

TRACKING WONDER



5 WAYS TO RALLY

Curiosity, Delight, & Deep Connection

INTO YOUR CREATIVE PROFESSION & LIFE

TRACKING WONDER | HANDBOOK ONE

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Wonder to the Core



WONDER IS NOT JUST KID'S STUFF.

This nuanced emotional experience cracks open our shells of preconceptions so we can see and taste what's real, true, beautiful, and possible.

Wonder sparks questions like, "What would happen if on 10.10.10, eco-innovators organized their own events to limit the carbon footprint?" ([See Bill McKibben and 10:10.](#)), "How could the song of insects in the desert be performed?" ([See performance artist Meredith Monk's work.](#)), "What if a corporation were focused primarily on fun for employees?" ([See Zappos.com](#) or [Southwest Airlines.](#)), and "What color will be the egg from which I hatch in 2018?"

Whether you're an individual creative practitioner or freelancer, a proprietor of your own micro-business, or someone simply seeking a fresh way to approach your days, wonder is an awesome ally. And who are wonder's allies? Curiosity, delight, and deep connection are three. Wonder sends **CURIOSITY** off to pursue our wondrous questions.



It invites sensual **DELIGHT** to the pursuit of our projects.

And because of its unique ability to open the human mind and spirit, wonder also brings us into **DEEP CONNECTION** with the world around and with what matters most.

The experience of wonder is not a relic of childhood. It's a reminder that some things are more important, more real, and more beautiful than others. It's also not an accessory for people with easy lives. It's as essential for us to thrive in this human life as is good food and love and fresh water and play.

This handbook shares 5 simple ways you can track wonder and invite curiosity, delight, and deep connection into your creative profession and creative life.

Thanks for running with me,

One: Honor Your Quirky Curiosity

TAKE STOCK OF WHAT YOU AND POSSIBLY ONLY YOU ARE CURIOUS ABOUT.



When [E.O. WILSON](#) was a boy who roamed Alabama's fields and woods, he paid attention to ants. Chalk up his obsession to boyhood fascination, and you miss the point. He has kept his eye on the industrious insects most of his life. His open wonder and active curiosity have led him to develop great ideas that have changed how we view social behavior, the unification of knowledge (consilience), and human beings' innate attraction to other living species (biophilia).

Your curiosities might not lead to scientific theories, but they might lead to new projects for your business, your design, your art, or your writing – or they might just lead you further into the woods of your own imagination. And that's not a bad thing. If you don't pursue these seemingly quirky curiosities, who will?

What You Can Do to Honor Your Quirky Curiosity:

➤ KEEP A CURIOSITY NOTEBOOK

I prefer pocket-sized lineless Moleskines. Keep it stashed in your pocket so you can capture an idea or observation on the page and translate it into creative action later.

➤ KEEP A PERSONAL OR PROFESSIONAL CURIOSITY CABINET

Cabinets of Curiosity (*Kunstkammern*) and Cabinets of Wonder (*Wunderkammern*) emerged in sixteenth-century Europe. Imagine a whole room or piece of furniture devoted to curiosities – a whale rib next to owl egg. Wonder cabinets were indicative both of the European drive to record and categorize all known knowledge during the Renaissance as well as to question that very tendency.



A personal or professional Curiosity Cabinet is a table, shelf, an actual cabinet, or corner of a room devoted to your curious project. Here is where you shape space for your wonder project, and here is where you will let your mind hang out in your own wonder room – even if the “room” is a corner.

What's included in such a “cabinet” space? Books and articles, photographs, magazine images, your sketches and diagrams and notebooks, musical instruments that attune your mind, favorite pencils and pens – in short, anything you select that daily reminds your creative mind what is important. And what is important?

This project that invites wonder and opens you to new possibilities. That's what is important.

Two: Stop Knowing So Much

When someone offers a new idea or a bit of information that might unconsciously threaten you, part of your brain sizes up the new idea into your mind's known categories.

This biological impulse comes from what I call “**Survivor Brain.**”



Our ancestors needed Survivor Brain. As they tromped through thick woods or new land and saw a shape, their brains automatically registered “predator” or “prey,” and the body – before the conscious mind could even register the right category – responded with uplifted spear or running legs. (See cognitive scientist George Lakoff's [Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things](#), a fascinating study of this impulse.) The truth is most of us do not need Survivor Brain to be as active as it likely is in our daily professional and personal lives.

What do we need to survive and thrive in the 21st century's new economic and social climate? A study referenced in [Fast Company](#) recently cited one trait as the quality that most people in business need to “survive”: **creativity**. Survivor Brain ironically counters the mind's capacity to stay open to possibility – a crux for creativity. Survivor Brain reacts more than creates. Survivor Brain bolsters our ego by bringing out our Mr. Know-it-All. Our Mr. Know-it-All pretends we already have all the answers.

The Mr. Know-it-All in each of us sends wonder in hiding. When you're pursuing a creative project, keep your mind open. Live in more questions than answers during three critical phases of a creative project:

➤ INCEPTION

Don't start a project thinking you have everything already figured out. You'll lose interest and drop the project more quickly than a baby drops yesterday's toy.

➤ IN THE MIDDLE

How do you stay fresh with a long-term project day after day? I heard Susan Orleans, author of [Orchid Thief](#) and writer for *The New Yorker*, address this matter. One litmus test that she's onto a good project is whether or not she is continuously having questions about the subject. “If I already know everything about it or know where it's going, then what's the point of my writing the piece?” Wonder is an awesome motivator. If in the middle of a project, you lost that wondrous feeling, either stop knowing so much or assess whether or not this project even merits more attention.

➤ TOWARD THE END

Refrain from tidying up a project. Poets, novelists, and memoirists have to trip up the mind's attempts to tie up the loose ends. Some artists have to hold back from making a piece look too polished. A business product might be refined when produced, but it's likely going to need improvements.



Art, products, and life – they're all works-in-progress. And the more we think we know about any of them, probably the more we realize how little we do know. Savor that not-knowing, and turn on your Wonder Brain. You'll find it in the wilds of your imagination.

Three: Care About What Matters Most, Not What Others Think



PAUL CEZANNE'S paintings in the late nineteenth century have helped change the way we see space and matter and the way we see art and beauty in ordinary things. HERMAN MELVILLE'S novel *Moby Dick* changed the way some later novelists form novels and how we think of truth and beauty. ELIZABETH GOULD'S studies on marmosets have helped change the way we view our brain's capacity to create new neurons and, hence, how some of us view middle age and our golden age. Her research has helped us recognize the environment's and, most recently, sex's role in birthing new cells. RIC O'BARRY'S activist efforts have helped change the way we view dolphins in captivity at seemingly innocuous dolphin parks like Sea World.



Cezanne's friend Emile Zola pleaded with Cezanne to stop painting; he thought they were that bad. Numerous publishers rejected Melville's novel over and over. Gould risked being laughed out of her professional community as happened to a handful of brain scientists who earlier had posited the possibility of neurogenesis. O'Barry's former friends in Hollywood thought him daft when he risked his creds as one of the best dolphin trainers in the industry to start freeing his captive bottle-nosed friends.

IN EACH CASE, AN ARTIST, A NOVELIST, A SCIENTIST, AND AN ACTIVIST CARED MORE ABOUT WHAT MATTERS THAN WHAT OTHER PEOPLE THINK.



What likely helped them persist the potential suffering was wonder. In his book *Self and World*, Eli Siegel says this of Cezanne: "He sees the fruit accurately — with unrelenting accuracy; nevertheless, through his accuracy a something beyond the fruit, a wonder beyond the vegetable is presented. Familiarity and wonder must be, and have been present in all true aesthetics."

And Melville loved the sea. Melville complained in that the sea writing of his day was fact-based and, as one scholar notes, "symptomatic of a larger movement away from the qualities of wonder and poetic resonance." Herman yearned for more. Wonder for the sea and the desire to create a wondrous experience for others fueled *Moby-Dick*'s convention-shattering form.



Questions and curiosity prod scientist Elizabeth Gould. An early wonder for Kathy, a bottle-nosed dolphin used in the television series *Flipper*, has inspired O'Barry's activism for nearly forty years.

Once they know they're on a meaningful, wondrous path, creative innovators in business, the arts, and sciences ultimately don't fret about holding onto managerial jobs or rocking the boat. Wonder connects us with a deep sense of reality and truth. This sense matters more than what voices of the status quo, the masses, the *hoi poloi* say to pull us down, yank us back to our cubicles, or shackle us to the obvious.



Three: Care About What Matters Most, Not What Others Think

What You Can Do to Honor What Matters Most

✂️ ➤ FIND THE WONDER PORTAL IN YOUR PROJECT

The Wonder Portal is that open space within that helps you feel more alive and real when working on your project. Just center yourself or take a walk and check in with one or more of these questions:

- What does this project matter to the best in me?
- To the best in a few other people?
- What's enjoyable about working on this project?
- What do I still not know about this project that I'm excited to explore?

Whenever doubt calls out, remember how you feel when you wear the answers to these questions.

✂️ ➤ GIVE A MILES DAVIS SHRUG TO OTHERS' NAY-SAYING

Few tunes bring out my creative wonder more deliriously and automatically than Miles Davis' landmark "So What." It's the first track of *Kind of Blue*, hands down the best-selling jazz record of all times. Released in 1959, the album of six tracks defied the standard be-bop trend of jazz at the time and forever changed the way people thought of jazz, and it changed the way musicians played jazz. I hear in the two-note refrain on "So What" Davis' shrug to the musical establishment. So when you hear that chorus of the status quo start to chime in with "But what if you fail? But what if you lose money? But what about your obligations?", then respond (silently or otherwise) with your own shrug of confident cool: *So what?*



Take an audio break.

Click to listen to Miles Davis' landmark song, "So What".



Four: Dose Up on Daily Delight & Wonder While You Work

WE MAMMALS THRIVE ON DELIGHT.

When sights, sounds and smells, tastes and touch surprise us with delight, our brain's happiness zone lights up. When we enjoy our work, we're more likely to persist and focus.

Delight, not drudgery, motivates us. Successful creative people know how to bring pleasure into their lives and work every day.



The research of psychologist [Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi](#) (pronounced “cheeks sent me high”) has changed the way we understand creativity and pleasure. Csikszentmihalyi gave subjects a beeper. Whenever the beeper went off throughout the day, subjects instantly noted what they were doing in a notebook and to what extent the person enjoyed doing it. He discovered that people are happiest when having good meals. Good food, good sex – not surprising results of what satisfies us mammals.

But there was one big surprise. Csikszentmihalyi discovered that more than good food or sex, something else brings joy to creatives: that state of flow, as Csikszentmihalyi himself coined it.

HOW DO WE INCREASE OUR HAPPINESS WHILE WORKING AND ALSO CREATE THE CONDITIONS FOR FLOW TO HAPPEN?

Shape your days and physical space to bring more physical pleasure and emotional gratification into your work. That's the conclusion drawn from founder of positive psychologist Martin Seligman's research. But seeking only positive emotions and pleasure alone won't ultimately bring you happiness. Again, Seligman during his TED Talk: “If you have meaning and engagement, then pleasure is the whipped cream and the cherry.”

You don't have to work in Maui to invite delight to your days. Savor the hues and tastes of the small physical world around you. Letting a dark chocolate bite dissolve on your tongue, tending to a tender orchid near your desk, writing with the right pen, and stepping outdoors for a break in vision— these are all small yet essential ways to bring wonder closer to your work space.



Go deeper with your happiness.

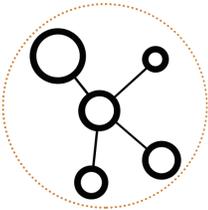
Click to listen to Martin Seligman's TED Talk, “The new era of positive psychology”.



Five: Crack Open and Connect

Creative professionals and practitioners often think they must suffer their projects alone. They're often mistaken. True, we writers, designers, and creative entrepreneurs thrive on solitude. But creative collaboration plus a deep connection with the world around you offers a combination that can sustain you through the vagaries of a creative project and a creative life.

In fact, several psychologists now examine **social creativity** – the dynamics of how the Lennon and McCartneys or the Michelangelos and Medicis of the world flourish.



HOW DO WE CONNECT?

More than love, more than joy, more than any emotional experience, wonder opens us.

It opens our body's windows – our senses – to dried leaves floating like brown snow onto the lawn. It opens our hearts to a stranger on a bus or to a baggage-toting relative. It opens our minds to the ideas of a co-worker we previously had pigeonholed. It opens that portal to our own true self's possibilities and to what matters most in this one wild life.

What You Can Do to Get Cracked Open in Creative Collaboration:

➤ LEARN TO LISTEN

Good ideas need space to roam. Practice not interrupting. Practice asking, “Is there anything else you'd like to explore?” Practice asking questions more than inserting your knowledge. If you hear your own mind racing with what it wants to say next, quiet it by focusing part of your mind on your breath's rhythms.

➤ FOCUS ON IDEAS NOT YOURSELF

People who have more substantive conversations about ideas report being happier than those who don't. Nothing shuts down a good flow conversation that could lead to great ideas than bragging, self-analyzing, or otherwise redirecting the topic back to one's self. When you notice your ego begging for attention, step back in your mind and remember the big idea, the project, the creative problem at hand.

➤ OPEN UP INSTEAD OF SIZE UP

In brainstorming sessions and collaborative sessions, it's common for Survivor Brain to size up your potential collaborators. Survivor Brain pigeonholes, labels, and writes off. If threatened in a competition of ideas, Survivor Brain attacks or criticizes. Often nearly unconscious prejudices can keep you from recognizing the potential value in someone else's idea.

If you hear your Survivor Brain whispering insults to you about your potential collaborators, whisper back, “Open up, instead of size up. Open up, instead of size up.” Imagine the space between you and your collaborator as a continuum of ideas. It's up to you to keep that continuum open and fertile with possibility. See the person before you anew.

Wonder Talk can be invaluable not only in idea generation but also in idea execution.

Five: Crack Open and Connect

▶ CONNECT OUTSIDE YOUR FIELD

What does feverfew have to do with writing fiction? Well, my wife is an expert in Chinese medicine and community medicine. If I want feedback on a character who flourishes in dark rooms, she's likely to tell me about an herb like feverfew that thrives in shady woods. That analogy in turn might lead me to riff on fever and feverfew and further research the herb to see if the research might feed my story's texture. None of my writer friends could offer that kind of fertile collaboration. **Creative habitats thrive on idea-diversity the way environmental habits thrive on eco-diversity.**



One of Frans Johansson's contribution to the field of innovation and creative collaboration is what he calls the [Medici Effect](#) – the name of his book that teems with insightful ideas and useful tools. His convincing premise is that during the Italian Renaissance, artists, architects, and poets thrived in part because the Medici family's funds and social orientation brought figures in seemingly separate fields together. And early 20th-century salons led to such innovators as Picasso, poet Jean Cocteau, and musician Eric Satie working together on the ballet Parade.

Yesterday's salons find form in co-working environments among creative professionals. As part of the co-working movement, a group of people in New York's Mid-Hudson Valley where I live have developed the [BEAHIVE](#) – a collaborative workspace + community. A quotation that guides this group's principles actually comes from Csikszentmihalyi's book, [Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention](#): “...an idea or product that deserves the label ‘creative’ arises from the synergy of many sources and not only from the mind of a single person.”

So reach out to other people committed to living creatively. Shape ways the two or three or four or more of you can gather regularly for creative collaboration, feedback, and support.

▶ TAKE THE WORLD AS YOUR PARTNER



Step outside, step outside of yourself, and you might realize that this physical world is a creative partner. When Australian Muslim [Aheda Zanetti](#) paid attention to how uncomfortable wearing heavy burqas was in the Australian waters, she listened to a great question – How could a bikini be combined with a burqa? And then she followed through and came up with an answer – the burqini, a lightweight polyester swimsuit. Her paying attention, being open to that question and its possibilities, and then following through all have led to changing the way Muslim (and even some non-Muslim) women around the world enjoy swimming. And she's changing the way people view Muslim women.

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