

THE  
WRITER'S  
ROADMAP

12 Steps to Make a Living Writing

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# INTRODUCTION

## **You Don't Have to Starve (If You Do This...)**

A friend of mine recently did a survey of a few thousand writers, asking them how much money they make off their writing per month. Do you know what they said? Can you guess? A few thousand bucks a month? A few hundred? Not even close. According to this study, the average writer makes less than a dollar a month off their writing.

A dollar. A DOLLAR?!!

That's insane, and in my opinion, unacceptable. Sadly, though, it's true. Based on my conversations with the hundreds of thousands of writers who read my blog every month, most of them aren't making money off their writing. Like, none.

Another study I found was done by *Writers Digest*, and the findings weren't much better. Out of the 7,000 working writers surveyed, over 77% didn't make more than \$1,000 a year off their writing.<sup>1</sup>

Look. I know it's no surprise that writers don't make a fortune off their work, but a dollar a month?

A thousand dollars a year?

We can do better.

And yet, for every group of Starving Artists out there, we occasionally stumble across an individual who defies the odds and breaks through the glass ceiling of what's possible. These are those elite few we tend to call "lucky" and "privileged."

But are they really?

The truth is some writers make very little money and some make a lot of money. In fact, writing may be one of the few jobs where the minimum and maximum earning potential are practically limitless. With other jobs, like law or medicine or even food service, there is some minimum salary to which you are entitled. Not so with writing. That makes this a little risky. But you knew that already. ;)

But the converse is also true. Most doctors and lawyers don't make much more than the average income, which can be multiple six figures. It's a nice living, but such professions have their limitations. Those in the creative arts, however, have none. Take J.K. Rowling, for example, billionaire author of the Harry Potter series. Or

even Dr. Dre, another billionaire who made his living off his work and the products he was able to create around it.

This may be the most volatile, most exciting profession there is. Now, let me tell you something you didn't know...

You don't have to starve.

You can share your ideas and stories with the world and make a living doing so. You can get paid to write for a living. And you don't have to be a bestselling author or a super-popular blogger to do so.

What you do have to do is pay attention to the way other people have succeeded. You have to follow the path that your predecessors have set before you. You need to give up on the limiting beliefs that you can't do this and stop thinking you're special.

You're not.

You are no different than the millions of aspiring writers who have come before you. Except that you have opportunities and resources that many never did. Hemingway didn't have a blog. Twain didn't have Amazon. Austen didn't have an email list.

This is the best time to be a writer.

And yet, many of us are squandering the opportunities before us. We're believing a myth — we must starve for our art — that just isn't true.

It's time to break out of that way of thinking and create the future you've always dreamed of. Every year, I see hundreds of writers bridge the gap between starving and thriving. I've watched them do it, documented the process, and I'm going to share it all here. This is what I teach in my program Tribe Writers, and before I begin each class, I always tell the students the same thing:

## **IF YOU DO THE WORK, YOU'LL SEE THE RESULTS.**

In other words, this process works if you do. I can't motivate you. I can't make you sit down and write. But I can show you the way to success and hope that you take the next step.

So, here's how this is going to go. In this brief book, I am going to outline a process for you. I call it the "12 Steps to Writing Success." This is what 99% of the writers I know who are succeeding have done, in one form or another. It's a proven path based on literally thousands of case studies. And if you do the work, you will see the results.

## **A FEW QUICK RULES ON THESE STEPS:**

- You can't skip a step. Do them in order as best you can. They are designed to work in a progression that creates a sense of momentum so that each step becomes successively easier.
- In particular, this book is designed to help you get moving in the right direction, but I recommend joining a community to hold you accountable to the process. At the end of the book, I'll share some resources about how you can keep going.

- If you get stuck, see the trouble-shooting tips for each step. The level of success you experience may vary, but I have never seen someone do all twelve steps and not get out of the rut they were in, filled with hope for what was made possible. I pray the same is true for you.

Okay, let's begin.

**SOURCES:**

[How Much Do Writers Earn? Less Than You Think](#)

# STEP 1

## **Clarify Your Message with a Worldview**

The first step in this process is to clarify your message. Where do we begin as writers? With our voice, right?

Well, kind of.

So many writers struggle with their writing voice, and a lot of the struggle is unnecessary. The truth is nobody cares about your voice. Your readers want to know that your content matters to them.

Did you know the amount of books people are reading each year has been declining for the past forty years? In fact, some studies say the average person reads about a book a year, and there are growing groups of people who read zero books a year.

“That can't be true,” you're saying.

It is.

So how do we become one of the few writers a reader will bother reading? How do we make our work stand out from all the rest?

The answer is: we must write with a worldview. The best authors and communicators do this naturally. They understand intuitively that the writing we love to read has more to do with style than content. In other words, it's not just what you say, but how you say it.

Another word for that is “worldview.”

We all have a unique way of looking at the world, a particular perspective that informs our message. For Hemingway, it was his belief that courage was grace under fire, a quality that only the greatest heroes and heroines possess. For Machiavelli, it was his political convictions about how people should be ruled and how rulers should exert their power over others.

Every great writer has a worldview.

So, how do you find yours?

Start by filling in the blanks of the following:

**EVERY [PEOPLE GROUP] CAN/SHOULD [ACTION]**

This can be whatever you want, but it needs to be as specific as you can make it. For example, you might say:

- Every person should recycle.
- Every mom can run a successful business without neglecting her family.
- Every politician should tell the truth.

And so on.

A worldview can be obvious, but it doesn't have to be. It can be very specific or more general. The point is that it is the guiding statement that undergirds everything you write and why you write it.

**ASSIGNMENT:** Take a moment to write out your worldview, following the above exercise. Put it on a post-it note and attach it to your computer so that you stare at it every time you begin writing.

**SOURCES:**

[The Decline of the American Book Lover](#)

# STEP 2

## **Pick Your Platform Personality**

In today's noisy world, there's no other way to be heard than with a platform. You have to fight for attention — that's just the way it is. But if you think that means there's only one way to communicate your message, that's just not true.

A professional speaker doesn't connect with an audience the same way an author does, nor should someone who writes fiction follow the same game plan as a nonfiction writer — at least, not exactly. The rules change, depending on what you write. So what do you do?

If you aren't one of the typical types of bloggers trying to make it online, is there any hope to break through the clutter and getting your message heard?

Here's the good news: There's more than one way to build a popular blog. After years of studying the most powerful communicators in the world, both online and offline, I've discovered five basic types of bloggers that I call "The 5 Most Powerful Platform Personalities." And before you start building your audience, it would be wise to figure out which one best suits you.

## **THE JOURNALIST**

The Journalist builds his platform on asking questions. The only requirement for this type of platform is curiosity.

When I set out to start my blog, I was nervous. I was no expert on writing, so what right did I have to tell other people how to do it? I didn't even have a published book.

Then I found out about Darren Rowse. Darren, as you may know, started one of the largest blogging communities in the world. How did Darren build his platform? Did he wait until he was an expert?

No. He began his journey by asking questions. And as he publicly shared the answers he got, his curiosity attracted an audience of hundreds of thousands of people. Now, he is considered a leading expert on blogging, and it all began with asking a few simple questions.

If you are a naturally inquisitive person, this may be an excellent approach for you to consider.

# THE PROPHET

The Prophet builds her platform on telling the truth. The requirement for this type of platform is a passion for authenticity. I can think of few people who have done this better than my friend, Jamie Wright.

Jamie authors a popular blog called *The Very Worst Missionary*, on which she riffs and rants about faith, life, and other stuff that bugs her. She complains and cusses and confesses. In short, she says all the things missionaries wish they could say, and people love her for it.

Ask any of her readers why and they'd probably tell you, "Because she's real." She tells the truth — the dirty, ugly, nasty, wonderful truth. That's what a prophet does.

Of course, prophets are not always so popular. They are unpredictable and often offending someone. But that's not their goal. The goal is to simply tell the truth, whether people want to hear it or not. Another example is Seth Godin, who is an iconoclast in the business world.

Seth calls out the brokenness of the status quo — whether it be in marketing, education, or charity work — and challenges us to something better. And sometimes he catches a lot of flack for it. That is also part of the job description of a prophet, so be prepared for some criticism if you take this approach.

And remember to not be cynical for the sake of being cynical. Good prophets do not only condemn the dark; they also call us into the light.

## THE ARTIST

The Artist builds his platform by creating art — whether it be music, painting, or entrepreneurship. The requirement is an eye for beauty.

An example of this type of author is Ann Voskamp, best-selling author and blogger. She communicates the truth of her message through the words she uses and the phrases she chooses. It's a form of prose poetry, and the experience is completely captivating (for the right reader).

[Ann's blog](#) encourages readers to notice the everyday moments in life we might otherwise miss. The gift of an artist is they give us eyes to see.

## THE PROFESSOR

The Professor builds her platform on facts and information. She does extensive research until she has achieved mastery. Of course, there is always more to learn, but this type of person knows more than most. The only requirement is a longing to learn.

A great example of someone who has built a platform this way is Jim Collins. Jim is respected speaker and author. He has written *Good to Great*, *Built to Last*, and *How the Mighty Fall* — all bestselling business books based on extensive research and case studies he and his team have done.

These books are not light reading. They are full of charts and information and case studies. The Professor loves data. And if you are going to build your expertise this way, you too better love reading, studying, and analyzing (or find a team that does).

An example in the blogosphere is Michael Hyatt, who uses his platform to break down complex problems into easy-to-follow solutions and processes. This is the gift of the Professor: they make the seemingly impossible, doable.

## THE STAR

Perhaps, the oddest type of platform to build (and the most visible) is that of The Star. Now, don't misunderstand this. These people aren't just famous for being famous. They are known for being charismatic, naturally likable.

A product of a media-saturated culture, stars are a new breed of influencers. They woo and endear us, even sometimes scandalize their audiences, and for the most part, we love them for it. They are doing what we ask of them — sharing their lives.

But of course, not everyone can be a star. This kind of personality earns his audience through charisma. Often, the person is attractive or talented, but not always. These people earn their attention because people want to be around them, and this is often because they want to be around people. They're a party looking for a place to happen.

An example of this type is Ashton Kutcher. A talented entrepreneur and well-known actor, Ashton has something that makes him especially interesting to fans and customers. He is charismatic, full of energy, ideas, and excitement. As a result, people love listening to him. Another would be blogger and best-selling author, Tim Ferriss, whose mantra is basically, "If I can do it, so can you." This is the message of a star: *I'm just like you.*

Networkers fall into this group, as well. They have influence, because they're

good with people. They may not be the up-front-and-center person, but they are charismatic, nonetheless.

People like stars because stars tend to like people (or at least pretend they do). You can't be a star if you're a misanthrope. It just won't work. More than any other personality, this one is contingent on community. You have to be able to bring people together and give them hope. That's what stars do best — they attract the attention to themselves so that they can point it towards something ultimately bigger.

## **WHAT TYPE OF PLATFORM WILL YOU BUILD?**

If you have a message you want to get out into the world, you need to identify what type of voice you have and what type of platform you should build. These are the five main types of platforms. So, which one are you?

**ASSIGNMENT:** Choose your platform personality.

# STEP 3

## Launch a Blog

I'm gonna cut to the chase: You need a blog. The world is changing and moving on without you, and it's time you had a platform of your own to share your message. The best and easiest way to launch a self-hosted blog is with WordPress.

There are over 60 million blogs on WordPress, one of several platforms that helps you to publish online. This number, according to one source, represents only 43% of all blogs, making the total somewhere around 160 million blogs. (I recently heard this number could be as high as 300 million). These blogs are viewed by an audience of over 400 million people each month — and that's only one place people are connecting online.

Incredible, isn't it? You'd be hard pressed to argue there's not a tremendous opportunity here. But are you taking advantage of it? It's never been easier to connect with an audience and get your message heard... but are you engaging in the conversation?

Forget for a second all the technological hurdles and learning curves you think are associated with blogging, and imagine for a moment: If you had the chance to share a message with the world, what would you say? And what would happen if people actually listened? We all have something to say. Blogs not only make that possible, they make it easy. All you have to do is act. It's time to dive in and figure out what it takes to get your message heard, to see your cause spread.

What happens if you don't do this? Well, nothing. You keep getting what you've always gotten, which probably means:

- No more attention
- No more trust
- No more permission

You stay invisible, and your message remains irrelevant. If that's okay with you, keep doing what you're doing. But if not, it's time for a change. For years, I dreamed of having a personally-branded website I could have control over. But once I started getting bogged down by the technical aspects of blogging, I froze. Then I'd stall and eventually give up. But you don't have to do that.

Setting up a self-hosted blog sounds technical but is, in fact, easy to do. And yes, I think it's worth investing a little money into having full control over your website. I'm going to show you exactly what you need to do. Here are the quick steps you can take:

1. Get a host. A web host is where your website "lives." You own it, but you pay a small fee to keep it online (kind of like paying property taxes to the

government). I recommend [Bluehost](#) for only \$3.49/month. It's one of the most popular web hosts on the Internet and offers excellent, 24/7 customer service.

2. Register a domain. You can get a domain name (e.g. [goinswriter.com](#)) through your hosting company. I recommend doing it this way, so you can keep everything streamlined. With Bluehost, this service is free with a hosting plan (as opposed to paying extra through a service like [Godaddy.com](#)). If you've already registered a domain through another service and need to host it, you'll either have to transfer your domain registration or point your name servers to the host ([here's a video](#) on how to do that).
3. Install WordPress. Blogging requires software, and the best that I've found is WordPress. It's easy, quick, and best of all, free. You can set up WordPress through your host (Bluehost does this for you for free). Otherwise, you have to go through WordPress.org to download the software and then upload it to a host.
4. Get a theme. When you start using WordPress, you get access to a bunch of beautiful blog designs (called "themes"), many of which are free. For those just getting started, I recommend Twenty Sixteen; it's a simple, elegant theme.
5. Log in and start blogging. The URL for your dashboard (which redirects to the login page if you're not logged in) is `yourblogname.com/wp-admin/`. Once logged in, click "Posts" on the left-hand side, and then select "Add

New.” Write a title and create some content for your new blog, and you’re off to the races!

And that’s it; now you’re blogging. Which is where the hard, but good, work of writing begins. See you on the other side!

**ASSIGNMENT:** Set up your own self-hosted blog using a service like Bluehost. For a free, eight-minute tutorial on how to get started, [visit this page.](#)

# STEP 4

## **Publish One Post Per Week**

In this step, we're going to focus on the importance of shipping new content every single week. Once you have your blog up and running, you've got to keep creating. Launching a blog is worthless if it's not updated with regular content.

When I started my blog, I made a commitment to write and publish a new article on it every single day for the first year. By the end of that year, I had over ten thousand email subscribers. Some of the articles were better than others, but looking back, I realize that it was the consistency that grew my audience. It made me a better writer and earned the trust of an audience. When you keep showing up, good things happen.

Now, I'm not going to tell you to write a new article every single day. That was a different Internet back then, and the rules of the game have changed. But I am going to tell you to write one new article (that's at least 500 words) per week.

If you do this consistently, 80% of the time, you are going to see improvements in your quality of content, your own confidence in your work, and the amount of people reading your stuff.

I call this the Aram Method, named after one of my students in Tribe Writers.

For years, Aram Boyd struggled with his writing. He had dreams of becoming a published author and popular speaker but kept getting stuck. Finally, after years of frustration and perfectionism, he committed to writing and publishing a new article every single week.

Aram had made these kinds of vows in the past and failed to meet them. Why would this time be any different? What had changed, however, was that he had recently joined a mastermind group and made the goal of writing a new article every week known to each member in the group. He asked for accountability and invited feedback.

And guess what?

Aram wrote every single week. He did something that, at one point, he didn't even think was possible. Some weeks, he would write well ahead of time and others he'd be finishing the article minutes before deadline. But over the course of a year (and counting), he's consistently done it. And here's the best part: his writing has

improved, his confidence has soared, and he's reaching more people than ever. Here's what Aram wrote on his blog after a year of consistent writing:

“This year I made a commitment to post to this blog every week. Every Thursday by midnight. This kept me focused and got me to work even when I didn't feel like it. 51 weeks in a row I fulfilled this promise to myself. If you're reading this it means I made it to 52. All because of one little phrase: 'no matter what.' That's the secret right there. I made an agreement with myself to post every week No Matter What. Those three little words kept me true to my word. I worked when I didn't feel like it. When it wasn't convenient and things came up, I still got my writing done. When I was tired, uninspired, frustrated and distracted, those three little words kept me going. Even when it seemed I wasn't getting anywhere and the doubt and despair were creeping up on me, I performed. Because those words left me no choice and no room for excuses. I had to do my work no matter what.”

If you want to find your tribe, you first have to prove yourself faithful to the writing process. Having some kind of accountability group, like [My 500 Words](#), can be a great way to stay consistent in this habit. You're definitely going to need help. And you're going to need to commit to the process. No matter what.

**ASSIGNMENT:** Commit to writing a new article and publishing it on your blog every single week. Share this with a group of friends or join an accountability group to make sure you have the support you need.

# STEP 5

## Start an Email List

Every writer needs an email list. It's just that simple. If you aspire to publish a book and actually sell copies some day, if you want to make money off your writing, you need people paying attention to your work. And the best way to do that is with an email list.

So many writers don't get the attention they deserve, and this frustrates me. Their messages fade into oblivion before they even have the chance to be heard. Why is this? Because they neglect the single-most important tool to their success:

The email list.

Email is king. It is, hands down, the best way to build an engaged audience, sell a product, or create excitement around your next big project. Without one, you

will struggle to get the traction your message deserves and leave your fate up to chance.

Why is email so powerful?

Because email is personal. It's a friendlier medium than blogging or even social media. When people see your email in their inbox along with all their other friends, this builds trust.

Because you own your email list. With Twitter and Facebook and other channels, you have to go through the "middleman" to access your audience. But with email, your message is delivered straight to your readers. You don't need anyone's permission.

Because email is private. When you start a conversation in someone's inbox, they feel like they can be themselves and share whatever they may be struggling with, what they want, or questions they have. I love the rapport this builds with readers.

Nearly every person in the world has an email address. That means email outnumbered all the users on Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, and every other social media channel combined. That makes it the world's largest social network. If you haven't tapped into the power of email marketing, then you're missing out on an incredible opportunity to engage with the people who want to hear from you.

But wait a second. Isn't email dead? Maybe you've heard this, that people don't read email anymore or that it's better to use Facebook or Snapchat. But that's just not true.

If email is dead, why does every social network ask for an email address before you can create an account? Why do most people still check email first thing in the morning? Because email is still the most popular way for people to communicate online.

Every day, people check their inboxes (often multiple times per day). They sit in front of a screen, glued to Outlook or Gmail, refreshing until they get that gratification of knowing someone else in the world cares about them.

Certainly, the way people communicate online is changing and some may not be reading or using email as much as they did a decade ago. But email is not dead — it is very much alive and well. And being almost as old as the Internet itself, it's not going away anytime soon.

If you've been avoiding building your email list because it seems like an outdated technology, it's time to face the facts. Email isn't going anywhere. And if you're a writer, you need one.

I've personally seen this with a recent book launch where the book sold 15,500 copies in the first two weeks of the launch. Do you know how many of those were sold via social media? About 500. And the other 15,000? Well, that was all thanks to email.

As a writer, I get more “mileage” out of my newsletter than any other platform, including my blog. When I send an email to my list, I often get hundreds of replies, far more engagement than a blog post gets. If I send a link to my email list, people click it. If I ask a question, people answer. If I talk about my new book, people buy it.

So, you need an email list. I hope that's clear by now. But how do you get started? Here's what you need to do:

1. Get a good email marketing service. This means more than just Outlook or Apple Mail. You need a way to send one message to lots of people all at once.
2. Create a signup form on your website. It needs to be obvious and not hideously ugly. If your website doesn't have a clear opt-in form, then you're missing out on a lot. If you don't have a self-hosted blog yet, [watch this 8-minute tutorial](#) on how to get started.
3. Start emailing your list something new once a week. Don't overcommit to a frequency like once a day or even a few times a week. Start small and be consistent. A weekly newsletter is plenty. What should you send? Whatever you want. I recommend the articles you're already writing once a week. The goal is to be helpful, so that people continue to read and pay attention. If you make it about them, they'll make it about you.

For this, I recommend ConvertKit. It's affordable and easy to get started, and they'll walk you through all of the above. [Check them out.](#)

**ASSIGNMENT:** Sign up for an email marketing service like ConvertKit and set it up for your blog. Then start emailing!

# STEP 6

## **Publish a Manifesto**

Once you have an email list, you need some way of attracting new people to join your list. This is how you grow your tribe. The best way to do this is through what's often called a "lead magnet." For our sakes, I'll call it a manifesto.

A manifesto, in essence, is a summary of your worldview. It's a short, shareable document that quickly lets your readers know what you are and are not about. It's a great way to condense your message into a short, all-encompassing format that adds value to other people's lives.

People can read it, print it, email it to their friends, or feed it to their dog. By reading it (if you've written it well), they get a fuller understanding of your core message, which you have may have been trying to communicate (through your blog, website, Twitter profile, etc.) for years.

This is the reason why people write books instead of just publishing a series of magazine articles. Sometimes, you have more to say than can be contained in short, bite-sized pieces. A community can't do this. When you have something powerful to say — revolutionary, even — you need a manifesto.

My first eBook was a manifesto. I called it *The Writer's Manifesto* (nobody said you had to be too creative with this), and it was a repurposing of an existing article that I expanded into a short PDF that people could download for free once they joined my email list.

The week that I launched the manifesto, my list grew from 72 subscribers to over 1,000. That's the power of this step.

If you've got something to say that can't be contained in a simple article or blog post, maybe it's time to write a manifesto.

**ASSIGNMENT:** Take a piece of writing — a popular blog post, an old article or essay, even a short story that summarizes who you are and what you're about — dust it off, and turn it into a manifesto.

# STEP 7

## Get Your First 100 Subscribers

Now, it's time to build your list. Most people do this all wrong. They start growing their tribe by reaching out to strangers. Don't do this. All you need to get started is 100 people. Do you know 100 people?

Of course, you do. Go to your phone right now. Look at Facebook. Pull out your address book (physical or digital). I guarantee that you have 100 people there. You know 100 people.

So let's invite them to join your email list.

I learned this from my friend, Bryan Harris, who spoke at the Tribe Conference and challenged every writer in the audience, the majority of whom had fewer than

100 subscribers and many who hadn't even started an email list at all, to get 100 subscribers by the end of the day.

Do you know how he told them to do this?

With a pen and paper.

No fancy apps or marketing budgets. Just a pen, a paper, and a phone or computer to start contacting people directly and saying something to the effect of, "Hey, I'm starting a blog about X and want to send out weekly newsletters. Can I include you?"

If they said yes, you could add their name and email to the list. If not, then you honor the request and move on.

By the end of the day, the majority of people who participated in the challenge had achieved the goal. In fact, some had grown their fledgling email lists to over 200 people!

The truth is you know people. You just need to ask their permission to send them information. You can do it. It's not that hard. And before we start thinking about thousands of subscribers, we need to start with 100. If you got started right now, you might be done before the end of the day. So, what're you waiting for?

**ASSIGNMENT:** Reach out to 100-200 people via text, Facebook, and email, and ask them if you can add them to your list (using the script above).

# STEP 8

## **Publish Ten Guest Posts**

Guest posting is a powerful tool for growing your platform. You develop relationships, increase the visibility of your content, and generate new opportunities. Some of the biggest names in blogging used guest posting to build their tribe (Brian Clark, Chris Brogan, Leo Babauta to name a few). I did it myself, using a strategic guest posting approach to gain 10,000 subscribers in about six months.

It really boils down to positioning a couple elements: you and your content. Positioning yourself communicates to the host blogger who you are in relation to her. Maybe you are a subscriber or maybe you know someone she knows. Establishing the relational connection creates familiarity you can build on.

If a host blogger doesn't know you, they definitely don't know what you write about. Positioning your content demonstrates the value you'd bring to the celebrity's blog

in a guest post. Sharing other places you've published content strengthens your credibility and shows you take writing seriously.

Bottom line: You've got to guest post.

One person who did this really well without having any unfair advantages was Elizabeth Bradley, one of my students in Tribe Writers. Elizabeth started blogging almost six years ago. But for the longest time she felt stuck. She started a niche blog but wasn't passionate about it, so she launched another blog called *Savouring Simplicity*.

And then, she started guest posting.

Through guest posting, Elizabeth built her list, grew her network, and contributed to blogs of celebrities, such as Cameron Diaz and Carrie Ann Moss (who played Trinity in *The Matrix*). But the way she did this was crucial to her success. She didn't just hope to succeed. She set a goal, found a winning strategy, then created a plan to get there.

If you want to succeed as a writer, you're going to have to do the same. Passion alone doesn't lead to success. You need to be strategic. Things won't just happen to you, especially if you want to be a writer. You're going to have to learn from those who have gone before you and tasted success. Understand their methods and use their strategies. Trying to do it on your own is just foolish. Learn from the best, mimic what they do, and figure out your own way. You won't succeed without a strategy. It's just that simple.

That's what Elizabeth Bradley did. After learning about guest posting in my Tribe Writers course, she decided to apply the process and made some big asks. And she ended up getting incredible results, results that surprised even herself. Here's what she did:

1. She created a list of 10 bloggers she dreamed of guest posting for and just started asking them.
2. She kept asking until she found a yes. The crazy part? Nine of the ten people she pitched said yes. And the one dummy? Well, that would be me (don't worry; I've since rectified the situation).
3. She continued to do what worked, guest posting on more and more sites and growing her email list to 2,000 subscribers in a matter of months.

If Elizabeth's story teaches us anything, it's that if you do the work, you'll see the results. I believe that. And I hope you do, too. If you're feeling stuck, chances are what's missing is a strategy, or perhaps, the right strategy. Don't just hope for things to change. Make a plan and execute on it.

**ASSIGNMENT:** Make a list of 10 websites you'd like to start guest posting for. Then try to think of other similar sites and get the list to at least 25 if not 30 websites. And start pitching those websites, asking them for an opportunity to contribute something to their website.

# STEP 9

## Get 1,000 Subscribers

Your next step is to reach 1,000 subscribers. Once you have 100, you can start guest posting and promoting your work. The goal of this is to start building links to your website that over time create enough traffic that your audience soon will begin to grow organically.

After you publish 10 guest posts, if you haven't reached 1,000 subscribers, you want to start trouble-shooting and getting more strategic with this tactic.

First things first, how much traffic are you generating from a guest post? If it's less than 100 visitors from a single post, it's time to start targeting some larger bloggers in your niche. Make a new list of 10 heavy hitters (what are sometimes called "A-list bloggers") and pitch them. Consider your first round of guest posts practice for this next round.

Next, if you're generating considerable traffic (more than 100 visitors per guest post), you want to make sure your conversion rate (the percentage of people that are visiting your site and actually signing up for your email list as a subscriber) is healthy.

Tip: if less than 1-2% of your total traffic is converting to your email list, then you need to fix that. So if you're getting a total of 1,000 visitors, then you should be getting 10-20 new email signups per week. Again, that's total traffic. Sending targeted traffic from a guest post should yield a higher conversion rate (more like 5-10%), meaning if you have 100 people visit your site from a single post then you should be able to get 5-10 subscribers from those leads.

If you're not doing that, then you need to tweak one or both of the following:

1. The location of your email opt-in form. This should be clear and obvious, nearly impossible to miss. I recommend signing up for [Sumo](#) and using the pop-up tool called List Builder.
2. The name of and/or the positioning of the manifesto or lead magnet. Oftentimes, people want to change the whole thing, but the truth is people aren't signing up for your email list based on the content in the manifesto. They're signing up for whatever you're promising them this will do. So if people aren't signing up, don't scrap the whole thing. Tweak the promise until you start seeing better results. And if the manifesto doesn't actually fulfill that promise, then it's time to write a new one.

This step is a tough one and is a place where a lot of people get stuck. Some people spend months here. Others spend years. The trick to getting off this plateau is to keep testing things and figuring out what's working and what's not. Then, it's simple: do more of what works and less of what doesn't. As simple as that sounds, very few bloggers do this. If you do, you'll be well ahead of the pack.

Good luck!

**ASSIGNMENT:** Measure how well your guest posts are performing and how well your traffic is converting. Make the necessary tweaks to get the numbers where they need to be (see above), then keep guest posting until you hit 1,000 subscribers.

# STEP 10

## Conduct a Survey

Okay. So now the real fun begins. You have 1,000 subscribers. This is a destination that few bloggers ever arrive at. Of course, you're not done, but you have just now entered a world of possibility.

Kevin Kelly says that if you have 1,000 true fans, you can make a living off your art. And he's right. But there's still work to be done in order to make this idea a reality.

With 1,000 true fans, you now have a tribe, a group of people who are listening to you, who like you, and trust you. What do you do next?

Well, maybe not what you think.

Lots of folks get to this point and try to launch a book or sell their audience something that they think those people need. But that's the wrong move. Because sometimes—no, often—the place where you think people are at is not where they actually are. And sometimes, what you think they already know, they don't.

I like how Derek Sivers says this: “What's obvious to you is amazing to others.”

So, what's obvious to you?

Chances are you don't know. So let's find out. There are three steps you need to take to go from not knowing what people want to knowing exactly what you should create for them. And the way we get there is having the audience tell us. Here's how it works.

## **STEP 1: DO A SURVEY.**

Don't try to guess what people want from you. Ask them. It's that easy. The best way to do this is through a survey, which is just a fancy way of asking some questions and collecting answers. Whether you use a tool like SurveyMonkey, Google Forms, or just send out a plain email and ask people to reply, you want to make sure that you include the following:

1. What do you want more of from me? (Here you want to include the kind of content you provide and maybe some content you're thinking of creating. You want to stay focused on topics and/or how you're helping people.)

2. Would you pay for this? If so, how much? (Here you want to offer some price points that you would willingly accept for whatever this thing is going to be.)
3. How do you want it packaged? (Here you want to suggest the ways you could deliver the product, be it a physical product, a PDF file, a course, a coaching program, etc.)

That's it! Keep it short and sweet. You can ask a few demographic questions if you want. But make sure the above three questions are asked.

## **STEP 2: GIVE THEM WHAT THEY WANT.**

Once you get at least 5-10% of your audience to take the survey (you want a large enough sample size that you can be confident in the responses), it's time to analyze the results.

What do you see that surprises you?

What confirms what you already knew?

Most importantly, what does this tell you is your next move?

At this point, you have enough information to move forward and create your first product. Once people have told you what they want and what they're willing to pay for, then it's time to give it to them. And that's what we'll cover in our next step.

**ASSIGNMENT:** Conduct a survey.

# STEP 11

## Launch Your First Product

Now it's time to create your product. This is not some fancy new app or full-length book. It's something short and valuable that you can create in the next 2-4 weeks. Don't overthink it.

My first product was a keynote presentation that I used to deliver a talk on blogging at a college. I spent a week turning it into a PDF. I called it *Every Writer's Dream*, which was a response to the number-one thing my audience was asking for: answers on how to succeed as a writer. Then, I wrote another PDF to accompany it called *Before Your First Book*, which was specifically about landing a book contract, which I had just done thanks to my blog. Altogether, both books were about 10,000 words.

Then I bundled them together into one product and sold both for \$4.99, with a \$2 discount if you bought in the first week. That's right. I wrote two books and sold them both for \$2.99. That was my first product launch. I sent a bad sales email on a Friday afternoon and waited with bated breath, wondering if anyone would buy.

Someone did. And then someone else did. Three dollars here, six dollars there, and that's how I spent my weekend.

By Sunday night, I had made \$1,500. Five hundred people had purchased my book bundle. At the time, I was making about \$35,000 a year. That was a paycheck, and I'd just made it in a weekend. This changed everything.

After that, I turned those eBooks into a better product, which became a full-length book called *You Are a Writer (So Start Acting Like One)*, and I sold 10,000 copies of that in about six months. Then, I used that book as the basis for a course called Tribe Writers. And that was the year that I made \$150,000 off my writing. The following January, I quit my job and haven't looked back since.

And it all started with that first product. It wasn't the best product in the world. I mean, I built it in a week! But it was the best I could do with the time that I had. It wasn't bad. But it wasn't great either. It was good enough. And that's what a minimum viable product (MVP) ought to be.

You need to create something good enough to sell based on the feedback from your audience. And once you get them to pay you for it, you keep iterating on it, making it better and better, until you've got something you can really be proud of.

Here's how it works:

1. Once you get your survey results, pick the easiest thing you can create in the next 2-4 weeks.
2. Tell your audience that you're going to create it and give them the option to buy it ahead of time at a discount (this is called pre-selling the product).
3. Try to sell at least 10 copies of the product before you build it.
4. If you can pre-sell it, go ahead and build it. If not, keep trying until you find something at least 10 people will buy. Don't spend more than a month building the product.
5. Spend a week launching the product. Send a few emails to your 1,000 subscribers, at least one on the day the product goes live, and two on the last day of the sale (I recommend some kind of early bird price for the first week to capture as many sales as you can during launch week).
6. Keep selling your product until you get to \$1,000/mo.

There are lots of ways to do this. Andy Traub spent 30 days writing a book in public, sending a new chapter every day to his growing email list of subscribers, asking for feedback. By the end of the month, he had a book and an audience interested in his book. When he launched that book, *The Early to Rise Experience*, he made about \$40,000 in just over two months.

Getting paid to write is a messy process. Landing a big book deal is not the first step. It's finding at least 10 people to pay you to create something. It's involving people in the creation process, so that as you build it, people are validating the idea for you. It removes the risk.

Brianna Lamberson did this by coaching a group of 30 women in a Facebook group and then taking everything she learned from that experience to write and launch a book in 30 days. Before she wrote it, she emailed a handful of friends asking them if they'd pay \$20. When they said they would, she sent them a PayPal link. When the money started coming in, she knew she could confidently build something that people would actually buy. Then she launched the book and made \$1,000 in the first week of launching it.

Again, this can look a lot of different ways, but you must create your product with your audience. Involve them in the process, and they will repay you with loyalty. If you can sell the idea (even just to a few people), then you can build it.

**ASSIGNMENT:** Build your MVP and launch it. Don't move to Step 12 until you've made \$1,000 off it.

# STEP 12

## **Make Your First \$10K**

Once you've launched your MVP and made your first \$1,000, it's time to scale. The idea here is once you've done something you can do it again. Once you've made \$1,000 a month, you can do it again and again.

Each time you level up, the baseline for what's possible rises. You increase your capacity. What once was out of reach is now the new norm. And so now, our next step is to make your first \$10,000. If we can do that with a launch, we can start doing that regularly, and you will be on your way to making a full-time living as a writer.

This stage is a big one and may take some time to work through. That's okay. Don't rush it. You need to do this right.

Here, you need to keep growing your email list (from 1,000 to 10,000). You need to test and tweak what's working and what's not working with your product. In all likelihood, your MVP—whether it's a book, a coaching program, or something else—won't be your forever product that you keep selling year after year. It's just your first big win.

So at this stage, you may want to remove that product entirely and create something new, or maybe you can just tweak it and turn it into something better. But at this point, you need to be thinking about how you can grow.

Typically, that means doing all three of the following:

1. Reaching a larger market. Practically speaking, you need to grow your email list from 1,000 to 10,000 through more guest posting, webinars, and paid advertising and other means of list growth. Once you have something to sell, you can also partner with affiliates and get access to other people's audiences. Together, you can sell your product and share the revenues.
2. Charging more for your products and services. As a rule, your prices should only ever increase over time. Start low and gradually raise them to test what your audience is willing to pay. Also, don't forget that as you grow in experience, what you're worth actually increases. So it only makes sense that what you sell should cost more over time. A good rule of thumb here is to start with multiple price points for your products with the high price being out of reach for 80% of your audience, the middle price being what you want most people to pay, and the low price being something low enough that it should feel affordable to those who really want what you're offering.

3. Sell more often. This might mean more launches or creating automated sales funnels. But the bottom line is the more you sell, the more money you'll make. Obviously, you want to do this in a way that you are comfortable with and aligns with your values, but as a rule, it's true. Sell more, make more.

At this stage, you'll need to iterate your MVP into some kind of signature product that you can continue to sell over and over again. It can be a course, a coaching package, or even a book. You'll want to spend a few months building the product so that you know it's right. It needs to have multiple price points, and you should spend at least 5-10 days launching it. The goal is \$10,000. If you can do that, you can do \$100,000 a year.

**ASSIGNMENT:** Spend 3-6 months creating a signature product. Grow your list to 5,000-10,000 subscribers. Then launch your product to your email list for 5-10 days, sending at least one email every other day telling people why they should buy it. Make \$10,000.

# CONCLUSION

I remember the first time I launched my signature product, Tribe Writers, and made \$25,000 in a week. It felt like I'd just won the lottery. Afterwards, I went to lunch with my friend Michael Hyatt and told him about it. I said, "I don't think this will ever happen again. That was just dumb luck." He laughed and said, "Jeff, you're right. That won't happen again. Next time, it'll be even better."

And he was right.

Every year since then, it's gotten better. The books I write, the blog posts I publish, the courses I teach. It's all been getting better. That's not to say there haven't been failures and setbacks. But over all, this thing just keeps getting better.

I know it sounds crazy and out of reach. It certainly felt that way to me then and still sometimes does. But what I know about these 12 steps, because I've now seen them implemented with success thousands of times, is that they work. If you do the work, you'll see the results. And if you get to Step 12, and you do a \$10,000 launch of a signature product, you've made it.

When my first traditionally published book, *Wrecked*, came out, my wife gave me a card congratulating me on the accomplishment. It was at the tail end of a busy season when we'd had our first child, I'd started a blog, published two books, and launched a course, all while still holding down a day job. But it was all about to change. A few months after, I would quit my job and our lives would never be the same. And in that card were these words, which I'll never forget:

"It was never a question of IF, but always a matter of WHEN."

The same is true for you, if you're willing to do the work.

Good luck.

See you on the other side.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J Ben". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline.

# APPENDIX

## The 12 Steps

**STEP 1:** Clarify your message with a worldview statement

**STEP 2:** Pick your platform personality

**STEP 3:** Launch a blog

**STEP 4:** Publish one post per week

**STEP 5:** Start an email list

**STEP 6:** Publish a manifesto

**STEP 7:** Get your first 100 subscribers

**STEP 8:** Publish 10 guest posts

**STEP 9:** Get 1,000 Subscribers

**STEP 10:** Conduct a survey

**STEP 11:** Launch MVP and make your first \$1,000

**STEP 12:** Start making \$10,000/mo