere at certain points in history, free of influences or precedent, with a direct connection to God or The Muse. When inspiration comes, it strikes like a lightning bolt, a lightbulb switches on in his head, and then he spends the rest of his time toiling away in his studio, shaping this idea into a finished masterpiece that he releases into the world to great fanfare. If you believe in the lone genius myth, creativity is an *antisocial* act, performed by only a few great figures—mostly dead men with names like Mozart, Einstein, or Picasso. The rest of us are left to stand around and gawk in awe at their achievements.

There’s a healthier way of thinking about creativity that the musician Brian Eno refers to as “scenius.” Under this model, great ideas are often birthed by a group of creative individuals—artists, curators, thinkers, theorists, and other



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tastemakers—who make up an “ecology of talent.” If you look back closely at history, many of the people who we think of as lone geniuses were actually part of “a whole scene of people who were supporting each other, looking at each other’s work, copying from each other, stealing ideas, and contributing ideas.” Scenius doesn’t take away from the achievements of those great individuals; it just acknowledges that good work isn’t created in a vacuum, and that creativity is always, in some sense, a collaboration, the result of a mind connected to other minds.

What I love about the idea of scenius is that it makes room in the story of creativity for the rest of us: the people who don’t consider ourselves geniuses. Being a valuable part of a scenius is not necessarily about how smart or talented you are, but about what you have to contribute—the ideas you share, the quality of the connections you make, and the conversations you start. If we forget about genius and think more about how we can nurture and contribute to a scenius,