



**THE
PRAXIS
WEEKLY
PLAYBOOK**

01

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN WORKER AND ENTREPRENEUR

I trust you're busy grinding it out and creating value! Over the next ten months at your business partner, think about what makes the enterprise tick. Here are some questions I want you to think long and hard about that will help you get a better sense of what you're doing:

- What's the biggest threat to put the company out of business? (A competitor? Unhappy customer? Legal issue? Obsolescence?)
- What's the biggest constraint on growth?
- Is there a new tech or innovation that would fundamentally alter the business model?
- Who are the customers? (Not always as easy as you think...sometimes you're not selling the person who pays the money, but someone else..)
- What do the customers think they are buying? (Peace of mind? Solving a specific problem? Happiness?)
- What do employees think they are selling? (and is it the same as the above? e.g., you think you're selling coins, but customers think they're buying security...)
- What would happen if the CEO stopped coming to work?
- What would happen if you stopped coming to work?
- Biggest strengths/weaknesses of the business model?

It might be useful for you to take these questions, add some of your own, and begin to write down your answers somewhere. It might be instructive to ask the CEO or employees their thoughts on these questions. The difference between a worker - one who gets a check to do a specific task - and a linchpin or entrepreneur is the ability to put specific tasks in the broader context of the business, industry, and economy. Kick ass on your day to day work, but never stop thinking big picture as you do!

02 SOCIAL CAPITAL CHALLENGE

Every opening seminar our speakers are impressed by you. They're even more impressed by those of you from whom they received thank you notes. If you did not send any thank you's, you missed a valuable opportunity to build social capital with some great people!

Speaking of social capital...

Here's a challenge for you this week: have coffee with one interesting person you don't know. Maybe someone at your business partner. Maybe another entrepreneur in town. Maybe some guy at the used bookstore. Reach out to someone you think might have an interesting perspective on life, ask to buy them coffee, and ask them questions.

Share the results with the rest of us!

03 \$1 MILLION

Did you take someone out to coffee last week? Did you list out answers to the questions from week 1 about the companies you work for?

Now the question of the week...

What would you do with \$1 million? Be honest. Think long and hard. If the money were really in your bank account right now, what steps would you take?

What if the money came with a directive: "Create as much value as possible"? Would that change your answer to the first question? Why or why not?

It's easy to assume all the things we want to do in life would be a piece of cake if we just had access to more capital. But most of us don't even know what we'd do if we had it! It's an excellent exercise in self-knowledge to really plumb the depths and answer this hypothetical.

I submit that if you know beyond a shadow of a doubt that you'd put it into a startup idea, that's a good sign you should pursue that idea! If you have a startup idea but you're not sure you'd put the money into it, it might not be such a great idea. I had a lot of ideas before Praxis, but I wouldn't have put that much money into any of them if I had the choice. Praxis was the only one I believed in enough to unequivocally desire to invest whatever capital I could. It was a good sign I should give it a go!

I'd love to see each of you share on the Facebook group your honest answer to the question - even if it has to do with Caribbean beaches and Mint Juleps!

Keep up the great work at your business partners and in your education. Don't leave any value on the table.

Congratulations on your progress thus far! Your progress through the Praxis program is a huge deal not only for you, but for anyone who wants to live a free, self-directed life. People are watching and waiting to see if an education model like this can be valuable, and the further you go, the more we have businesses and applicants coming to us to know more about the program. You are the secret marketing weapon!

Now, about writing. We don't have much in the way of formal writing assignments in the curriculum. Part of the reason we don't assign more is that writing for an assignment is so much less valuable than writing for a customer, investor, boss, blog readers, or the general public. We want - in fact, we expect - you to write regularly throughout the program, whether or not your business partner requires it. It's time to start pushing yourself to write - not merely to write, but to "ship" what you write - regularly. Ideally every day, or at least 3 times a week.

To that end, I issue a challenge: This week, either a) start a blog and get posting, and/or, b) write a letter to the editor to a local newspaper and submit it, or an article for an online magazine or outlet of your choice. To sweeten the challenge, if you get published in a newspaper or other third party outlet (not your own blog), we will throw some swag your way.

What to write about? A few ideas come to mind...

- Write about Praxis. Write about your experience, the curriculum, what this ten months means to you, how you're changing, what your goals are, etc. (I told you, you're the secret marketing weapon!)
- Write about what you're covering in the curriculum. There's no better way to learn something than to write about what you read. What ideas are interesting in the module?
- Write about the goals you set at the beginning of the program, and how you plan to meet them.
- Write about your favorite band and why they inspire you.

The Praxis blog would love to publish you as well. We are also happy to offer edits and suggestions. The team has written hundreds if not thousands of articles and blog posts, and while we don't claim to be Hemingway, we can help you clarify and punch up your writing.

Are you up for the challenge?

05

PROGRAM GOALS CHECK-IN

Remember your 3-5 measurable outcomes (not outputs) you hoped to walk away with by the end of the program?

It's time to do a quick gut check. Have you made any progress on any of them? Have you missed any opportunities to make progress? Can we help you make progress?

We should never be surprised to hear how you're doing. Ideally, you'll take advantage of the team and keep us looped in so we have a sense of how much you feel you're getting out of the experience, or any struggles you're having.

Kill it this week!



WHAT DOESN'T MAKE YOU COME ALIVE?

It's relatively early in the program, but I want to get you thinking about one of the most valuable forms of self-discovery we hope to foster: figuring out what **DOESN'T** make you come alive!

From your experience thus far, have you been able to add anything to your list of things you know you don't want to pursue? Eliminating things from the field of options is incredibly helpful, more helpful, in fact, than trying to figure out what you do want to do. If you begin by eliminating things you don't care for, whatever is left is fair game, and represents a kind of "probability field" of the things you'll settle into.

So, feel free to post to the group anything you've added to your, "Well, know I know I don't want to do this!" list since the program launched. Any aspects of what your business partner does that you know do not appeal to you?

Every time you add an item to that list, it should make you excited! It's one less thing to waste your energy on.



CONSTRAINTS AND THE FUTURE

If you had no constraints, what would you want to do immediately after Praxis?

Think about it for a bit.

Now ask yourself what you think you'll actually do immediately after Praxis.

If the answers are different, why? What are the constraints? Can you identify them, name them, and list them? Can you begin to eliminate or reduce any of them?

What can you do to narrow the space between what you'd do with no constraints and what you think you'll do in reality?

I tend to think it's healthy to have goals much bigger than what seems currently possible, but not to just leave them in the realm of imagination. Always ask why they seem impossible, and try to make them more and more possible. Even if you don't get all the way there, you might be surprised how close you can come...and it's likely what you thought you wanted will change in the process of thinking and moving toward it.

Try as much as possible to make the you without constraints and the you with constraints the same person.

A few months in, it seems a good time to examine the value of learning, vs. the process of “schooling” that most of you are familiar with.

The point of learning is to alter the patterns of your brain. It is to change the way you see and interpret the world so that you can better achieve what you want. (Sometimes what you want is simply the pleasure of knowing!). New facts or information can alter your thinking patterns, but it’s rare that raw data alone will rewire your brain unless it is the kind of data that runs counter to an accepted belief. The best learning requires conscious examination of your paradigms and theories (which are often tacit), consumption of information, both in the form of new theories and new facts, and a re-examination of whether your previous notions were complete and correct. If not, you begin the work of creating new ones that more accurately measure up to your new knowledge.

This all sounds a bit esoteric, but remembering what learning actually is plays a huge part in determining how much you learn from the Praxis curriculum, and life in general. The schooling approach is focused much more on a menu of raw data you are supposed to memorize, along with a set of predetermined questions you must be able to answer with that data. It asks nothing of you in terms of rewiring your brain or smashing your paradigms. You needn’t have the foggiest idea of the causal relationships in an economic order to memorize tropes like, “A) Black Tuesday was the event that caused the Great Depression”, for example. This kind of information, which you’ve been loaded up with throughout your life, has very little transformative power.

The incentive structure in a schooling system is for you to know all the answers, or at least be able to fake that you know them. You have to prove that you know certain things, regardless of whether you’ve been transformed or improved by that knowledge, and if you don’t you have to pretend you do. In other words, it has nothing to do with you or what’s beneficial to you, but everything to do with repeating certain things that allow parents, teachers, and other members of the schooling institutions to check things off their lists. The idea of pretending to know things you don’t is one of the most antithetical things to learning. Knowing you don’t know something is wonderful, and nothing to be shielded or treated with shame. It’s the greatest motivator for actually learning it!

As you continue through the curriculum, don’t worry about memorizing facts you think examiners want to hear. Take ownership. Look at the curriculum

as a smorgasbord of content that can be used to transform your thinking in ways beneficial to you. We want to see that transformation. We want to hear you talk about what you do know, and what you did learn, not say words you think you're "supposed" to know.

This ain't school, it's life. And in life, learning is not only amazingly enjoyable, it's the difference between stagnation and growth. We're tossing you a trowel, and some water and fertilizer, then coming back a month later for a tour of the garden. Your growth is in your hands.



THE VALUE OF ECONOMIC THINKING

To whatever extent you have or will engage the economics in the curriculum, I would be remiss if I did not stress the power and relevance of economics to improve your decision making and thinking in all aspects of life. There is no better field to understand human behavior.

So what is economics? It's the study of purposeful human action. When humans acts, what do they do and why? What patterns emerge and why? It begins with the assumption of rational self-interest (everyone who acts does so because they believe acting is preferable to inaction given the knowledge they have at the time). This approach is called "rational choice theory" and it is the most powerful lens through which to see and navigate the world.

Once you internalize and understand it, you no longer grasp for childish explanations for odd behavior. When a seat-belt mandate passes and accidents increase, economic helps you see why, rather than simply saying "people are dumb". It forces you to do real thinking rather than let yourself off the hook calling people stupid or evil, even when they do the most apparently awful or irrational things - from terrorist acts to bizarre pricing schemes to wearing lots of bling. It doesn't make anyone good or evil, but acknowledges that, regardless of their righteousness or lack thereof, they are rationally self-interested, and therefore their behavior communicates something of importance about them and the incentive structures they face.

Dig deep into this discipline and learn to think like an economist. I assure you, it will provide so many insights that break through superstition and dogma and make you better at what you do. You'll recognize the incentives baked into the institutions around you - from governments to workplaces to social circles - and understand why people within those institutions behave as they do, and it can help determine whether it's worth your while to change the incentives in those institutions, play the game as written, or opt out altogether.

Be rigorous when you analyze the world.

10 THE DIP

The dip is real.

The honeymoon phase of the program is likely over. You're probably right about in the dip. The lull. The doldrums. This is when the work gets hard, the study gets hard, and the enthusiasm is now work.

This is also what separates greatness from sameness. Those who maintain a definiteness of purpose within and in spite of the dip are those who build the best world for themselves and others.

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PERSONAL BRAND AUDIT

Review your online presence and the online presence of one fellow participant. Partner up, swap feedback, make adjustments. Who do you want to be? Are you that person? Is it easy for others to see that you are?

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WORKER VS. ENTREPRENEUR PT. 2

What's the most unique value your business partner creates?

Compared to all the other alternative providers of the product/service you offer, what's the one value add most unique?

What makes it so valuable?

Do customers see this clearly? Why or why not?

Can it be scaled? Can you do something to help?

Take some time to think about these questions. Write down the answers. It's about more than just doing tasks. It's about effectively doing tasks AND taking ownership of the vision and taking the big picture into account. It's about seeing how and why each task does or doesn't matter, and how much so.

Be the kind of employee someone would want to hand the business off to someday!

Networking is incredibly valuable. But are networking events? Sometimes.

Here's a short challenge:

Identify and attend some kind of event, reception, networking shindig, conference, or social this week with a crowd of interest and relevance to you. Then share with us on the FB page where you went, what you thought, and what value you gained, if any.

I have attended hundreds of networking events, happy hours, conferences, receptions, seminars, business networking groups, etc. The range in terms of value they provide is huge. Many are a ridiculous waste of time. Some are quite inspiring and full of valuable connections I still have today.

Early on, the only way to know is to go. Over time (and as your opportunity cost rises) you'll develop a more keen sense of what is and is not worth it for you.

Do a little research on some meetings in your area (ask your coworkers, friends, locals in the know, Google, etc.), pick one, attend it, and let us know what you think!

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PHILOSOPHY OF WORK THOUGHTS

I had an interesting conversation with a friend about how realistic it is to merge what you do for a living with what you do for fun. We both agreed, whatever path is chosen, it's important to not be of a divided mind about it and not harbor feelings of guilt or being a "sell out" if you do work that's not also your hobby. Everyone has different preferences. I personally have always placed a higher value on doing work that's really interesting to me than I have on doing work that's highly lucrative or allows a lot of free time. Sure, I've had jobs at golf courses and grocery stores and construction sites that weren't my passion, but I always viewed those as transitional while I moved closer and closer to work that expressed what I'm all about. I'm very happy with my choices, but I do know people who've pursued their passion and never made enough money for a decent life. They do work they love, but they're a little bitter about their relative poverty.

I have friends who chose a different route - getting highly remunerative work that they could tolerate but don't love so they could spend more time/money on what they do. Some have succeeded marvelously and have nice lake houses and recording studios and do a lot of traveling and cooking fancy meals. They don't like work much, but they work so they won't have to work much. I also know some who've taken this path and never done well enough to pursue what they love, and they are probably the most bitter of all, feeling both like sellouts and serfs at the same time.

The point is, I can't tell you what's the best approach for you. No one can but you. But it will benefit you to examine your preferences. What do you love doing most of all? Would that be better or worse if it was also how you earned your living? (I probably love playing music more than anything, but I think I would like playing music a lot less if I had to earn a living doing it). Why do you work? To create free space to do other things, or because it's what you want to be doing?

Whatever you decide, be at peace with it. Be conscious of the trade-offs and why you chose what you did. The worst is to just sort of float downstream and end up doing something by happenstance, never feeling like you made a choice, and always bitter that you aren't doing something else, or aren't making more money, etc.

That's my thought for the week. It's something you should always be thinking about.

Be selfish.

Too many people labelled “selfish” are really merely self-consumed, which is the weakest form of self-interest.

Instead, be genuinely selfish, not as a convenience - it’s actually quite inconvenient - but as a principle. That means making decisions for you and in your interest, but also desiring that others make decisions for themselves and in their interest.

Wishing your own good as defined by you and the good of others as defined by them is a noble challenge and the basis of genuine relationships and progress.

Phrases like, “Take one for the team” are typically just a way to evade genuine self-knowledge and responsibility, or to manipulate people into doing what you want rather than what they want. If you’re doing something because of guilt, obligation, or sense of duty, you can always blame the collective, or slack, or remain unclear about whether you’re really happy with your action. Don’t give yourself that out. Know what you want to do and do it. And respect others enough to want them to do what they really want to do.

This plays out in enterprise all the time. Don’t try to make a great company, try to make yourself great. If you are the best version of yourself and everyone else on the team is too, that’s the most likely recipe for corporate success. It’s the same with friendship.

I'd like to issue a challenge: think bigger.

Probably the only regret I have about my own path in life is that it took me too long to give myself permission to ask big questions and treat big opportunities as possible. It doesn't mean you'll achieve everything, but there is a kind of transformation that happens when you open your mind to bigger ideas and questions than those you've been told are reasonable for your social group. Let's look specifically at thinking about your business partners.

In a previous class a guest to our group discussion asked some questions about the business model of participant business partners. No one seemed to have given a whole lot of thought to things outside of their own area of work like, "How much net profit does the company make per customer?" or, "How much does the owner make per deal?" Don't let yourself get stuck in an employee mindset. Yes, you want to effectively handle your responsibilities, but that doesn't mean you should only think about those responsibilities!

Think bigger. What would you do to setup a company to compete with your business partner? How would it be better and more profitable? Thinking seriously about these things can not only open your eyes to new possibilities, but also make you better at overcoming problems in the present.

What about the industry you're in? Is it a dying industry, or a growing one? What points in the production chain in that industry are the most leveraged and offer the greatest value creation opportunity or ability to impact the world?

I think it's a useful (if sometimes annoying) habit to constantly try to calculate and guess how much money people make, how much their companies make, and break down in your head your estimates of costs/revenues. This exercise can bring some interesting realizations. Some businesses will baffle you entirely as to how they make a dime (which will make you really impressed that they somehow do...or able to predict their inevitable demise). Other businesses will stick out as hugely profitable and you'll wonder why more people haven't gotten in...maybe there's something you're missing, or maybe it really is a great opportunity.

There are endless examples, but the point is to break out of the narrow focus on your immediate tasks, skills, assumed career path, etc. and think about the bigger picture.

Do you want to follow orders or create your own path? The former requires little big picture thinking, while the latter can't happen without it.

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COMMUNICATING BIG IDEAS

One of the hardest things I've faced is turning an exciting idea into something understandable to others. I've launched a number of businesses, nonprofits, and programs, and in every case the idea grew into something so big and exciting I had a hard time boiling it down.

When I put together the "business plan" or summary, it tended to be more descriptive than persuasive. A mistake it took me too long to learn. If you want to convince others - investors, co-founders, allies, customers - to be a part, you need to be able to sell your core vision in words.

As you build your portfolio projects, here is some excellent advice on putting a summary together that I've found incredibly useful:

<http://www.garage.com/resources/writing-a-compelling-executive-summary/>

If you get a little more involved and actually want to flesh it out more, here's a great guide to putting a deck together:

<http://www.garage.com/resources/perfecting-your-pitch/>

Dig in, and have fun!

“5 PEOPLE” EXERCISE

It's been said so many times that no one seems to know who exactly to attribute it to:

“You are the average of the five people you spend the most time with.”

This is a powerful and revealing insight. Whether or not it's true in a formulaic sense, there is truth in it for sure.

So here's your five minute morning exercise:

- 1 - Make a list of the five traits you most want to gain/enhance/improve in yourself
- 2 - Make a list of the five people you spend the most time with
- 3 - Add what trait you think most defines/describes each person above

Now take a look at both lists - the traits you want, and the traits you hang out with. How similar are they?

The only person who can get you where you want to go is you.

Psychological and social studies both show that people feel depression and anxiety when they do not believe they are the locus of control in their life.

Did you catch that? A belief alters mood, brain chemistry, thinking ability, effectiveness, and even health.

Because it's a belief doesn't mean it's easy to change. Beliefs are formed not only by rational reflection, but by willful practice. I don't mean the "What About Bob" kind of repeating a desired belief to yourself over and over. I mean by taking actions in accordance with those desired beliefs until you begin to change. We assume that we only act based on our beliefs, but it is also true that we believe based on our actions.

Back to despair. If you've ever felt it, the chances are very good at the root is a belief that you don't have a lot of control over your life. The more external you believe your locus of control to be, the more despair. How to combat this? How to gain the genuine belief in your own ability to direct your life? Act.

Start doing things. It's always amazed me how much it helps. I've had many days where I felt helpless, down, in despair over something important that was out of my hands. I was waiting for a response to a big email or call. I was waiting for a colleague. I had done my part and the rest was up to the universe. Whether or not that was true, it always turns out that accepting it as such made me have a terrible day, week, or even month. Instead, if I start doing things, taking action to increase the likelihood of success, actively pursuing plans B, C, and D, even if unlikely, digging deeper and getting more creative about other things I can do, even as I awaited others.

As an entrepreneur, you are bound to feel helpless at times, especially in regards to capital. Don't believe it. If your mentality is one of helplessness until and unless you get that big investor, you probably won't succeed and you'll probably be depressed. There is always more you can do without anyone's permission. Always. And when you start taking action, you'll feel a hell of a lot better.

Sometimes it's worth it to do something you can control even if it's unrelated to the "big" thing. My old boss would get stressed while awaiting replies from important board members on important stuff. Rather than letting it eat her alive, she'd immediately find the most important documents or materials

she could and start editing the daylight out of it. She was a great editor, and it was an activity in which she was in total control, and could knowingly create value without waiting for permission from others. It wasn't always her highest value activity, but it was probably the best way to keep her positive and energized.

Entrepreneur or not, you've probably experienced this yourself. Contrary to popular jokes about how awful Mondays are, for most of us they're actually pretty amazing. The real bitch is Sunday evening. During the weekend we become less and less attuned to our various projects and responsibilities, but we know they still exist. They become more myth than reality, and thus their power to stress us out grows. By the time you sit at your desk Monday morning, you're probably a little avoidant and worried about what lies before you. But then something amazing happens. By simply going through your emails, looking over the week's schedule in detail, and handling a few smaller tasks, you feel in control and confident. Rather than simply knowing challenges existed and feeling them suck the life from you all weekend, you now know exactly what they are and what it will take to tackle them, and you've started making lists and taking actions towards completion. Your belief in your ability to handle them is monumentally stronger than it was over the weekend.

This is one of the reasons I like working a little on vacations, holidays, and weekends. Not because I live such a stressful life, but as an active choice; a way to reduce stress. When I know what I have to do and am taking even small actions every day, I feel more in control and thus more empowered and happy.

If you feel depression or despair, ask yourself what you believe about the locus of control in the situation. If it's not with you, find actions you can take to reinforce your belief in your ability to control your life.

Have a great week.

20 THE POWER OF THE THANK YOU

I loved the book, “The Hard Thing About Hard Things” by Netscape co-founder and VC superstar Ben Horowitz. When I read it, it hit me at just the right time. I couldn’t put it down. When I finished it I did something immediately...

I wrote Ben Horowitz and thanked him for writing it.

I had to do a few minutes of digging and eventually send him a rather impersonal LinkedIn mail and email to a generic inbox at the VC firm. He’ll probably never get it, but that’s not the point. I didn’t write it for him as much as I wrote it for me.

The act of writing a thank you email or note is powerful. It draws my attention to the people around me and the value they create for my life. It sharpens my awareness. It enhances my enjoyment of life. It keeps me on my game because it forces promptness, clear and concise communication of what I value, and doing what I believe regardless of if it’s seen by others. It makes me more organized. For all of these reasons I’ve tried to turn it into a habit, and send thank you’s whenever I can. I never lie if I’m not thankful, but I can discover a lot of reasons to thank a lot of people.

What I’ve discovered about thank you’s reminds me of what one of my favorite thinkers, CS Lewis said about prayer. He said he didn’t pray because he thought it would change God. He prayed because the act of praying changed himself.

Again, thank you’s, especially when habitualized, have a powerful positive effect on you. Not always in cheap, immediate warm-fuzzies. That’s just the heart candy. Even when it’s just a task, the act of doing it consistently begins to change you in wonderful ways. It’s great that they can also have a powerful effect on others, but even if they don’t, you can gain from thanking.

In short, thank you notes are really valuable, really low-cost, and really underutilized. It’s value just sitting there waiting to be seized.

How many have you done since starting the program? Have you sent thank you’s to your bosses, or co-workers, or guests on the Praxis discussions, or oral examiners, or new business contacts? Have you read a great article, book, or blog post and thanked the author?

Try it. Don’t let yourself slack on it for a few weeks or months. Buy an inexpensive stack of thank you’s and use them. Thank you emails are a close second.

You are more than half-way through the program. That is a perfect timeframe to try something I've found to be incredibly valuable: short-term goal-setting.

I find big plans like New Year's resolutions, or goals like, "I'm going to run every morning for the rest of my life" to be useful only for the first few months, if that. I like to complete things, and I have a short attention span. This makes long-term goal-setting a bit counter-productive at times. If you're like me (or most humans), you lose momentum, and the initial goal you set is unrealistic for such a duration.

Instead, try setting mini-goals, or even micro-goals. Micro-goals are to normal goals what Twitter is to a blog. For example, rather than, "I will read more this year", or, "I will read two new books each month", try doing something more intense, but shorter, like, "I'll read three books I've been wanting to get to this week", or, "I'll read 10 books in the next 10 weeks". When that goal is completed, create a brand new one, totally unrelated, but in some other area you think will add to your human capital and happiness.

I find goals that last anywhere from 1 to 12 weeks to be ideal, and the shorter the more intense they can be. I've gone as long as six months with these (A six month period in which I blogged every day, and read a book per week. It was probably the most creative and productive time of my life!), but I find that somewhere in the 1-2 month range is ideal, as I can really push myself with both kinds of discipline - the urgent action of a sprint, and the sticktoitiveness of a marathon.

So, 20 weeks. What's one thing you want to do to improve yourself that will be hard, but that you can do in 20 weeks? You can do a lot in even just an hour a day for 20 weeks. That's 140 hours. You could learn an instrument, read five books on a single topic (and thereby know more than 95% of the population on that topic), etc. etc.

Have fun with it.

22 HAPPINESS AND HARD WORK

“Are you the hardest working person at your job?”

I was once asked that. It took me a minute to decide, and the fact that I didn't know immediately made me think maybe I wasn't. At least not everyday. I thought about the days when I definitely was, and those when I cashed in a bit of my stored up good will and took it a little easier. I realized something: I was less happy the days when I couldn't unequivocally say I was working my hardest.

It's unrealistic to work your ass off every day if your only motivation is for the company to succeed, or the customers to be pleased, or because it's the “right” thing to do. That's fine. Don't do it for those reasons. Work your ass off because it makes you happier than when you slack.

Rules are beautiful things. They are also horrid things. Depends on who's making them: you, or someone other than you.

Because people like us are all for breaking other people's rules doesn't mean we shouldn't set some for ourselves. Testing out different rules is an amazing method of self-discovery. We do this with things like diet and exercise, but I think rules can be fruitfully applied much more extensively.

Here's one rule I challenge you to test out this week: don't criticize anything.

Deny yourself the opportunity for one week to voice your disapproval of anything. A movie, a book, a bad driver, the weather, etc.

This rule is especially valuable when you don't conflate lack of criticism with complete silence. If you want to say something about the really boring meeting at work but you're not allowed to simply say, "That sucked", what will you do? I bet you'll dig a little deeper and get a little more creative at identifying the problem and communicating possible solutions, or taking action yourself.

Facebook is of course the obvious place to test it out. And we're all watching. ;-)

Let's see what a week without criticism feels like.

It might be great, or it might be awful. Either way, you'll learn something about yourself, which is the most important thing to be knowledgeable about.

PS - You like how I pre-empted your ability to tell me what a dumb idea this is? ;-)

OK, how did it go trying not to criticize anything for a week?

New test for this week: Try reversing the burden of proof as much as possible and see what happens. What if instead of needing damn good reasons to do or think things, you required of yourself damn good reasons not to?

Why not start a band? Why not run a marathon? Why not write a book? Why not order a spouse through the mail from Russia? Why not....?

You won't end up doing most of these things. But in reversing the burden of proof, you'll learn a lot about yourself. A lot. Status quo bias is hugely useful and efficient. If we had to re-argue against every new thing we'd be exhausted. But try doing it for a week, and try doing it just a little bit more in general. It's easy to assume we have reasons for not living much differently than those around us, but often we have no reasons at all.

25

CREATE YOUR OWN SCHEDULE

I often think about how slow society can be to change, and how so many of the things we do and feel are the result of completely outdated norms that no longer serve any purpose.

In the realm of work we all basically still act like farmers with no electricity. Nearly everyone across the country gets up within the same few hour window, works and eats on the same schedule, and comes home on the same schedule. Even those with more flexible schedules, remote work, or who love what they do often deviate little more than extending the hours on either side. This results in things like horrible rush hour traffic, weekend lines at dining establishments, and conformity in thought and action.

We're all on the same basic schedule for no reason at all. We don't need sunlight to see and we needn't wait until the animals are awake any more. In fact, why have a work week at all? Why not just create as much value as you need to earn the amount you want for any given slice of time? Just create and produce and exchange stuff in whatever way works for you.

There are obviously benefits to being on a similar schedule as others, and certain lines of work that have better reasons, but for the most part the feelings of guilt for deviating from the norm and the pressure to conform are needless. There is nothing bad about the typical schedule; in fact, it's probably one many people would choose even if it wasn't pre-selected for us. But it's an example of how easy it is to just think the same as everyone else rather than doing the hard work of discovering what works best for you and having the courage to do it.

Consider how many things you do and feel for reasons unknown. Examine them. If they don't work for you, create your own way and excel.

26

UNIQUE RULES

There are a lot of incredibly valuable general rules, tips, methods, and approaches to productivity and success in the Entrepreneurship module. We're all pretty familiar with some of the common maxims.

Yet every successful person I've ever met or spoken to has a few weird exceptions to these common rules, or a few odd rules of their own. Often the tipping point is when you finally discover the rules and habits that are valuable for you but almost no one else.

Think about your own. Share with us on the Facebook group one weird habit that you successfully employ!

We make it a point of emphasis in the program that theory and practice needn't be walled off from each other, and that abstract ideas feed and are fed by application and experience.

There is a slight danger, however, that this unification of theory and practice will be misunderstood to mean that all theory in order to be valuable must immediately present a way to make my Tuesday mornings better.

You see it in religion and philosophy a lot. Deep and complex mysteries of the universe are quickly transposed to "Ten Tips for Dealing with a Bad Boss". There is nothing wrong or to be sneered at about making practical use of abstractions, but the potential to miss out on a deeper level of knowledge is present. The danger is not in moving from abstract to concrete, but in doing so too quickly.

When you're toying with big, crazy ideas give yourself plenty of time to just let them sit. Ruminates on them consciously, and let your subconscious toy around with them. Don't present yourself with the false dichotomy of, "It's either of use to me today, or it's a useless idea." Give it time. Come at it from other angles. Don't demand too much immediate use.

After you've treated the idea with respect and interest over time, perhaps then you'll start to see ways in which it can make your life better. If not, you can probably move it to the back shelf.

The best ideas tend to motivate and change us and improve our lives eventually, just don't be too impatient or try to force a philosophy into a catchphrase unnaturally.

This one is short and sweet. When you email someone or call them for professional reasons, have a clear ask.

If it's a friend or mentor and you just want to talk, no problem. But a professional contact should not be contacted unless you have a clear, simple ask. Preferably just one ask, not several, and with a simple explanation, not tons of supplementary information.

Are you living on purpose?

Humans are not like other earthly creatures. We cannot live for only the biological imperative to survive and procreate. Humans require purpose. Lack of purpose is the greatest disease against which all of humanity must daily fight. It is the one disease that will not and cannot be overcome by advances in medicine.

You can't have purpose on accident

Our existence is couched in a series of accidents. That we were born, when, where, and to whom are accidents (they were not accidents to our progenitors, but from our own point of view). Our genetic structure is an accident. The first language we hear, and therefore learn, and the first beliefs to which we are exposed, and therefore predisposed to, are accidents. Purpose can not come from accidents. We do not discover or live with purpose naturally, the way we grow physically.

None of these accidents are good or bad. They simply are. In your exploration and creation of purpose you may find that a meaningful life demands radical differences from the norms and beliefs in which you were raised. You may find that it demands beliefs and norms almost identical to those in which you were raised. Whatever the end result, the one consistent demand is that you choose it. You cannot discover and live a purposeful life by simply following rules handed down to you, taking the path of least resistance, and sitting idly on the conveyor belt you were plopped on. It's not where it takes you that matters as much as who decided to go there. If it was not your decision, you will never find fulfillment from it.

Suffering with and without purpose

Suffering is terrible. It can also be valuable, in the same way the physical sensation of pain is valuable. Without it we would soon die of unattended wounds. Because pain is valuable doesn't mean it's noble or to be sought. Psychological suffering is the same.

To suffer is no noble deed. If the suffering is avoidable it's a worthless or even cowardly thing to suffer. If the suffering is unavoidable your response to it can be heroic. There is nothing heroic about the suffering itself, but

heroism can be found in someone who chooses to respond by finding meaning in unavoidable suffering.

Do not mistake your suffering for heroism. If it's at all avoidable, the heroic thing to do is to escape from it. If not, create purpose in it.

There is no right decision

There is no decision that will give you purpose. Your life is not a series of binary choices, with the door on the left leading to meaninglessness and the door on the right leading to purposefulness. What you choose at each juncture of your life matters little compared to the fact that you, not someone else, choose. You can't find a perfect version of your purposeful life. You have to create it by the undivided, definite choices you make. Consciously choose to do things you value and find meaningful. Consciously exit those that aren't. It doesn't matter what you choose so much as that you choose. Complaining about a path someone else pushed you down and against which you did not resist will not do.

Purposeful living is a process of exploration, experimentation, feedback, adjustment, and joy in the midst of it. There is no pressure to get it right because there is no right. There is better and worse, as determined by you. It requires self-knowledge and self-honesty to find your own scale of better and worse. It requires courage to abide by it.

Are you the 2%?

At any given moment 98% of us will choose – or rather not choose – to live by default. It is only the 2% who decide with definite purpose to act according to their own wishes who are really living. How often are you among them?

There are two kinds of mentalities with which you can approach your professional life. The first mentality is the “let’s see how this experience goes” approach. The second mentality is the “let’s see how much I can get out of this experience” approach. The first mentality leaves the quality of your experiences up to circumstances. Maybe you’ll do meaningful work at your job or maybe you won’t. Maybe you’ll learn something from a conversation or maybe you won’t. Maybe you’ll get something of value out of a networking event or maybe you won’t. When you take a “let’s see what happens” approach, the result is up in the air because it’s not really up to you. The second mentality puts the power in your hands. Instead of being the person who says “I hope I have a good time at this event,” you become the person who says “I’m going to be the kind of presence that makes this event an awesome place to be at.” The second mentality leads to greater control over your creative process. You’re less likely to feel disappointed, let down, shortchanged, or ignored when you have this mentality.

Since you don’t have control over everything, you’ll have to approach some things with an experimental “let’s see what happens” attitude. What’s important to remember, however, is that you never have to leave the second mentality out of the equation. In every situation, there are elements you can change and control. One of the main goals of this program is to help you develop the habit of always including this second mentality into your approach to things. When I worked as a server at Applebee’s, my manager corrected me for asking a customer if their food was okay. He said “ask them if the food is great. Because if it’s anything less than great, we have a problem. Getting them to agree that everything is okay is an unimpressive accomplishment.

So here’s what I want you to ask yourself: Is your work experience great? Is your educational experience great? If the answer to either of those questions is “no,” please don’t take a “let’s see how this goes” approach. Take charge of the experience and try to figure out how you can make it great. We’ll help you. We’ll brainstorm ideas with you. We’ll provide you with advice. We’ll go to bat for you in every way we can. We’re on your team. Don’t settle. This is your money, your time, your life, your career, and your future. Don’t leave it up to chance. Don’t sit back hoping that someone will notice. Make your voice heard. Make your presence felt. Make your needs known. Make your goals a reality. If your work experience is not great, let’s work together to get that on track. If your curriculum experience is not great, let’s work together

to that on track. If both of those things are great, let's challenge ourselves to make them even greater. The Comedian Marlon Wayans once advised me "don't wait for work, create the work." My suggestion to you is similar: don't wait for a great experience, create a great experience.

One thing I've learned from golf over the years is the importance of fundamental practices. When you're playing poorly or going through a bit of a rut personally or professionally, instead of trying to fix whatever is going wrong, focus on getting back to the fundamentals you practice when you're kicking ass.

Write down three to four habits, practices, or values that you notice you regularly maintain when things are going well. Keep them on your phone or a notepad and you'll have them handy as a reminder when you feel things are starting to go bad.

Here are mine.

Always Be Creating Value: When things go well for me it's because I'm spending my time purposefully and I'm focused on improving myself and improving the lives of others through projects I'm working on.

Keep Life Tight: In order to stay focused on value creation I minimize distractions and categorize my time on these three categories; 1. Professional projects 2. A few close personal relationships 3. A hobby or two

Productive Routines: Maintaining a day-to-day structure is challenge for me. Right now I break my day up into three sections; 1. Morning: read, write, prepare for day ahead 2. Day: Don't overthink, just get shit done 3. Night: read, tie up loose ends, and prepare for next day

Think Big/Have a Vision: This keeps me focused on long-term goals and why doing well at whatever I'm working on at the time is actually important to me.

32 THE CHALLENGE OF DOING WHAT YOU LOVE

The hardest thing to do is what you love.

It's a long and difficult process to discover what you love; what truly makes you come alive. It includes a series of epiphanies about your own errors of judgement and direction. It demands brutal self-honesty. It requires tedious and dangerous trial and error. It cannot be found by mere reflection, but deep reflection has to occur alongside experimentation. None of this is easy, and you're never done. You change, and what makes you come alive changes. The journey toward it is endless and adaptation and adjustments of your goals are continuous.

That's just to discover what you love. Once you've begun to remove the chaff and hone in on a direction that makes you fulfilled, actually moving in it is even harder. You have to muster the grit and determination to move toward it, even when the individual steps themselves are grueling. You have to continue to remind yourself of what really awakens your love of life, and not let yourself off the hook pursuing anything less.

It's much easier to find and do what you mildly enjoy, what you can tolerate, or even what you hate. Anyone can stop the discovery process short and find what feels comfortable in the short term. Anyone can choose not to chisel away the distractions; not to get to the core of what makes you fulfilled. Anyone can treat what they love as an unattainable object that exists only to torment and tease. Anyone can come up with mediocre, safe, reasonable, sound, and predictable goals and activities.

People say when you do what you love you never work a day. It's easy to hear that and envy those whose profession seems to be something they have a lot of fun with. It is true that when you're in the zone pursuing your passion, it doesn't feel like work. But discovering that zone, and making yourself enter in is more work than anything.

Some people think work is hard because they're not doing what they love. In reality, they haven't been able to do what they love because they're not willing to work hard enough.

Finding and re-finding what you love, and moving toward it every day, is the hardest thing in the world. It is also the most worthwhile.

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BUSINESS QUESTIONS CHALLENGE

You've spent eight months now with your business partner. More likely than not, you've had to ask a lot of questions along the way

You've also probably progressed a lot to becoming a really kickass, "get shit done" kind of person over the past eight months. Your challenge now is to keep learning. Your challenge is to not only to keep asking questions, but to ask more and better ones.

Look outside of your role or department. There are people much wiser and more experienced than you who would love to talk about what they know. Are you taking advantage of this opportunity?

Today's challenge: talk to three people about their work. Ask them things you've been wanting to know that might apply to the skills you're trying to gain or the mindset you're trying to cultivate. Your questions don't even have to be particularly practical – just use this as an opportunity to see how much capital is lying unused all around you.

You just have to ask.

What have you learned from asking questions of the people around you? We'd love to hear about it in the Praxis Facebook group.

Here's a follow up. Now, instead of asking for knowledge, I'd like to challenge you to try asking for something. This is one of the hardest things to do, but it's one of the most important things to master in any kind of work.

You don't have to ask someone to give you five bucks. In fact, you really shouldn't. Think about ways to ask people for things in a way that offers some value back to them. This is key.

Ask to interview someone you've admired from afar. Ask to sit in on a lecture or a demonstration you find interesting. Ask if you can work (for free, with something tangible, actionable, and deliverable in mind) for someone you want to learn from. If you're working on a product, ask to conduct a survey or even demo your product with someone who might be in your target market.

Be creative. Then let us know what you find out about yourself from the experience. Are you up to the challenge?

35 VALUE PROP

Here's a quick one.

You're all going to be graduating soon and you might be looking for job opportunities elsewhere.

You have more experiences and skills than most of the graduates entering the market. Sell that. Tell that story on your resume. Don't deal in abstracts like "leadership skills." Give examples of the real world results you've achieved during the program.

It's important, but it's NOT enough.

You need more than a resume, **you need a value proposition**. Take control of the vetting process and identify a quantifiable area where you can lend value to that business. Maybe it's a weakness you've identified or maybe it's a new idea you have for expanding sales or marketing.

Whatever it is, don't come in to an interview with the expectation that the burden is on the employer to decide how you can be valuable. It's YOUR job to tell them.

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TAKING FAILURE LIKE AN ENTREPRENEUR

Odds are, in this first year of work, you've let down your co-workers in some way. You'll probably do it again after you finish your Praxis business partner experience.

You're going to fail to perform. You're going to make mistakes. You may even form what seems to be a pattern of screwing up.

If you're anything like me, you're going to feel terrible about it. Most hardworking people don't like to fail and take it personally when they do.

So, what's the best way to take responsibility for failing and for correcting that failure while still keeping your chin up? Again, approaching things with an entrepreneurial mindset can make all the difference in the world.

Entrepreneurs succeed when they create value for clients. When an entrepreneur fails to please a client, they lose work. Sometimes things work out that way. Providing a product or service in the real world sometimes means not being able to provide the kind of value your clients want.

Do entrepreneurs give up or shut down their companies when they disappoint or even lose a client? Of course not.

We've been trying to convince you that, in the end, you're your own firm. You need to approach life as an entrepreneur, and you need to approach your work in the same way.

Don't let failure stop you. You have so much to offer so many people now as well as in the long game of your career. Keep building your product and getting better at providing value for others. Use your failure as market feedback, not as an opportunity to shut yourself down.

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TAKING SUCCESS LIKE AN ENTREPRENEUR

Last week's entry was all about failure and critical feedback. Today let's look at success, shall we?

Look, you've spent almost a year now working in roles and taking responsibility for tasks which most people don't think people your age are able to do. That's amazing. Your real danger now is becoming complacent.

Career development in the employee paradigm is all about slowly working to reach a set level of salary or influence. Many people "climbing the ladder" satisfy themselves with (or limit themselves to) climbing to the highest rung they can reach. They cease to grow as a result.

How can you apply an entrepreneurial mindset and think differently? Startup companies cannot remain static (even when they're doing well) – they die if they do. The entrepreneur who makes a profit more often than not reinvests that profit in his company. Just look at Amazon to see what this does at scale.

Here's your challenge: start thinking about success as an entrepreneur might. Are you counting on your past results to guarantee your future, or are you actually putting in the effort to keep growing? How can you reinvest the capital you've built and accumulated over the past year into something bigger and better?

There's a lot of truth to the admonition to "stay hungry." Even after completing this program, you have no laurels to rest on (and who really wants them, anyway?)

38

DON'T DO THINGS YOU DON'T LIKE DOING

The next three weeks are the final three chapters. So I'm going to pass on the three most valuable lessons I've learned in life so far, on each week.

Lesson #1: Don't do things you don't like doing

Surprisingly, this is one of the hardest to learn. Maybe it's the Puritan ideal that suffering through drudgery purges the soul, maybe it's the guilt, shame, fear, and obligation we allow to take on from others in the name of altruism. Whatever the cause, we are surrounded with voice, both inner and outer, that subtly nudge our decisions and activities into a lot of things that we really don't enjoy at all. If you step back and ask, "Do I actually want to be doing this?", you might be surprised how many things would get a no.

Of course this is different than not doing anything *hard*, or even *painful*. I ran a marathon once. The training sucked. Many times while running, I felt I would rather be sitting on the couch with a beer. But I didn't actually want that. I wanted it in a vacuum, but the real world has trade offs. In the world of trade offs, though I wanted to beer and the couch, I wanted to be able to finish a marathon more. Thus, I endured pain and hardship because I wanted what it would bring me more than the alternatives.

In order to not do things you don't like, it requires ruthless self-knowledge and self-honesty. Do I really not want to do this thing, or do I only not want to compared with some other imagined option that is not possible? It forces you to not feel embarrassed about what you discover. As a personal example, I do not enjoy phone conversations with extended family members or friends I don't know really well. I used to feel bad about this preference, and subject myself to many long phone conversations that I didn't enjoy at all...I'm pretty sure the other party didn't either, but it was a weird, guilt-based obligation. I stopped taking or returning such calls. I just tell people I'm not much of a phone person, but shoot me an email or we can talk when we next see each other.

Once I internalized this lesson, I made it one of my daily, weekly, and long-term goals. To reduce more and more the numbers of things I do that I do not enjoy. Perhaps surprisingly, the more I focused on and succeeded at this, the more hard work I ended up doing. You might imagine pursuing this goal

would result in me sitting around a lot (with beer and football), but it turns out that when you're doing things you like, you actually work well and you want to work! I became more and more productive.

I could go on, but you get it. Consider the biggest stressors and pain points in your life. Stop doing them as soon as possible. Rinse, repeat.

As I mentioned, I'm passing on my three biggest lessons. Last week it was...

1) Don't do things you don't like doing

This week it's...

2) Do things all the way

As long as you're not doing something you dislike, you should do the shit out of whatever you are doing. Notice this doesn't mean only go all in for things you love. Too hard to know what counts. This means anything you don't dislike, you should do it with everything you've got. There are three primary reasons for this (though many more as well).

First, you'll do everything better when you do it to the best of your ability and don't let yourself off the hook with a less than full effort. Your time is too valuable to spend it doing something but not really doing it. Get results.

Second, you will be many times happier and more fulfilled if you work your ass off. Every one of us has this nagging feeling of self-doubt and unease when we're kind of taking it easy with work, activities, etc. When you're busting your ass, you feel pride. It's a good feeling.

Third, pouring yourself into what you're doing now is the best way to increase the likelihood of finding and succeeding at what you'll do next. Opportunities come to people who get shit done and with passion. Skills are acquired and networks built by those who kick ass. It's not just for now, but for what's next that you should pour yourself into the now.

Until next week...

What a journey it's been! This is the final week of your Praxis experience, and I can't wait to see what all of you do now!

I'm rounding out my top three bits of valuable discovery.

- 1) Don't do things you don't like doing
- 2) When you do something, do it all the way

and...

- 3) Be more than what you do

Considering #2, it might seem odd for me to suggest you should be more than what you do. After all, isn't "doing it all the way" all about living and breathing your work and activities? Yes. Absolutely yes. In fact, so much so that I don't think you'll ever achieve #3 unless you first master #2.

Somewhat of a paradox. When you're really in something you discover things about your true self, and you gain abilities and insights that help you awaken to a fuller version of you. The feeling of being "in flow" is an experience of the self outside of particular activities that might have activated that state. It's that broader self you want to always stay in touch with. It has huge benefits if you do.

One of the benefits is that it makes you better at what you do. When you can both live and breathe your work and yet not take it personally or feel despair over failures, you are unstoppable. You want the win more than anything, but when it doesn't come, you're fine, because you're more than that win. That's a tough mindset to earn, but it can be done. When an angry customer, co-worker, or boss, or just a mistake you made by yourself can ruin a day, remember, this is just something you're doing now. This isn't you. If it fails, you don't fail.

A good test to see how well you're maintaining an all-in mentality and an "I'm more than this" mentality at the same time is the shock test. If you quit what you're doing now and did something totally different, would your friends and family and coworkers be shocked? They should be. If they say, "What? You're doing something else now? But you lived and breathed that job/

business/vision/project?!?” That’s a sign that you were in it and living it and extracting all the value out of it so much that others saw you as inseparable from it. But all along you were and are so, so much more.

Be more. Be a lot more than what you’re currently working on. But never in a way that takes you out of the moment so that you’re not engaged. If people heard you were changing direction and said, “Yeah, she was never really into it, so I’m not surprised”, you’ve been missing an opportunity to fully engage. (Unless of course the thing you’re quitting is something you don’t like at all, in which case you’re working on #1...but the better you get at #1, the less this will be the case, if ever. At some point, everything you move on from should seem like a shock because you loved it so much!)

Alright, that brings to a close my weekly thoughts. I’d love for one last time to get each of you to let us know your thoughts on this experience. What has happened in the last ten months? Where are you going next and why?

