



Ray Edwards Show, Episode 287

Real Artist Don't Starve

Ray Ray Edwards: Ray Edwards Show. Episode 287. Real Artists Don't Starve. An interview with Jeff Goins.

Announcer: The Ray Edwards Show. Live your destiny by design. Start, run, and grow your own internet-based business and create the life of your dreams. You can do it. This is the Ray Edwards Show.

[music]

Ray: I'm pretty excited about today's interview.

Sean Edwards: Cool.

Ray: Jeff Goins is somebody I've known for quite a while. We've been in a Mastermind group together in the past and we talk frequently. He's a very successful artist. I want to give you a quick quiz. You can't answer, Sean, because you already know the right answers.

Sean: All right.

Ray: This is a quiz for our audience. In fact, you've got the list, so let's just ping pong these back and forth. I'll start. Now, just answer true or false to each of the following statements. You can't be a real artist and make money.

Sean: Most other professions are reliable and stable than any kind of art.

Ray: A lower percentage of artists make a stable livable income than other professions.

Sean: For art to be pure, the artist should now do it for the money.

Ray: The only way for an artist to make it, is they must sell out. Now, if you answered true any of those statements, you need some deprogramming. Jeff Goins will help you deprogram yourself in today's interview. So standby, you're about to be released from being a struggling starving artist for the rest of your life.

Announcer: Does anyone want to live a life that is long and prosperous? Spiritual foundations.

Ray: Our word for the day comes from Ephesians, chapter four verse 29. "Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers." The reason I wanted to share this verse and specifically from this translation, I think this is the only one of the English translations

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that I could find except for the NASB that actually, I believe, translated this first accurately. Most of the other versions make this sound like it's talking about cussing.

Sean: Right.

Ray: Because they say things like "No foul language, no dirty talk," but that's not what is closest to the original meaning of the language, as far as I can determine by looking at things like Blue Letter Bible and Strong Concordance. I'm not a Greek scholar, but I'm able to look stuff up on the internet and look it up from reliable sources. Saying that you want to let no corrupt word to come out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification-- That means to build people up, to lift people up-- So that it may impart grace, which is favor to those who hear it, is a more accurate rendering of what this verse means.

Basically, it means don't be a negative dodo. Don't be going around raining on everybody else's parade. Don't be saying things that discourage people. Say things that encourage them. The meaning of the word encourage means to instill courage in the person who's listening. If we all followed this rule, I think most of us would be in a better mood most of the time.

Announcer: Now, simple hacks that make life cheaper, easier and faster. Ray's tip of the week.

Ray: Our tip of the week, not surprisingly is tied to our interview guest. The book is entitled *Real Artist Don't Starve: Timeless Strategies for Thriving In The New Creative Age* by Jeff Goins. I really love this book. One of the things I love most about it-- I won't spoil it for you, but I'll let Jeff tell the story in our interview. It starts with a detective story of sorts. Which begins to debunk the myth of the starving artist. I really do believe it's a myth.

I'm not just speaking metaphorically, I'm speaking literally. You'll know more when we get to the interview with Jeff. Before you order the book, listen to the interview, because during the interview, Jeff will give us a link where you can go and not only get the book but get a couple hundred dollars worth of free gifts in addition. By the way, I get no financial compensation for this. I just love the book, I love Jeff. I want his book to be successful, that's why I have him on the show.

Announcer: Now, our feature presentation.

Ray: And our feature presentation, not a surprise, is an interview with Jeff Goins. So let's get right to it.

Sean: Alrighty.

Ray: Jeff Goins, welcome to the show.

Jeff Goins: Thanks for having me, Ray. Good to be back.



Ray: So you've got this new book that we're going to be talking about. Which I am in love with, I have a crush on this book.

Jeff: [laughs] Thanks. **Ray:** It's called *Real Artist Don't Starve: Timeless Strategies for Thriving In The New Creative Age*. I love everything about that title. I read a lot of books and I read them quickly. This one is a slow reader for me because I want to savor it. There's a lot of, I think, tall fox in here. So I'd like to start just by giving people an overview. How would you sum up the book?

Jeff: I would sum up the book in a sentence. Today, being a starving artist is a choice, not a necessary condition of doing creative work. When I say artist, I am using the broad sense of the term. Seth Godin talks about this in his book *The Icarus Deception*, this idea that we are all creating art in one form or another. Art to me is your creative gift that you have to share with the world. Ray, you talk about this a lot. You give people permission to prosper and share their message, their idea, with the world, often in the form of a business.

I believe you can be an entrepreneur and your business can be the gift that you share with the world. I believe you can be a painter and be an artist. I believe you can be a writer and be an artist. And so, I wrote this book to give permission to people that they don't have to starve for their dream, for their passion. I run into so many people, entrepreneurs, creatives, writers, musicians, you name it, who have this idea. They have this mindset that you have to starve in order to create really, really good art. And in *Real Artists Don't Starve*, I argue that's not true. Historically, that's not been the case, it's mostly a myth, and today it has never been easier for you to make a living and thrive off of your creative work.

Ray: You start the book with what I feel like is like a second detective story, and it's wholly fascinating. Can you tell that story?

Jeff: Sure. In 2003, there was this art history professor, an American professor who was living in Italy, working at Syracuse University in Florence, Italy. He was trying to take the different parts of The Sistine Chapel that Michelangelo painted. Michelangelo painted The Sistine Chapel over the course of about three years, and he was looking at The Sistine Chapel going, "Okay, but when did he paint that part?" There had never been an extensive timeline developed for the ceiling.

His first idea was Michelangelo wrote a lot of letters to his family and patrons, and so he thought, well, maybe he'll mention in July 21st that he painted this part of the scene of The Sistine Chapel. That didn't work out, and then he had this other thought. Well, he received his commissions in installments. If I go to the bank records I could probably figure out when he received the commission for this part and then go, "Oh, that was painted on this date," or, "That was completed on this date." So he goes to the bank records, he had a friend working at the archives in Florence, and the way he tells it, he says, "I just looked up the letter M."



He looked up the letter M, and he found bank records with huge sums of money that he was not expecting to see. Because he, like many of us, was raised on this idea that artists starve, and Michelangelo was one of those starving artists. It turns out it was not true. And so, all of a sudden he forgets about The Sistine Chapel and he just starts diving deep into all these financial records and finds out that when Michelangelo died, he had over 50 million dollars in today's currency to his name, making him the richest artist of the Renaissance. And at that point, the richest artist who had ever lived.

Ray: Wow.

Jeff: Yes. I mean, I hadn't heard this story. I thought it was fascinating. What happened after Michelangelo-- This is very interesting. Before him, artists were basically manual laborers, and after Michelangelo, what he accomplished, becoming a wealthy aristocratic artist was now the new norm. He set a precedent. He broke the glass ceiling, and there were many artists like him who accumulated vast sums of wealth off of their art as a result of the example that he set. This really challenged me, because today I think we live in an age where the story of the starving artist is a popular one. We're familiar with it. This story, from 500 years ago, really challenges the assumption that you can't make money off of arts. It turns out that this is not true and Michelangelo was not the exception, he created the new rule and it was hundred of years later where the idea, which I call a myth of the starving artist really emerged. Today, Ray, you and I both know plenty of talented, creative people who are making a killing. They're supporting themselves, they're thriving. I kept running into people. I've done this over the past five, six years, I keep running into groups of people both of which are very talented. One group are the starving artists, people have a great idea but they're just really struggling to make any money off of it.

Then you've got the people who are also talented and are doing great and qualitatively I don't see any difference between the two but what I do see is the thriving artist tend to all do the same things, and the things that these thriving artist do happen to be many of the things that starving artists don't do. These are similarities that these thriving artists have with very successful artists from history like Michelangelo, like Picasso, Jim Henson and Walt Disney and Twyla Tharp and so many others throughout history.

What I was left when I started, when I stumbled upon this story and then started doing some research, was I felt like a pretty compelling case that you don't have to starve as an artist if you do the things that Michelangelo did, if you do the things that thriving artists have always done and are doing today. It just so happens that these things like building in that work and finding an audience for your art are things that are actually pretty easy. It's probably been the easiest to do now, easier than they've ever been, that's why I call these timeless strategies, but why they're particularly relevant for today.



I think we're living in a new Renaissance where if you have a creative gift to share with the world, you have no excuse to get that idea, that gift out into the world and start making money off of your art.

Ray: Okay, I've been making notes furiously because I've got about three different directions I want to go in.

Jeff: Okay.

Ray: Let me start by asking you, if you could briefly tell the origin of the story of the starving artist myth because this was totally new to me, I never knew there was a traceable historical origin to this idea of the starving artist.

Jeff: There's this guy in the 1800s named Henri Murger. And Henri Murger is the son of working class people, he's a Frenchman. This emerges about 200 years after Michelangelo dies. And so Henri Murger is a writer and he's surrounded. I mKeep in mind this is the era of the early French Impressionist, this is the romantic period of art. Paris in the 1850s especially is a pretty big creative scene. He's surrounded with creative geniuses and he's really struggling and he wants to be successful and it just doesn't work out.

In what I would imagine is a frustration in 1847, he publishes a collection of stories that basically romanticizes poverty and it reaches a little bit of literary acclaim but he continues to struggle and dies not long after that. This book eventually becomes the opera *La Bohème* and eventually turns into the spin-off of *Rent* and even *Moulin Rouge*, it's all the same story of bohemian artists living in Paris struggling to survive and there is this idea that their art is somehow purer because they're not making any money off of it. This is where the myth of the starving artist really begins and I call it a myth because a myth, I think, is the appropriate term for it.

A myth is a story that we tell ourselves to make sense of the world. There are religious myths, there are political myths, a myth is not necessarily untrue but it is a very powerful story that we orient our life around. C.S. Lewis, and I think you'll find this story fun, C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien, before Tolkien became a Christian had a debate one night where Tolkien is talking because they all they love myth, they're literary professors and they love the power of myth. Tolkien is talking about the myth of Christianity and Tolkien says to Lewis-- Because Lewis is an atheist at this point and Tolkien is a pretty diehard Catholic. He says to him, "Some myths are true," right? And so there are myths that are true. And then there are myths that become true because we believe them. So when I was five years old then I believed in the myth of Santa Claus. The story of a man coming into the house and eating my cookies and giving me gifts. Because I believed it, for me, it was very very true. It changed the way I acted on that December 23rd, 24th and it lived in me and had a life.

The same thing is true with the starving artist myth. If you believe it, it becomes true in your life and at the same time, the converse is true. If you believed the story of the



thriving artist, that you don't have to starve, that you can make a living out of your art. And I am not talking about necessarily being rich. The opposite of a starving artist is not a wealthy artist, it's a thriving artist. Somebody who was doing interesting creative work and is making a living out of that work so that they can continue to do the work.

Ray: This mythology idea, it fascinates me because, I think, especially the myth of the starving artist, we received confirmation of that myth in a thousand different little pieces throughout our life.

Jeff: Right.

Ray: Movies and books and discussions with people and little catch phrases and one of that corollaries I think to the myth of the starving artist is the idea that if you are making money, it can't be art.

Jeff: Right. Yes exactly. That just isn't true and the reason why I like the Michelangelo story is because, I think, it is practically inarguable that Michelangelo was the greatest artist of the Renaissance and probably one of the greatest artists who had ever lived. If you have ever been to Florence or Rome and you've seen his sculptures, they really do kind of embody perfection.

Nobody was as good as him and there been very few with any that had ever been as good as him. So he's great. He is one of, if not the top artist of the Renaissance, right? And he's got multiple mediums, he's a painter, he's a sculptor, he's an architect. He can do anything. He tackles a task and he does it masterfully, right? At the same time, he's the richest artist of the Renaissance.

So if it's true-- Because we have this idea in the back of our head, Ray, and I certainly have struggled with this, that maybe you can make some money out of your art, but if you make a lot of money out of your art, there's a point at which you're too commercial, you've sold out, right? And you look at Michelangelo, he has the most money as an artist of his time and he is the best. And so it cannot be true that making more money or being more commercially successful somehow means that there's some sort of inverse correlation to the quality of art that's being done.

I think that this idea that artists have to starve-- And you're right, we have confirmation bias. It's a romantic idea and again I think it comes from the story from Henri Murger and it just has endured and we keep feeding the story and when you keep feeding a story, you keep believing it and you keep finding ways to confirm it. And yes, it's true that some artist did not do very well. It's also true that some artists are rich. Monet was basically independently wealthy. Picasso was filthy rich. Picasso said, "I would like to live like a pauper but with plenty of money."

[laughter]

Jeff: I think that embodies this idea of "I don't want to appear--" Because art is all about challenging the status quo and it really is about changing the world around

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you in some way. And so some of the best art is found on fringes, on the edge of what is acceptable or normal. And so if you're a well-off man or woman, you can't be an artist because what do you have to challenge. We really struggle with reconciling that but it just ends up not being true, that having a bunch of money and making really good art are mutually exclusive.

Ray: What does this book have to say to people who would tell you, "I'm not an artist, I don't write, I don't paint, I'm not a sculptor."

Jeff: Right. If you don't want to be an artist, then you don't have to be an artist. But there's 12 rules in the book and the first rule is this, "You aren't born an artist, you become one." What I did was I studied all the stories from history which we've been talking about but I also-- But half of the book is stories of contemporary creatives. We're talking about creative entrepreneurs. We're talking about people with online businesses, like you and I, and people that-- You are probably listening to this right now. I'm talking about writers and people running software companies and painters and puppeteers and all things in-between. Again, I think that art is your greatest gift that you have to share with the world.

Being an artist means that you are willing to share that gift. I do think it does mean that this thing that you have to share has to be more than a job, has to be more than a means of making an income. I think all that stuff is fine, but if you wait to be an artist, a real artist, then, first of all, you have a responsibility not to starve for your art because you need to make money to pay for the supplies and tools and time that it takes to create your art. Second of all, I think you have a responsibility to share that with the world.

Ray: You broke the book up into three parts, and I think it's a fascinating framework that you put this whole thing into. Can you kind of describe the three parts and why you chose to do this?

Jeff: Yes, mindset, market, and money. The first part is-- First of all, they all start with 'M'. I thought that was a goo alliteration.

Ray: I love that.

Jeff: I appreciate that you'd appreciate that. They're not necessarily steps, they're strategies. They go in more or less a progressive order. I think we have to begin with mindset. Michelangelo serves as an archetype. There's his stories woven throughout the book, but there are many other stories as well. He's a really interesting figure, first of all, because he kind of sets the bar so high. I'm not saying we have to do what Michelangelo did, but it's a really great picture of what's possible with being really great at your art and also being really great at the business side of your art.

He began this as a career early on as a teenager with an apprenticeship with a story in his head. He isn't telling himself the starving artist story, which is a popular idea at the time. Again, keep in mind that artists, before Michelangelo comes along, are basically manual laborers. They have shops, they do commissions occasionally and

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then they create whatever their thing is, a sculpture, a painting, whatever, and they bring it to the market and try to sell it. They're good blue-collar jobs.

Michelangelo is different because he grows up with his dad telling him that they come from noble lineage, that they're descended from some royal family or some noble line of blood and they've just fallen out of favor. They don't have a lot of money, but they have the last name. At that time, Ray, only nobility, only aristocrats had last names. Michelangelo grows up with this story that he's a nobleman, basically, he's an aristocrat and he has to restore the name Buonarroti to nobility. When he decides to become an artist, he realizes, "What I've got to do this as an aristocrat would do. I've got to think and act like a wealthy man would think and act."

What ends up happening is he gets an apprenticeship with one of the best artists in Florence. Very quickly, he's brought into the Medici household again because he's thinking and acting like an aristocrat. He realizes, "I've got to have not just any sort of patron, I have to have the wealthiest patrons, the Medici." Being in the Medici household, he finishes the apprenticeship there and in that household, he's exposed to people who will eventually be popes and rulers and famous politicians. And he runs in all this as a teenager. He's around these people. When he leaves that apprenticeship, he now has a network of people that will his patrons, who are basically the wealthiest people in the society.

He ends up making about ten times the average artist for any commission that he does. Here's the really interesting thing about this, Ray. I talked to a biographer of Michelangelo, a guy named Bill Wallace. He said it turned out that Michelangelo did not come from noble blood. It's not true. It was a story that his family-- that they believed, that they told themselves, and because he believed it, he became it. This is really important. If you have a starving out of this mindset, if you go, "Oh, I could never do that," or, "I'll never make much money out of this." I remember when I started writing, somebody asked me what my dream was I said, "Well, I'd like to be a writer someday, but that's never possible. That would never happen." And a friend of mine laughed at me and he challenged me. He's said, "Jeff, you don't have to want to be a writer, you are a writer. You just need to write. Like, go do the thing that you are." This is what Michelangelo did really well. He understood that before he could go become something, he first had to believe it, then he had to behave like it, and then he could become it.

Ray: This idea of the story that we tell ourselves is so powerful. I'm reminded of I went to a self-improvement seminar that was put on by Jack Canfield and he had us do an exercise where he said, "take a sheet of paper from your journal and I want you in one page to write out the story of your life and here's one rule; you must write it as a tragedy."

Jeff: Interesting.

Ray: One bad thing that happens after another. We did that and he said, "Now, I want you to turn the page and I want you to write the story of your life as a triumph."



As a story of victory." The only rule for each of these was everything you wrote had to be absolutely true. When we finished writing the second story he said, "Now, my question to you simply is this, "which one of those stories is true?" We all realized well they're both true. He said, "So, which one serves you the best?"

Jeff: Yes, that's it. I think you have to begin with mindset. Mindset is where you begin and then you move into the market, this idea of it's not just what you know, it's who you know. Turns out this is true you have to have a network, you have to be a part of the scene, you have to collaborate with others and connect your art with an audience. As I mentioned before, turns out it's easier than it's ever been to do these things. You don't have to go through traditional gatekeepers. The gatekeepers, the patrons, the people that are going to help your art spread are the people around you right now. They're the people whose podcasts you listen to and blogs you read.

These people are not inaccessible like we sometimes think but it does begin with a mindset. I have to believe that what I have is worth sharing, I have to think and act like a successful person would think an act. If I do that enough I become that thing. I do not believe that we fake it until we make it but I do think we believe it until we become it and you see that in the life of Michelangelo and so many other thriving artists who had this faith in themselves or their art or this thing that they felt they were called to create. And so from mindset, you move to market and then finally you do have to make money.

Ray: Well, it's a tough job but somebody is got to do it.

Jeff: [laughs] Yes, that's right.

Ray: You have these 12 rules.

Jeff: Yes

Ray: To me this is-- You say if you want to be successful-- I'm paraphrasing you-- like Michelangelo, you need to do the things that Michelangelo did. Is this your answer to the question of what is it they need to do?

Jeff: Yes, there's these 12 things and they're broken up into three different categories you mentioned. Mindset, market, and money. These are the things that I noticed when I read hundreds of biographies of artists, entrepreneurs, and writers. What I noticed when I interviewed hundreds of working creative today who were successful, were making a full-time living off of their creative work. Again, for some of them, they were painting, others were drawing cartoons, others were musicians, other people were authors and writers, some people ran online businesses; selling online courses or software, other people were bakers and I mean there's just so many different disciplines represented here.

But they all consider their work creative in some way or another and these were the 12 things that I noticed all these groups of people had in common. if you do most these things-- And it gets like eating your vegetables. If you do most of these things

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if not all of these things, you're going to be really healthy. If you do very few or none of these things, you're limiting your lifespan, you're limiting the likelihood that you're going to be successful and if you don't do these things you're just really rolling the dice.

I think when we see somebody succeed, particularly an artist, we go, "They must be either really talented or really lucky or both." I think we don't like this idea that even artists are being strategic in their decisions. Sometimes people are doing these things intuitively without knowing that it's a strategic decision, that it's a good decision. But they're still doing these things. They're still building an audience. They're still finding patrons. They're still collaborating with others and being the right kind of stubborn that's going to help them succeed. I saw more than just a coincidence. There was a correlation between all the people that succeeded. It turns out that all the people that succeeded, they did things that the unsuccessful people actively, sometimes willfully, did not do.

Ray: I think it's interesting that some of these successful artists think they're not being strategic, but they're doing it intuitively without even knowing it.

Jeff: Yes, I mean I'm always looking for the thread, the reason why somebody is successful. I just am very suspicious of the luck explanation. I don't know if you ever read the book *Great by Choice* by Jim Collins, he debunks that whole idea. He studies a group of very successful entrepreneurs who had these enduringly great companies for 30 years or something and a group of people who did not. He talks about luck. Did luck play a factor in the success of these leaders and their companies? What is luck? How do we quantify this? How do we measure luck?

He defined luck as a fortunate outcome that has a low probability of happening, something unlikely, something that isn't normal that is something that's good. That's luck. So he tested these two groups and created some nerdy luck quotient. What was interesting about it, is the successful companies had the same luck quotient as the unsuccessful companies. In fact, the unsuccessful companies were just like a smidge luckier than the successful ones. But for all practical intents and purposes, statistically speaking, they were about the same. He said, "So maybe it's not about getting lucky. Maybe it's about getting a return on your luck."

So when Ernest Hemingway moves to Paris and he meets all these other artists and all these other people who will eventually be very influential creative minds in the 20th century, James Joyce, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Gertrude Stein, Pablo Picasso. He doesn't go, "Well, that's great. I hope I get lucky again and meet some more people later on in life." Now he sees an opportunity here and he really takes advantage of it. He becomes these people's friend. He helps them. He's the young, new writer in town. So he meets Ezra Pound and he says, "Hey, I'll teach you how to box." [laughs] He gives boxing lessons and Ezra Pound teaches him how to write.

He goes and listens to Gertrude Stein talk which he likes to do, helps her get published and she vouches for him and connects him with all of these other creative



people that eventually become his patrons, people who say, "Listen to him." They help him out. They give him resources and time and sometimes even money. And he becomes one of the most influential authors of the 20th century.

Was it lucky that he met all these people? You bet. But did he just stop there and go, "That's great, I hope I get lucky again"? No. He found a way to get a return on his luck and this what Collins says is the difference between unsuccessful people and successful people. Successful people get a return on their luck, whereas unsuccessful people wait for their next break, their next lucky moment. They don't recognize the opportunity that they already have.

Ray: I think that the luck explanation is a comfort to some people because it lets them off the hook.

Jeff: Totally. I'll be honest, sometimes I do that. Do you ever do that? You see somebody and you feel like, "I feel we're about the same level of skill." I see other writers who are selling more copies of a book or doing this or doing that. I recently talked to somebody who is selling hundreds of thousands of copies of his books. I thought, "We're both good writers. I might be a little bit better." [laughs] I had a conversation with him and he started telling me how he spends his days and what he was doing to promote his books.

I just realized, "Wow, he's working harder than I am." On the surface, on social media, it looks like these things are just happening. Then he told me about how he gave away 3,000 copies of one book strategically to all these different people and how that was the tipping point. It didn't just happen. Because I said, "How did you get all these people to talk about your book?" He says, "Well, it was organic, sort of." Then he proceeds to tell me how he strategically gave away 3,000 copies of a book which is very expensive to do. I was going, "Wow you're working harder. You're being more strategic than I thought you were being." Sometimes when we see somebody succeed, we don't really understand all the work and all the strategy that's happening. It's not always just hustle harder, it's being strategic. It's making the right kind of decisions at the right time.

Ray: A couple of these rules I just wanted to touch on because I found them a little challenging at first and I think they're interesting. One of them is, stop trying to be original and steal from your influences. Talk about that because that sounds like maybe it's sketchy.

Jeff: Yes, right. Well, let's talk about what it isn't first because I got an email about this, this week. The email said this, "Dear Jeff we--" The subject was, "Legal notice."

Ray: Those are fun.

Jeff: I was like, "Oh" I open that one real quick. It said, "Dear Jeff, we just found your article, article X and it looks eerily similar to our article, article Y. In fact, there are many phrases and words that are identical between the two articles. We take this very seriously and ask that you would please take the article down so that we don't

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have to proceed with legal action. Sincerely so and so." My heart leapt and I was like, "No, this wasn't-- Did I subconsciously borrow an idea or a phrase? But the idea that like word for word, line for line, they're pretty similar?" That really bothered me so I click over to the article. I don't even finish reading the email.

I click over to the article and it's not there anymore, their article on their website. I go back to the email and I scroll up and read the most recent email from them in the thread. An hour after they sent me that first email, it says, "Dear Jeff, we just realized that article X, your article, was published two years before our article, article Y, was published and the college intern that we hired to write this article seems that they may have borrowed it from you so we took the article down. We felt like it was the right thing to do and we apologize."

Ray: Oh my goodness.

Jeff: I couldn't stop laughing about that. I said, "Hey, it's fine." They did the right thing but it was really funny. The way it was worded it was very strong, they assumed that I had stolen from them and then they realized, "We stole it from you." That's not what I mean when I'm talking about stealing. What I'm talking about is this Austin Cleon steal like an artist kind of definition, where if you borrow an idea from one person, you're a copycat. You are kind of a thief if you do that, but if you borrow a bunch of ideas from a bunch of people and reassemble them into your own arrangement of them, now, all of a sudden, we call you original, we call you an artist.

There was a historian by the name of Will Durant who says, "Nothing is new except arrangement," and I love that. I find, Ray, is I find lots of business people and creative people struggling to come up with a new idea. They think, "If we could just have one big idea, we could change the world," and it turns out, two things are true. One, this is typically not the way the world is changed. It's not by some big original idea, it's often by iterating on an idea that somebody else had. The other thing that's true is there are no new ideas, there are no new things, there is only the rearrangement of old things.

When we do this well, we actually do end up creating something that the world has never seen before. When Steve Jobs creates the Mac and creates the graphic user interface that has a mouse, the world had never really seen this before, except that it had and a company named Xerox had pioneered a lot of this technology but really could only take it so far. Jobs went over there with his whole team and borrowed a lot of these ideas and put them into the first Macintosh. Shortly after that, Bill Gates comes out with Microsoft Windows, and this user interface looks very similar to the way the first Macintosh worked.

Steve Jobs is really mad. He calls his frenemy Bill Gates and says, "You stole from me." Gates goes, "Hang on a second, who stole from who? The way I see it, you and I both moved into a neighborhood and we both had this neighbor named Xerox and we both broke into his house. But when I broke into his house to steal his TV I noticed that you had already stolen his VCR so I'm not really stealing from you, we



both stole Xerox. Let's admit to what's really going on here." This is what we're all doing, right? We're borrowing from our peers and the people we look up to and the masters who have come before us and, again, you're going to be a copycat if you just take something and identically share it but if you borrow from a bunch of different sources and you re-combine them and add your own perspective and your own creative flare to it now you've created something new. This is the way that humanity advances, this is the way technology grows and continues to advance, and this is the way really great works of art get made as well as we build on the ideas that have come before us.

We do this by studying the greats who've come before us, stealing some of their best ideas, and then also really sharing that in a way where you're giving credit where credit's due and contributing your little piece to the world and then people will hopefully if you've done your job well, then they'll steal from you and build on those ideas and make them even better.

Ray: Beautiful. There is another rule that I think probably terrifies a lot of people because I think a lot of artists want to work in private until they perfect their art and then they want to show it to everybody. But your recommendation is that you should practice your art in public.

Jeff: Right. I borrowed this idea from Seth Godin. He talks about-- he has a blog post called *Talker's Blog*. He says, nobody, ever gets *Talker's Blog*, meaning you're not tongue-tied. Why? Because most of are opening our mouths at some point in the day and saying something. He said, "So, why don't we get writer's block? What if you wrote the way you talked?" Which is to say you did it often and you did it in public. I thought, "That's really cool. What if we practiced in public?" And I thought back to how I got really good at playing the guitar.

For years, my dad played guitar, he taught me how to play guitar and as a teenager, for a couple of years, I would sit in my bedroom, in the basement, I would practice guitar by myself. And I got okay, I could play some chords, play a few riffs, but that was about it. I just couldn't get much better with the song books and the CDs I was listening to by myself. Then I started playing with other guitarists who were much better than me. We started playing together and we even started playing some shows, and very quickly, in a matter of months, my skills doubled, tripled, and quintupled. I got really good.

Then after college, I traveled with the band for a year, and I played about a show a day and wasn't really practicing other than to rehearse for the next show that we had and then play it live. When you perform your art for an audience, even one other person, I think there's a seriousness that you bring to your craft that doesn't get matched when you're doing it in your basement by yourself, in your office where nobody can see you fail. I'm not saying don't practice but I am saying as soon as you have something to share, share it because this is how you get better faster.



I found out that Chris Rock, this is how he has become a great comedian. What he does is he comes up-- before he does a big comedy tour, performing for tens of thousands of people at an arena, he goes to a bunch of local comedy clubs. He'll do this, dozens, sometimes hundreds of times, with brand new jokes that are on a legal pad and he'll just go and do a comedy club, nobody is expecting him to take the stage. He comes on stage and in a very unexaggerated tone reads the jokes off of the legal pad. He's not performing, he's just testing out the jokes to see which ones get a laugh and which ones fall flat.

Most of them fail but he understands that putting his art out into the world and getting immediate feedback is the best and fastest way for him to become better. Incidentally, this is what blogging is, this what podcasting is. The internet makes it really easy. This is also a really good way to grow an audience, to market your work.

If you're practicing in public and people are watching you get better and better, what a really good byproduct of your practice is when it comes time for you to publish a book or launch a course or do something big and people have been watching you get progressively better, now they're going to support you because you've got an audience that's there waiting for you to sell them something, to share something with them. It's really interesting. I talked to a young woman by the name of Stephanie Halligan who wanted to be a cartoonist her whole life and just couldn't figure out how to do that. So she started a blog and started publishing a new cartoon once a day on that blog, grew an audience and had people reaching out to her saying, "Can we buy prints from you?" She realized, "I'm just doing this for me. I'm doing this for myself." But the really beautiful by-product of this practicing in public is there an audience whose waiting when you're ready, is waiting for you to sell them something.

Ray: You know, this is so important. I was listening to an interview a couple of days ago. I don't want to say-- I don't want to give too much detail because I'm going to be critical of this interview. But the recommendation the person was giving was, "Don't launch your new thing," let's say it was a book, "until it's very professional, very perfect because you only get one chance to make a first impression." And I thought, "That's terrible advice."

Jeff: Yes. I mean, the problem, Ray, as you know, is it will never be good enough.

Ray: Yes.

Jeff: And you and I know probably thousands of people. I run into these people at events, they email me every day, who are so talented, so skilled, and their best work is in a sock drawer somewhere. People do not need to be told, "Make it better." Now, to be clear, I'm a big fan of excellence, but they do not need to be told they're not good enough. They're telling themselves that all day long.

Ray: Yes. That job is filled.

Jeff: Yes. Right. I'm not talking about launching your thing into the world as much as I'm just saying start sharing something today. If you're an artist, take a picture of your

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work in progress and put it on Instagram today. If you're a writer, take a piece of writing that you worked on yesterday and put it on your blog today. We understand. I mean, if you're sharing your work in public-- I remember reading on Donald Miller's blog years ago, he says, "Before it goes into a book, it first goes here." Like you can temper your audience's expectations. Chris Rock walking up on stage with a legal pad is not bringing with him the same expectation of an audience that paid hundreds of dollars to see him at an arena. They understand.

Ray: Some people might get mad, and this happens. And that's okay, that part of the job. But you get it. You understand very quickly, "Oh, he's trying out new jokes, I get that, that's cool." It's a risk, of course. Some people walk out. Some people are mad, but this is what masters do. The reality, Ray, is if you practice in public, if you do this versus working on your business, your book, your idea in private somewhere, and then you eventually launch it when you think it's "good enough" which will probably take years, the person who iterated and practiced in public, and launched an ugly beta version and made it better and better, their final product will be better than the person who did it in private.

Ray: Agreed. Okay, there's one more. I would love to just talk about every page of the book with you, but I know it's not possible. There's one more of these rules I want to touch on because I find this fascinating. This may have been my favorite chapter. It's the one about owning your work.

Jeff: You know, somebody asked me recently, was there's anything that challenged me because what I do with a book is I just start with a question. The question is, do artists have to starve. I found this story of Michelangelo which truly did kick off the writing of this book for me. I just started digging deeper. I had had an experience as a writer where I felt like I was starving and then moved to this place of thriving where I was making more than I ever thought I could make off of my writing. All the goals that I had when I started as a writer, I blew past them in the first year. Everything since then has been gravy, which has been really fun.

But, there were these questions in the back of my mind, did I get lucky, is this not the norm? Because I kept hearing all these stories of what writers and artists normally do. So when I started digging deep, and doing a lot of interviews and trying to study what successful creatives are doing today I started to identify these rules.

This was one that actually challenged me. It's this rule of ownership that the starving artist sells out too soon, and the thriving artist waits really long, and they try to retain as much ownership over their work as possible. This was a challenge to me because I'm writing this book that I sold to a publisher, right? So, I didn't retain ownership of it. I get paid a royalty, but I basically sold the work to the publisher. What I saw-- this is kind of a complicated rule. What you see with starving artists is, if somebody picks them, a publisher, a record company, an investor, and they throw some cash their way, especially if they've never seen much money for their art, they're almost always too quick to sell out. What sadly happens, appears down the line, they're left in a lurch, and they no longer have any control over their art. They've probably ran out of



money if it wasn't a significant investment which at often isn't. The first offer is never the one you should accept. But then I looked at other thriving artists who eventually did sell their work off to somebody.

Some talking about an acquisition of a company, or selling a book, or a creative work to somebody who wants to continue that work. It was interesting. Like George Lucas, early on, retained as much ownership of Star Wars as he possibly could. He financed the making of *The Empire Strikes Back*, the second Star Wars movie, himself. He basically took every dollar that he made from the first Star Wars film. He put it into *Empire* because he wanted to own the majority of it. He didn't take any outside investment. Whereas the previous movie, Fox had invested a lot and they'd been the primary investor and kept most of the profits.

When Lucas went to make *Empire*, he endured of that. He made about 77% of the profits of the *Empire*, and 90% of the merchandising profits. Which as we all know, they made a lot of toys and he made a lot of money off of that. Then you fast-forward a couple of decades, few decades, he sells Lucas film and the entire Star Wars franchise to Disney. Why do you do this? Well, first of all, they paid him billions of dollars for it. That's a pretty high price to get to sell out. Second of all, he was done. He was done with Star Wars. He had set an interview, he goes, "What's the point of making more movies?" because people were asking to make more Star Wars movies after the prequels.

He said, "what's the point of doing it, people are just going to criticize it?" [laughs] He was really kind of burnt out on it. This thing that he created, he could only take so far, it was actually better for the work for him to sell it off. You see this, with other-- that like Pixar's another example of that. John Lasseter was fired from Disney because he had all these ideas of how they could make their films better and they didn't want to hear it. The '70s he was fired and he went to work at Pixar, which was basically a hardware company. They're building computers and he talked Steve Jobs, the CEO of the company, into making films.

They do it, obviously, the rest is history but in that process, Disney offers Lasseter's old job. They realize what he's doing is really great, they want him to come do it for them, they offer to pay him triple his salary, his previous salary. He says, "No, I'm having too much fun, I get to control the work here." I think that's really important, as creatives, as artists, as people who are creating intellectual property, whether that's your business ideas, the books that you're writing, the blog post that you're creating, you need to own your work. You need to fight for this because nobody has your vision.

Yes, there may come a time where it makes sense to sell your work, where somebody-- where the payoff is high and they can help you make the work better, help you reach more people with it and you're going to be well off for a long time after selling it off. But, by and large, the most successful artists held on to as much of their intellectual property, for as long as they possibly could because they needed



to control the work. Because when you sell it off, you lose control. That's the most important thing for an artist to have is ownership and control of their work.

Ray: The book is called, *Real Artist Don't Starve: Timeless Strategies for Thriving in the New Creative Ages* by Jeff Goins. Jeff, where do people go to get a copy of this book? When is it available?

Jeff: Well, it is available on June 6th. You can go get a copy at, wherever fine books are sold, as they say. Amazon, Barnes, and Noble, you name it. When you order a copy, you can go to website dontstarve.com and fill out a little form and submit your receipt number. If you have any questions about that, you can just email me, jeff@goinswriter.com and get a whole bunch of bonuses including an online course, a free exclusive community and transcripts to download of all the interviews that I did with all these thriving artists. Again, that's a dontstarve.com.

Ray: Perfect. If there was one concept or belief that people walk away from this book with, what would it be? If you want them to-- what do you want people to carry away from the book?

Jeff: First of all, I think being a starving artist is a choice that we make. It's not a necessary condition of doing creative work. Second of all, we all are artists if we have a gift to share with the world and so we have a responsibility to not starve for that art because we have some romantic idea that somehow it's better or purer.

We have a responsibility to thrive and help our art reach as many people as possible. I wrote the book not to shame anybody or make somebody do something but to say, "You've got two paths. Whatever your art is, whatever the work that you're doing is, you can choose to starve or you can choose to thrive but understand that that really is a choice," and at the end of the book, it's up to you which path you're going to take.

Ray: Now you know, real artists don't starve.

Sean: That's right.

Ray: If you're starving artists, you're making an excuse and you may not really be an artist. Or you've been deceived and you're now seeing the light. You're going to stop that starving business.

Sean: [laughs] That's right.

Ray: Get the book.

Sean: All right. If you found the show helpful, please subscribe to the show through the Apple podcast's application. Give us a rating and a review. Make sure to put your real name and website in the text review. We will mention you at some point on the show. Get the transcript by going to rayedwards.com/287. Any final thoughts?



Ray: Yes. Real artists don't starve.

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