HOW TO GET YOUR MOJO BACK

7 Steps to Face Your Fear & Climb Out of Your Creative Rut

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Introduction

Seems like once upon a time ago
I was where I was supposed to be
—John Mellencamp, “Longest Days”

I remember the day vividly.

It had been a long day of teaching, and it was almost time to head home. I wanted to enjoy a few minutes of silence before fighting traffic, so I slouched down in my office chair and stared at the bookcase next to me.

I was exhausted. I was in my mid-30’s and 40 lbs. overweight. I thought about the classes I was teaching: fundamentals of the arts, how to plan worship services, how to speak effectively, and how to creatively use technology.

The irony was that I felt anything but creative. The energy and enthusiasm of my 20’s was long gone. I had no clear vision for my future, and I felt like a complete failure. I had lost my mojo and had no idea how to get it back. I knew I had to make some changes in my life to recapture the energy and momentum I once had.

Can you relate? If you’re tired, burned out, and feel like you’re stuck in a creative rut, this book is for you.
Have You Lost Your Mojo?

What is *mojo*, exactly? In its most literal sense, it refers to a magic spell or charm that gives unusual power to its owner. As a person of faith, I don’t believe any object can give you special powers. However, I do believe that God gave each of us creative abilities we can use to powerfully impact other.

So in that sense, *mojo* is a slang or informal term that refers to the momentum and creative energy we have. There’s nothing magical about it, but there’s no denying that you can lose it.

Have you lost yours? Here are a few symptoms to help you decide:

- You feel emotionally, mentally, or physically depleted most of the time
- You lack a compelling vision for your life
- You don’t remember the last time you were inspired by a great movie, good book or some type of art
- You aren’t reading any books that are expanding your mind
- You feel isolated from other creative people
- You don’t have an outlet for your creative gifts
- You are just “getting by” instead of pushing yourself to do your best work
- You generally feel “stuck” in life
- You feel your best days are behind you
• You feel cynical about the present and pessimistic about the future

If you answered “yes” to several of these, you have probably need a good dose of inspiration and encouragement.

But before we get to some solutions, let’s explore where things went wrong in the first place.
Where Did Things Go Wrong?

How do we get to a place where we lose our passion and drive for doing great work? There are several reasons:

1. We are isolated from a creative community.

When we lose touch with creative people who offer support, with people who lift us up rather than pull us down, we quickly lose momentum.

2. We are physically and emotionally depleted.

Our level of creativity is directly tied to our energy. When you’re tired and depleted, you don’t have the capacity to think new thoughts or do your best work.

3. We are comfortable.

When everything in life is going just fine, and we don’t have any challenges that force us to learn and grow, we aren’t compelled to seek creative solutions to problems and live at the highest level.
4. We aren’t feeding our minds.

If you aren’t feeding your mind through books, podcasts, and other means, that will create the conditions for burnout and fatigue.

5. We let life wear us down.

The process of daily life—family, church, job, chores, social functions, relationships—can easily wear us down if we don’t break out of the rut.

6. We are experiencing conflict with others.

Conflict with others, whether at work, home or elsewhere, can absolutely suck the life out of you. Navigating conflict with others is very costly in terms of mental and emotional energy.

7. We are experiencing high stress levels.

When we’re too busy or overcommitted, we simply don’t have the time, or the mental and emotional energy, to be truly creative.

Are you experiencing any of these symptoms? If so, chances are very good that they explain why you feel stuck in a rut. However, there is one factor that lies at the root of all these other issues: fear. Let’s explore how fear is holding you back.
Three Fears Holding You Hostage

There are always factors outside your control that contribute to losing your momentum and energy. But the true culprit lies within. Fear lies at the root of nearly all of the problems that get us off track.

Specifically, three types of fear can hold us hostage and keep us from rising to our potential.

1. Fear of the past.

We are afraid to repeat the mistakes of the past. Perhaps we tried something and it failed. Or maybe we were criticized for our work and can’t bear the thought of going through that again.

When you fear the past, you tend to avoid any risks or changes that might cause the same negative consequences to occur.

2. Fear of the present.

We are afraid to make necessary changes and move forward because it will mean the loss of something. All change brings loss of some kind. But the whole reason for change is that it will bring a positive benefit that outweighs the negative loss.
This is the reason so many people stay in jobs or relationships that are not good for them. They would rather stick with the misery they know than risk the changes they don’t know (but could bring positive results). The loss of the familiar is a powerful motivation for avoiding change.

This is true for any type of change. It explains why so many people fail at getting healthier, or stopping any negative habit. They are afraid of losing the pleasure that comes from eating unhealthy food or indulging in any kind of activity that brings immediate gratification but has harmful long-term effects.

3. Fear of the future.

Sometimes we are worried about the future and what it holds for us. We might lose a job, a relationship, or something else that’s important to us. The future is unknown, and we tend to stick with habits and attitudes that will help us avoid the risk of loss. So we play it safe and don’t make necessary changes.

What is your greatest fear? The past, present, or future? Perhaps all three?

There is good news and bad news. The bad news is that you can never get rid of fear entirely. It’s part of your DNA. But fear is not necessarily a bad thing. When put in its place, it can help us achieve our goals and propel us forward.
The good news? You can take action to develop actions and a vision for your life and creative work that puts fear in its place. Your vision and excitement has to be bigger than your fear.

Keep reading for some strategies to help you take action, put fear in its place, and make your comeback!
How to Be a Comeback Artist

Everyone loves a comeback story. The good news is that a great comeback isn’t limited to the movies or television. You can get your mojo back and start firing on all cylinders again.

Here are 7 ways to help make it happen:

1. Spend time with growth-minded people.

The people you spend time with, in large part, determine your level of success in life. If you’re surrounded by small thinkers, your thinking in turn will be small. But if you spend time with big thinkers, that will have a wonderful impact on your success.

Here are 4 ways to spend time with growth-minded people:

• **Join a mastermind group.** A mastermind is a group of people who meet regularly to spur one another on toward success. It was popularized by Napolean Hill’s classic book *Think and Grow Rich*.

• **Find a mentor.** Mentoring can take many different shapes. Find someone who can help you in a specific area of your life, and ask if they would be willing to meet regularly. Several years ago I asked the pastor of a large church to mentor me in a work-related area, and it was invaluable to my development as a professor.
• **Join a community of growth-minded people.** I have enjoyed being a part of several groups at 48days.net. Here you’ll find literally thousands people who are focused on personal growth and success.

• **Invest in personal coaching.** When you invest in paid coaching, it shows that you’re serious, and you’re much more likely to take action because it’s costing you something.

2. **Reconnect with God.**

Over the last several years I have dealt with a bulged disc in my lower back, and it has caused severe pain at times. I am thankful for my chiropractor and acupuncturist, who have made a tremendous difference in my health. When your spine (the center of your body) is out of whack, it causes problems everywhere else.

There is a great spiritual principle here: **When your relationship with God is off balance, everything else will be as well.** I believe the key to a meaningful relationship with God is spending time in the Bible and praying. This is the best way to re-orient your life toward true north.

There are endless Bible reading plans and methods for prayer, but the key is to keep it simple. If you make your devotional life too complicated, you won’t stick with it.
My personal practice is to read a couple of chapters from the Bible, read a section from devotional book (usually something by Richard Foster, Frederick Buechner or Henri Nouwen), and then spend some time praying. It takes around 30 minutes total, and I prefer to do it in the morning before I start the rest of the day.

3. Eliminate as much negative input as possible.

The two biggest sources of negativity in your life are 1) the news, and 2) other people.

Have you ever noticed that the news consists almost entirely of stories about war, murder, political scandals, and other causes for worry? When I read or watch the news, I can literally feel the tension in my shoulders increase, and my heart beats faster as I worry about all the things I’m reading.

The irony is that you can’t do anything about 99% of the news you read, and most of it doesn’t affect your directly anyway. Consider curbing your input of news stories that don’t add any real value to your life.

It’s not always so easy to reduce input from negative people. However, you can limit the time you spend with them as much as possible. It’s easy to focus on the negative qualities of others and forget that we don’t have the power to change them. Instead, we must focus on what we can change—ourselves.
I once had a coworker—let’s call him Steve—who was extremely negative. He walked around with a terrible frown on his face, and he seemed like he was always miserable. When Steve entered a room, the tension level always went up considerably.

After a while I noticed that every time I talked to Steve, I felt more negative about my workplace and even became suspicious of others. So I began to limit my interactions with Steve to only those that were necessary for work purposes.

You’ve heard the phrase “garbage in, garbage out.” That is certainly true when it comes to your mind. One of the keys to a positive life is getting rid of as much negative input as possible.

4. Pay attention to your physical health.

Of the seven suggestions I’m sharing, this is the one where I have the most difficulty. I have struggled with my weight since my late 20’s. I love reading and writing (which are both sedentary activities), and I also love fast food and junk food of all kinds. Those habits are a recipe for disaster.

One morning in December 2013 I woke up and thought I was having a heart attack. It was the first time in my life I literally thought I might die. It turned out to be gallstones and I had surgery later that day to correct the problem. It was a wake-up call, and I knew I needed to get serious about my health. (I was 39 at the time.)
There are literally thousands of diet and exercise plans, and it’s beyond my expertise to recommend something that will work for you. But I do know that in my struggle to become healthier, seven things have helped the most:

• **Keep it simple.** You probably won’t stick with elaborate plans for meals and exercise. Do things that make it easy to follow through.

• **Make it fun.** Do the type of exercise that you enjoy. I like biking and running, so I incorporate those into my exercise routine.

• **Focus on small changes.** It’s tempting to make big plans and change everything in your life at once, but that’s a mistake. Use the power of incremental progress to your advantage. Small changes over time produce big results.

• **Involve others.** Melanie (my wife) and I keep each other accountable in our health goals. It’s much more fun to get healthier with others than doing it alone.

• **Have a plan.** Decide in advance what you will eat and when you will exercise. It’s much easier to cave into temptation when you don’t have a clearly established plan of action.

• **Shoot for a goal.** You will be much more motivated when aiming for a target. Remember the saying, “If you shoot at nothing you’ll hit it every time.”
• **Track your progress.** My favorite way to do this is with the [Lose It! app](http://loseit.com), which lets me record my calorie intake, exercise and weight. This helps me visualize my progress as well as my goals. It’s also a great motivator because you can see your progress as you lose weight and integrate more exercise into your life.

You know as well as I do that it’s very hard to make changes to your eating habits. It’s also hard to begin exercising if you don’t already. But there are numerous benefits to getting healthier, including more energy, more self-confidence, and fewer health problems.

In addition, the discipline that comes with getting into shape extends to every other area of your life. When you feel and look better, it has a positive overall affect.

5. **Fill your mind with great content.**

Your thoughts form root of everything that happens in life. Your actions, attitudes, and relationships, and are the direct result of your thoughts. It’s imperative that our thoughts be in line with our goals.

The problem is that we often fill our minds with meaningless news and entertainment. There is certainly a place for relaxing (and I’ve been known to occasionally binge-watch a series on Netflix), but it’s important to maintain a mental diet of content that will propel you toward success and help you reach your goals.
What kind of content should you be putting into your mind? Here are a few suggestions:

- **Books.** Choose books that will help you grow and become a better leader and artist. It’s important to read books from a variety of perspectives and subjects. This will keep you fresh and prevent you from getting into a mental rut. I shoot for reading a book every 1-2 weeks, though I typically have several books going at once.

- **Podcasts.** Podcasts are free and don’t necessarily require extra time. You can listen to them while in the car, or during your exercise routine. As with books, I listen to a variety of podcasts, including some just for fun. As a creative person, don’t limit yourself to content focused on business or productivity.

- **Magazines.** I subscribe to a few magazines pertaining to business and creativity, but the danger of periodicals is that the content goes out of date quickly. I have moved almost exclusively to reading content online (rather than print magazines).

- **Newsletters.** There is a huge amount of material available in the form of newsletters from bloggers, leaders and companies you respect. I subscribe to well over 100 newsletters, and use unroll.me to “roll them up” into one daily email digest. That way, I can quickly skim through the content without having dozens of emails clog my inbox.
The kind of content you put into your mind will in large part determine your thoughts, so make sure you’re reading and listening to great material every day.

We should take to heart this quote from James Allen, author of the classic *As a Man Thinketh*:

*All that a man achieves and all that he fails to achieve is the direct result of his own thoughts. . . . A man’s weakness and strength, purity and impurity, are his own, and not another man’s; they are brought about by himself, and not by another; and they can only be altered by himself, never by another. His condition is also his own, and not another man’s. His suffering and his happiness are evolved from within. As he thinks, so he is; as he continues to think, so he remains.*

6. Revisit your life purpose.

It happens to all of us. In the midst of everyday activities—email, meetings, writing, creating, driving, family life—we lose touch with our real reason for existence. We become mired in the details and forget that we need to look up once in a while. I don’t think you just sit down and write out your life purpose in five minutes. But over a period of time, as you create, serve and connect with other people, you begin to have a clearer sense about why you do what you do.
It took me quite a while to be able to articulate my life purpose. But here it is:

_I help people unlock their God-given creative potential._

That probably doesn’t sound like much to you, but it means the world to me. It gives me direction, focus and energy. Just as important, it helps me say no to things that don’t align with my purpose.

If you haven’t given this much thought before, here are a few questions to spur your thinking:

- What do you feel passionate about?
- What are your creative gifts?
- What do you enjoy doing?
- If money were no object, what kind of job would you have?
- What kind of books do you read?
- What is your favorite movie?
- What have been the most joyful times in your life?
- What kinds of things do people compliment you about?
- What makes you cry?
- What makes your heart sing?
- What are you known for?

These kinds of questions will help you get to the heart of who you really are, and what you were born to do.
Frederick Buechner describes a person’s calling like this: “We should go with our lives where we most need to go and where we are most needed.”

Where do you need to go? What are your talent, experience, personality, creative gifts, and others you trust telling you?

Where are you needed? Where can you make the biggest impact through your art and creativity?

7. Create a realistic plan for progress.

If you want to make positive changes in your life, you must make a plan. Long-term change rarely happens by accident.

The emphasis here is on a realistic plan. What will you actually put into practice? You want to push yourself, but you don’t want to do too much, too quickly. Focus on one thing at a time, on habit or action, and do a little bit each day. When you’re consistent, you’ll be amazed at the progress you can make.

Keep your plan simple and put it in a place where you will see it every day. I have a giant dry-erase board on the wall in front of my desk. I write my goals and plans there so I can see them every day. (My family also sees them, so it’s no secret when I’m off track!)

I know your head is probably swimming from all the suggestions I’m
making here. But don’t get overwhelmed. Trust me, I don’t do these perfectly. Think of these tactics more as something to shoot for, than something to be perfected.

Just pick one area, and get started today.
The Missing Ingredient

Everything I’ve said so far is true. I hope much of it is helpful to you. But all of it is worthless without the missing ingredient, which is:

\[ \text{You must take action.} \]

Books are great. Mentors and coaches are great. Plans are great. Positive people are great. Having a purpose is great. And God, especially, is great!

But all of it’s pointless unless you actually do something about it.

There are 4 things that help motivate me to take positive action every day:

1. Family

Every time I turn on my phone, open my computer, look at my desk, or the dry erase board in my home office, I see pictures of my wife and son. They are the real reason I do what I do. I want to create a better life and future for them.

2. Faith

I have faith in my abilities and my potential to do creative matters. I
have faith in God, that He gives me the strength I need, and the wisdom to make good decisions and invest my time wisely. I also have faith in the power of personal growth and developing good habits.

3. Future

When I don’t feel like doing what I need to do (whether it’s exercise, eating right, writing, or something else that doesn’t provide instant gratification), I ask myself a simple question: “Tomorrow, will I be glad I did this yesterday?”

If I do what I should be doing today, I can wake up tomorrow morning knowing I did the right things yesterday. Every positive action I take today is an investment in tomorrow.

4. Fun

Life is simply a lot more enjoyable when you’re setting goals, taking action to meet those goals, and enjoying the results. Once you start taking action, you will start to see progress, and you’ll be rocking your mojo once again!
What Happens When You Fail?

Despite your best intentions, and amidst all your wonderful plans, you will sometimes fail. In fact, you may completely crash and burn. Been there, done that.

The issue is not whether you will fail. You will. Rather, the issue is what you do after you fail. Here are four suggestions that will help get you back up on your feet after a failure.

1. Don’t beat yourself up.

When you make a mistake, it feels as if someone should punish you. But guilt is poor motivator. It doesn’t do any good to sit around feeling sorry for yourself and telling yourself you’re a bad person. You can’t change the past. As my Grandma used to say, “There’s no use crying over spilled milk.”

2. Figure out what went wrong.

It’s perfectly OK to make a mistake. What’s not OK is repeating the same mistake over and over again. What series of choices or actions led to the failure? What can you do to prevent the same thing from happening again?
3. Borrow the wisdom of others.

This is a good time to lean on the wisdom of others who have successfully navigated the waters you’re sailing. Find a trusted friend of mentor who can help you work through the issues you’re facing. You also have at your disposal a virtually unlimited amount of wisdom via books, podcasts, online courses, etc.

4. Take decisive action quickly.

It’s necessary to figure out the reasons for the failure, and wisdom and insight from others can make a key difference. However, don’t get bogged in that process. The only reason for these steps is to help you get back on track. This is not the time to overanalyze things; it’s the time to take action so you don’t lose momentum.
Chasing Tomorrow

You’ve heard that old phrase, “There are only two kinds of people in the world …” There are actually three kinds of people:

1. Those who are chasing yesterday.

They are living in the past, recounting the glory days of their youth and wishing things would just go back to the way they were. They don’t realize that the good old days weren’t really that great, and things will never go back to the way they were.

2. Those who are chasing today.

Their main concern is “What will make me comfortable and bring pleasure today?” They don’t invest in tomorrow’s success because it requires planning and discipline today. They would rather play now and pay later, but they don’t realize that the longer you wait to invest in tomorrow, the more it will cost.

3. Those who are chasing tomorrow.

These are the ones who understand that if you do what needs to be done today, you can enjoy a much better tomorrow. They don’t see the discipline they practice today as drudgery; they delight in the
process because it’s creating a better today and tomorrow. They know every thought, action, habit, and investment they make today will pay off tomorrow.

So let me ask: What are you chasing?

Are you chasing tomorrow by living in the past?

Are you chasing today by focusing on momentary pleasures and comfort?

Or are you chasing tomorrow by making the most of today and investing in your future, and the future of the ones you love?

If you’ve lost your mojo and want to get it back, you won’t it by living in the past or making today as easy as possible. You’ll only find it by imagining a better tomorrow and doing what’s necessary today to make it a reality.

The future is not determined. The future is created. And you have the power to create your future by the thoughts, choices, attitudes and actions you focus on today.

So choose wisely.
Thanks so much for taking the time to read this guide. But don’t stop there. Take a couple of minutes and write down 3 action steps you can put into practice in the next 24 hours.

**Action Step #1**

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**Action Step #2**

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**Action Step #3**

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Endnotes


Resources to Take You Further

Books

*As a Man Thinketh* by James Allen

*Are You Living or Existing? 9 Steps to Change Your Life* by Kimanzi Constable

*Creativity, Inc.: Overcoming the Unseen Forces that Stand in the Way of True Inspiration* by Ed Catmull

*The Daniel Plan: 40 Days to a Healthier Life* by Rick Warren, Daniel Amen and Mark Hyman

*Failing Forward: Turning Mistakes Into Stepping Stones for Success* by John Maxwell

*First Things First* by Stephen Covey, A. Roger Merrill and Rebecca R. Merrill

*Halftime: Moving from Success to Significance* by Bob Buford

*The ONE Thing: The Surprisingly Simple Truth Behind Extraordinary Results* by Gary Keller
Think and Grow Rich by Napolean Hill

Thinking for a Change: 11 Ways Highly Successful People Approach Life and Work by John Maxwell

Today Matters: 12 Daily Practices to Guarantee Tomorrow’s Success by John Maxwell

Podcasts

48 Days with Dan Miller
The Charged Life with Brendon Burchard
Life in the Woods with Blake Stratton
The Ray Edwards Show
Take Action Q & A with Rye Taylor
This is Your Life with Michael Hyatt
Meet the Author

Hi, I’m Kent. My wife calls me “Honey” and my son calls me “Dad.” My students call me “Prof. Sanders.”

Since I work on the assumption that we’re already friends and fellow travelers on the creative journey, you can just call me “Kent.”

By day I’m a professor at St. Louis Christian College. By night I’m a masked vigilante fighting crime on the streets of the Gateway to the West. (Not really, but a middle-aged guy can dream, can’t he?)

In addition to being a family man and teacher, I’m also a writer, guitarist, and equipper of artists and creatives. I live in St. Peters, Missouri with my wife Melanie, son Ben, emotionally needy Australian shepherd named Madison, and perpetually irritable cat named Sandy.

You can read more about me [here](#), and connect with me here:

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