

078: Use Sketchnotes to Deliberately Capture Meaningful Ideas: Interview with Mike Rohde

M You know, I look at life as kind of an experiment. And if you're not experimenting, how do you know if something better could be around the corner by just switching something up? So, that's the way I approach those things.

[Music playing]

A Welcome to The Portfolio Life with Jeff Goins. I'm your host, Andy Traub, and this is the show that helps you to pursue work that matters, make a difference with your art, and discover your true voice. Pen is permanent; and when we seek to capture memories, we also want them to be permanent. Well, Mike Rohde took note-taking, which we all want to be more permanent, and improved on it by creating the idea of sketchnotes. In this conversation you'll **learn how you can capture ideas more effectively** and how Mike **runs his business within the constraints of a full-time job**. Here's Mike Rohde and Jeff Goins.



[Music playing]

J Well, hey Mike. Thanks for being a part of this show. It's good to have you.

M Hey, thanks for having me on the show, Jeff. This is great to be here.

J So, I've got to give props where props are deserved. I mean, I've seen your work around a lot of places. You've done some really interesting illustrations for a lot of different people, and a lot of different organizations that I follow. But the props go to my friend, KC Procter, hailing from the Pacific Northwest who gave me a copy of your book, *The Sketchnote Handbook*, at this workshop that I was teaching. He was learning how to do sketchnoting which is a thing now, as I'm sure you're aware. And he gave it to me, because he said, "Here's an interesting way to take notes and capture kind of the big ideas from conferences, or meetings, and have a visual way to look at the content that you just digested," which I think is fascinating.

So, I want to talk about your book. I also want to talk about **how you balance sort of the creative and business side in this ever-changing marketplace** where I think there's lots of balance and tensions to be managed. Before we talk about all of that, let's talk about you and Sketchnoting, and really how you got into art in the first place. How did it all begin for you?

M Sure. Well, I'm actually a graphic designer, was trained as a classical graphic designer which means print design to a lot of people. Came up in the pre-Internet age, pre-computer age actually. I learned how to do graphic design on boards with pens, and rulers, and tape and all that kind of stuff.

J Wait a second.

M Yeah.

J Wait a second. So, **people could create are before Photoshop?**

M Oh, yeah.

J [Laughing]

M Yes, definitely.

J [Laughing]

M Lots of waxed pieces of paper and these ink pens that you would have to refill and clean in a special bath.

J Amazing.

M All kinds of things going on.

J So, you **got started as an old-school graphic designer**. How did this Sketchnoting thing come about?

M That's a really interesting thing. And I think I'm **observing other people develop solutions to problems**. This was a problem for me. I was actually a really good note taker, but I sort of took it to the nth degree. I almost acted like a court reporter when I took notes for a period of my life. And I had these giant books. And I would write every detail. And I used a pencil, because I was concerned about mistakes. And the pencil, I thought, "Well, **I can erase the mistakes later at some future, magical time** I can go back into all these notes and pull out all the valuable nuggets." The problem was the quantity of notes that I was taking, there was no way I was going to go and fix any errors. And there was no way I was going to go back and draw out those golden nuggets either. Because it was like **a thick forest of ideas**. And it would have taken as much time to extract the value as it did to take the notes.

So, I came up against this problem at the end of 2006. I couldn't take notes this way anymore, and I needed to change. One of the things that's benefitted me as a graphic designer is – and any designer will tell you this, we're always fighting up against constraints of some kind. It might be a one-color logo you have to work with, or a deadline, all different types of things that you deal with. And everybody does.

So, because I was used to **dealing within constraints** I thought, "Well, what if I put constraints on myself and see what happens?" So, what I did was I thought, "What would be the most opposite to what I'm doing now?" I'm using a giant book and pencil. It seemed to me the most opposite thing I can do was pick a small book and use a pen. The small book turned out to be a **Moleskine** pocket

notebook. I think it was a sketchbook. And I just happened to have a **Pilot G2 pen** and thought, “Let’s just give it a try.”

I had a conference that was coming up early in 2007. So, I took those two implements along and sat through this user-experience conference for my work and started using this small book and pen. And what I found was because I literally could not write the detail that I had been before, I had to sort of slow down, and it focused me on the big ideas. So, the combination of the pen, I think, also fit into this. Because with a pen **once you put it on the paper, it’s not coming off the paper**. It is what it is, right?

So, I had to be **very deliberate about what I captured**. And that put me in this space of not capturing everything, because not only did I not have enough space, but I needed – I had to focus on what it was that I was going to capture and be deliberate about it. And I think that was a really good thing. It put me in the place of letting go of things that wouldn’t apply to me. Like some idea that I couldn’t apply in my life. Maybe it was for an in-house designer, and I was working on other stuff. So, I would let that idea go. But there was some other idea that came along that was really fascinating. And I would capture that.

And because I had this extra free time, I could start doing things like fancier lettering. I loved doing lettering. So, I could do lettering. I could do little drawings to go along with the concepts. A lot of times when I hear an idea I’ll see an image in my head, and I’ll just draw that on the paper along with the text. So, what I realized was, the combination of these images and texts together really made an impactful note. And it was very compact, because I had so little space. I can capture a conference in maybe four pages or something. And it made it easy for me to go back and draw the meaning later on.

J That’s interesting about the constraints, about **intentionally deciding you’re not going to capture all the information**. I mean, I think that’s a challenge in any meeting, at any conference where you are consuming content. You can’t grab it all. And I think that’s what we try to do a lot. We fill these notebooks full of notes, and we never go back and look at them again. Or if we try to, it doesn’t make a lot of sense. And it sounds to me like you **decided first to sort of constrain yourself**. And with that constraint, “I’m not going to be able to erase. I’m going to make everything compact; and, therefore, I’m going to limit myself to what I’m going to fill the pages with.” And that gave you all of this margin, all this time to basically illustrate the notes. And I’m sure that the **ideas that stuck** with you did just that. They weren’t just in one ear and out the other. Because you’re spending time coloring the letters, it sticks with you. Is that something that you found with Sketchnoting that the ideas that you are capturing they tend to stick with you, because you are spending so much time on fewer ideas, or fewer concepts?

M I think they do. And there’s more and more evidence in some of the research I’m seeing that supports there’s **something about the use of your hand to capture the notes as opposed to keystroking and typing**. Because you have a tendency to analyze when you’re using your hand. There’s a kinetic part of it. And there’s something about using the whole body. And there’s other research that suggests this idea that **our brains work in two channels**. One is visual. So, that would be imagery and those things. And the other channel is verbal. So, that’s words and speaking and those things. Both are very powerful. But what the suggestion is, is when you sort of overlay these you end up with the **matrix of memory that’s better than the individual parts themselves**. So, they create lots of touchpoints in your brain that interconnect, that help you remember in more vivid detail because

you put in the effort of doing the drawing as well as the writing. So, it's really important that you're mixing the two together. They both have a part in this. It's neither only text, or only drawings. It's sort of a blend in between. And you sort of adjust how much text and how much drawings you use based on the context.

J So, say I'm at a conference. I've got your book, The Sketchnote Handbook which is teaching me all about how to visually capture content so that I can actually want to go back and look at my notes. I saw my friend, Ray Edwards. He did this recently. He was at a conference and he **took a picture of his notes**. And I think he was inspired by your work. And he was basically doing Sketchnoting. And I was like, "That looks cool. I want to be there. I want to be at that things, because those look like cool ideas versus like taking a picture of chicken scratch." I mean it was **compelling**.

So, say I'm in. I want to do Sketchnoting. Here's my fear, and I'd love for you to speak to this. I'm at a conference. I'm at one of these conferences that you and I have both been at Leader Cast or Story Line Conference, great content. So much amazing advice and ideas being thrown at you. And I go, "OK, that's an idea," and I start sketching. I think there's this fear of missing out. I've got this idea that I'm going to capture and what if Pat Lencioni, or Donald Miller, or somebody comes up with an even better idea, do you just start sketching and this is what I'm going to capture as content is still starting to be thrown at you? How do you deal with that? Because I'm afraid of missing a great little Tweetable or great thing to write down and capture in my notes. Because we're talking about constraints which means **you have to make choices to do one thing which is automatically choices to do other things**. When you're taking those notes, **how do you not miss other meat in the content?**

M That's a great question. I think there's a couple of techniques that I've developed and observed in myself. I think, number one, you sort of have to give yourself a lot of grace and room to experiment. So, maybe if you went to a conference maybe you wouldn't do every talk. Maybe you would experiment with a couple of talks to see how you feel. So, **grace is really important for yourself. And that includes your drawing ability**. A lot of people get hung up on their ability to draw. I emphasize a lot this idea that ideas are not art. So, it's not about the quality of your art. It's how you're capturing an idea that can be shared to yourself again, or to somebody else. But, specifically, the technical stuff that I do in those cases where there's lots of really great ideas coming quick, I do something I call **staking, caching** and taking. So, I try to cache like ideas like if someone says something, I try to analyze it and have an image of it in my head or the words in my head and start writing that down. Now, often, as you say, someone like Donald Miller might have a great point that follows it. I will pause, and I will leave enough space for what I guessed that might be. And I will jump to it a point below or next to and begin capturing the next concept. And if it continues to happen, I just keep on kind of estimating space and jumping. And, then, I have to be diligent about going back at the end and filling in the missing parts.

So, it's not perfectly ideal, but I think a lot of times because you're analyzing, it's sort of **your interpretation of what someone's saying**. I think once you **let go of it having to be the exact quote**, unless that's important to you, if it's something you're applying to your life you think analyzing the concept down to basic core and capturing that, that also helps as well. You're not so worried about quoting someone exactly. **As a journalist** it's more this concept and, "How does it apply to me and my life?" That might be quite different than maybe even they intend the concept to me. Maybe you have

context that you can add to it that relates to you that maybe they couldn't have imagined it having an impact on.

[Music playing] 11:15

J Yeah, I love that idea that it's the ideas not the art. And you're really just trying to capture your impression or interpretation of the concept. That makes a lot of sense to me. I want to keep talking about these constraints. I also want to talk about the work that you've done, because it's incredible. Here is me struggling with constraining this interview to make choices, because I want to ask you a bunch of questions. This is one of my favorite things to talk about especially as it applies to art and creativity.

I saw a YouTube video years ago now where Jack White was talking about creativity and technology. And he said **technology is antagonistic to creativity** which I thought was interesting, because **technology gives you tools. It gives you resources. It makes anything possible.** And he was speaking kind of broadly but, obviously, from the perspective of a musician. And he says **art always emerges from constraints**, from forcing the constraints. He says, now as an artist we have to do exactly what you just did, Mike, or what you did years ago when you started Sketchnoting is, I have to limit my choices. That's how great things come about. I can't erase. I'm not going to hit backspace. I'm going to write with a distraction-free app, whatever the constraint is.

He said art always emerges out of constraints. So, he limits himself with the technology that he uses, or the tools that he uses. And that reminded me of this great band from the '90s, what is it? The presidents of the United States how they recorded that one album with five strings, two bass strings and three guitar strings. And they just took everything away so that they were **forced to be more creative with fewer tools.** I find that fascinating. And I think that we're all struggling with this with our careers, especially with a creative career.

There is the **art side**, and there's the **business side.** And you just mentioned, you've got a full-time job. You've got a job, but you've also got these books. You've illustrated some incredible books like **Rework.** I love that book. **The \$100 Startup** by Chris Guillebeau. And I didn't realize this until recently, **A Little Book of Talent** by Daniel Quail. I love his stuff. Really fun illustrated books which I think all of those books are great. And the illustrations in many ways, especially in the case of Rework really make those books. So, you've got this, I think, pretty impressive list of clientele. And you've got your own book, doing interesting stuff, but you've got a job. I mean, you are doing this amidst all the constraints of taking care of your family, working for a full-time gig, and your **art is coming out of really the margins of life.**

It seems to me – but I don't want to speak for you – talk to me about those constraints of art, and work, being creative, and also having to sell your work. How do you balance that? **How do you manage that on a daily, weekly, monthly basis?**

M That's a really fascinating question and lead in. I remember Jack White, too. He would buy plastic guitars—

J Yeah.

M —at garage sale and stuff and like force himself to use it. Or something where he was playing a string that was wrapped around a bottle. I don't know. He did all kinds of crazy stuff.

J Oh, yeah.

M And I think that's true. And I think creativity can come out in lots of ways. It doesn't always have to be art. It's like **Seth Godin's interpretation of art is the thing you produce that's unique to the world**, right? So, it doesn't have to be drawing or painting. It can be almost anything. And for a long time I struggled with sort of the balance. What do I do with these two things? And actually very recently I sort of **changed my perspective a little bit to just appreciate my life the way it is**. Like there is lots of **pressure**, I feel, to sort of be this solo person and you have to do your vision and that's all you can do. And I think there's – maybe there's ways to do both of them. To have a full-time job and have fun stuff.

I think it was this book, something, **The Balance Between Should and Must, Elle Luna [The Crossroads of Should and Must: Find and Follow Your Passion]**. I probably just butchered the title. But – The Crossroads. And she talks a lot about this balance of things. She talks about this balance of things. And she talked about Phillip Glass. He was a plumber. He showed up at someone's house, and he fixed his dishwasher. "But you're Phillip Glass. You can't be a plumber." But why not? So, ultimately what that brought me to these thoughts about balancing things is, "Why can't I look at my limitations of my life as an opportunity to be creative?"

So, as an example, I work in a small team as a user-experience designer. Now, one of the things I have to do with them is we're doing an application, and I have to capture ideas and show things visually. So, I thought, "Well, why couldn't I use all these skills that I've been teaching other people and experiment with them on whiteboards for developing applications?" And I'm having a blast with this team where we sit in a room. There's eight of us, and we're working through these features that we have to produce. And I'm up at the whiteboard, and I'm facilitating the discussion and capturing everything we're speaking about. And everybody can see it visually on the board. And it really helps us solve our problems.

So, that really reminds me a lot of, **why can't we find – we look at it is a limitation. Is there a way you can turn it around and look at it as an opportunity and, then, find what kind of things could I do with this limitation?** Like, I don't have all these things, but I do have this one thing. What would be really interesting to try to see how far I could push that thing? And I think that gets at the essence of what Jack White is talking about, **using the situation you're in and finding ways to use it**. And, then, hopefully, that leads you to a place where maybe the opportunities open up, or go in a different direction.

And a lot of it is this awareness of opportunities, I think. That's what I've observed, too, is when as an example for Rework, when I did that project, Jason Fried reached out to me when I said I would love to do it. In the middle of it, we had our second child, our baby daughter. And I thought, "Oh, no, there's no way I'm going to make this deadline." But it turned out to be a blessing in disguise. Because what do mothers and babies do? They sleep a lot. So, I sat in the hospital room with my wife and daughter sleeping happily sitting on my computer like finishing the project. So, I think a lot of it is **mindset**. And it's sort of **accepting and finding ways to be creative within the time that you are given rather than spending that energy and that time complaining about all the things that you can't do**.

Find out what you can do and see how far you can push it. You may find a solution that's better than in an ideal world.

And we never really have an ideal world. It doesn't exist. So, why should we try to worry about that ideal world when it's not going to happen? Why don't we accept what we have and make that work to the best we can?

17:30

J Yeah, I love that idea. And I like what you're hinting at here. You're sort of dancing around this, and I want to clarify without putting words in your mouth. I hear you saying, "Maybe this is a good thing. Maybe it's OK that I'm not a solopreneur Sketchnoter at least at this season in my life." Maybe in some ways this **allows me to do more work**. Because out of that constraint really interesting stuff can come. And I think that's absolutely true. Is that what you're saying? Again, not to put words in your mouth.

M That is exactly what I'm thinking. And to give you some more insight into all the work that I've done with Sketchnoting, it's been a real long journey. So, you remember I mentioned, I didn't start this in 2007, early 2007 is when I started this. It's been years and years. It took years and years to get book deals. And when I did the book I hustled and promoted it and did some unique things like sharing the work as it was being produced on Instagram and writing posts on my blog about what it is like to write a book. And tried to go in different directions. All along my mindset is, "This is a really longterm run." Like, I'm not trying to – I'm not flipping anything here.

I'm building something for the future which also leads me to how I handle my communities. So, there is a community of people that loves Sketchnoting and really love to do it. And from the outset I decided I wanted to follow one of my heroes, Jeffrey Zeldman, who is very open in the Web-development community. He's super – he emphasizes other people's work. He's very open, and he likes – he's much more about the community than himself. And I wanted to follow his sort of example of being open, and understanding, and promoting anybody that was for his cause. So, anybody that talks about Sketchnoting, I'm for them, even if they're producing a book that maybe even competes with me, because I'm **thinking about Sketchnoting as this whole community, or this activity**. And I just sort of have the approach of **when the tide rises, all the boats go together**. So, it's a different perspective, I think, then I could have taken. And, so, that feeds into this acceptance or understanding that maybe this season in life is preparing me for another one where maybe that individual thing is better, right? It could be a better opportunity in the future than if I rush it now.

So, again, it's **be aware of the opportunity and knowing when the right time is to do what you're going to do**.

J And to me this speaks to the whole concept of The Portfolio Life which I found refreshing when I read Charles Handy's book, **The Age of Unreason**. When he talked about The Portfolio Life that your career is not one thing. It's a bunch of things that you're going to kind of cobble together. I said, "Yep, that speaks to me. I'm a businessman, a marketer, and a dad, and a writer, and an artist." I'm all of these things at different times and sometimes at the same time. What's interesting to me about you is you **live in these different worlds: the business world, technology world, and the art world** which, I think, often sort of see each other as opposites, right? A lot of my creative friends, a lot of people that listen to this show: writers, artists, I think that this idea of looking at what you do as a

business, looking at your craft as a brand, these are things that are uncomfortable for creative types, I think. They're uncomfortable for me sometimes. And I see sort of straddling these different worlds in a very creative and interesting way.

Talk to me a little bit about that. When you're creating, are you thinking about marketing? Like when you're writing your book, you're talking about sharing it on your blog. Are these different mindsets at different times? Are there different hats that you wear? Or are you constantly wearing all of these hats? How do you maneuver that? I think it's interesting. I think everybody kind of has their own way of approaching it. And I'm fascinated with how you do that.

M I think it's this both/and. For instance, the idea of sharing on Instagram, I stole that completely from Austin Kleon who is very prolific on Tumblr and Instagram. And he wrote his research. He sort of researches in public. So, I got ideas from him. So, sometimes it will be, "Hey, I can do this thing and it would be great to share." But I think I always filter it through this lens of, if I were the person on the other end following me, would I think that's cheesy, or hokey, or like that would seem strange, or would I like it?" Right? So, that's sort of the filter I look at things through. So, from the perspective of let's say sharing shots of my friend Brian and I shooting the videos for the books and showing all this stuff as we do it. It's a little bit more overhead, right? I've got to think about pictures, and it takes up time away from that. But in the long run we end up with this stream of photos that gets people excited about the book coming.

And, you know, I've got the advantage of, I have a very visual book. So, there are things to take pictures of—

J Yeah.

M —where someone who is writing letters, maybe it doesn't work quite the same.

J Yeah. Like me. I took a picture of my bibliography. I was like, "Hey, check this out people. Well researched." [Laughing]

M Awesome. So, you know, it's a lot of times, it's one or the other direction. So, I might just come up with this, "Oh, it would be really cool to do this thing." And, then, I think, "That would be interesting to share with other people." Or, "That could be a benefit over here, over there." And then I think of the application to the business side. Or maybe I'll think of, "How can I" — the whole background of sharing as I built it was, I had no clue how to build a book the first time. I had no one to really follow than what I discovered online. There's not really anyone teaching you how to do that necessarily. I think there is probably a lot more now. I thought, "It would be really interesting from my perspective to look back on my process and see what was I thinking at the time, especially if I do another book in the future. Maybe I can look back and remember, "Oh, yeah, that was pretty hard." OK, we'll just keep going.

And it actually did help me to have documented it when I did the second book to look back and remember, "Oh, yeah, this is really hard right here." Just to trust the process. **Crank everyday on a little bit of something and move the process forward.** Having that documentation turned out to help me as well as being a marketing thing.

So, I kind of like things that have layers to them and have multiple aspects. So, not only is it fun for people to look at it, but it also gets them excited about what I'm doing, and it's a good thing for me to

share, because it reminds me that I'm making progress. So, if I can align those three together, that's always the best. And you try things out, and some things work, and some things don't. And I look at life as kind of an experiment. And **if you're not experimenting, how do you know if something better could be around the corner by just switching something up?** So, that's the way I approach those things.

[Music playing] 23:45

J I love that you said, build a book. **Life is an experiment.** I don't know if you realize this, but even in your language I can hear the technology. I can hear the art. I can hear the guy who's trying to provide for his family but also do something that's fulfilling. It's fascinating the way you've blended all these things together. It's an art in its own way. Also, like that you remember what kind of pen you used at that conference [laughing], and I can see that on your About page on your blog as well. The first Mac Powerbook that you used and all that. So, that's fun. **Tools matter, right? But it's interesting that they only matter in as far as they help you to do the thing that you want to do.** And that's an interesting dynamic as well. **Restraining yourself but also making use of good tools.**

Any tools that you recommend for people who are wanting to be more creative? Because what I love about the work that you're doing, Mike, is that you're making – what Sketchnoting to me does is it **makes art accessible to anyone.** Because it's about anybody can draw something. It's not about the quality – it's not about the quality of the art. It's about capturing the idea. But it really is making something that doesn't feel very accessible to people much more accessible to other people. Are there tools that you go, "Hey, these are some really great things to help you be more creative or feel more creative?"

M Sure, I would love to share some things. And I would say, again, experiment with the things you have. Like I found good, old printer paper when I've been doing workshops work just fine. You don't have to have fancy tools. So, the bar is set pretty low. You can use all kinds of things. And sometimes I force myself to use strange things. Sort of like Jack White to see what comes out of it. Sometimes it works; sometimes they don't. And I'm always at a lookout at pen stores for new things.

So, I would say the book that I've been really loving of late is **A Barren Fig Confidant.** So, it's this company in New York City, Joey Cofone, and his partner. And they decided that they wanted to make a better notebook. They loved Moleskins, but they thought they could do something a little different. And, so, they approached it from a different perspective. So, it's got a linen cover, a gray linen cover. It comes in a box. So, it's really nice. And the paper is pretty thick, and you can get it different ways. It can be plain, grid, and lined. So, whatever you prefer. And it just takes ink really well. It holds up even to different pens. So, up to a certain degree. Obviously, if you use a Sharpie, it's going to bleed through. There are just limits to paper, of course. So, that's been a really great book for me. I've been experimenting quite a bit with them.

J And what's that called again?

M It's called, The Barren Fig Confidant. I think they're like \$16 each, or something like that. I think they have a deal if you buy a book, they plant a tree. So—

J Cool.

M They are very aware of the environment. So, the impact of paper.

J Yeah.

M And, so, and they're good people. That's a good shout out. I've rediscovered **Flare pens**. I don't know if you use Flare pens when you were in—

J No.

M —in school. I've just stumbled on picking one up. And I really like how it felt. They work really well on the Barren Fig, and Moleskine, and other notebooks. And I just remembered how much I loved felted pens. And I've been using since 2007. I've been a little bit more in the gel pen space. My favorite gel pen right now it the **Pentel EnerGel 0.7**. I like my pens a little bit thicker and the same for pencils. There's a variety of pencils out there that are handy if you want to have a little more fluid experience. **Retro 51** which is a company out of Texas produces these beautiful brass barrel pens and pencils. Their pens are great, but I love their pencil because it's got a 1.5 or 2.0 lead. So, it's really thick. And you get this sort of rougher thicker look to it when you're sketching. So, it keeps you loose, I think. So, that's a favorite pencil right now. And, of course, **Moleskines**. I love the Moleskines sketch book because of the really thick paper. It can take Sharpies pretty well. At some point they will bleed through, but it can handle quite a bit of ink coverage. And that's why I often use those for Sketchnoting or illustrations, because the paper is just so able to handle whatever I can throw at it. So, it really depends on the context for pocket notebooks. Of course, love the **Field notes**. That's really great. And Barron Fig also makes, I think it's called The Apprentice which is a similar type of pocket notebook as well. There are just so many things out there that you can **play with that can help your creativity**.

I would say the last thing I'll mention is two years ago I was inspired by Austin Cleon to **start a log book**. And the idea of this is not so much a diary like, "Dear diary, today I went to the store and I bought an ice cream." It's more like you capture your day as it happens. Like, "I called Jeff today, and we had a great talk on a podcast." Or, "I just fixed this problem." So, you're sort of documenting almost like engineers have a logbook where they log everything they do. Because a lot of times they may be able to retrace their steps and find solutions in there. But it's a good way to capture your days.

And, then, look back on your year. So, you come to the end of the year you can look back at a logbook. I've used a Moleskine daily planner for the first year, and it worked really well. And, then, this year I'm trying a new planner called **The Hobonichi Techo** which is a Japanese – it's a smaller. It's like A5 size. So, it's a bit smaller and the paper is really super – it's almost Bible thin. But it can handle ink to a surprising degree. It doesn't bleed through. So, it's a very small package. And I've really been enjoying The Hobonichi. That was recommended to me from my friend, Patrick Rohn.

There's so many tools out there. Everyday there are new ones to play with. **You just have to explore and play with and see how they work for you.**

J Well, I have to be honest with you, Mike. Out of all of the guests we've had on the show, and I've interviewed, nobody has ever said to me, "I like my pens a little bit thicker." I haven't geeked out with anyone on writing implements. So, that was fun. And if you're listening to this going, "Oh, my gosh, I don't know how to spell this, or didn't know how to write this down, we'll have a bullet list of

all of these tools.” Because I’m actually really bad at notetaking. I want to get better about this. So, I’m taking down all this stuff, because I want to get better about organizing my ideas and using something other than just Evernote to do that. I love Evernote. But it’s a challenge to – it’s a different part of your brain. As you said when you’re writing, versus when you’re typing. And my friend, Michael Hyatt, actually blogged about this. He blogged about why he is going to stop using notebooks, and he put everything into Evernote. And, then, like two years later he said how he reversed that decision—

M Interesting.

J —and he went back to writing hand notes. And he still loves Evernote. And **Evernote’s got that Moleskine thing** that magically transports it with an invisible time traveling ink or something. But, yeah, it’s interesting. Yeah, it is interesting, and I want to get back into that. Mike, thanks for all of this. Incredible stuff. Fun to chat about art, about restraints, about how your craft is something that emerges not out of all of your free time, but when you’re watching your wife and newborn sleep, and you’ve got a deadline to make. In between dinner and bedtime. I think that’s true. That’s always true. But we tend to believe these myths that when I get a little bit older, when I have more free time, when I quit my job, then I’ll be creative, then I’ll do these things that I want to do. And that’s just not true. I love the way you’re exemplifying that. And I love the undercurrent of this conversation which is, maybe that’s the way it’s supposed to be. Or at very least, **you don’t have an excuse to not create within the midst of all the constraints of your life**. Thanks for doing that. Thanks for leading a community of people in that. Great to have you on the show. It’s been fun.

M Thanks, Jeff. I really appreciate being on the show.

[Music playing]

A So, you should try to sketch your notes the next time you’re in a meeting. And if you’re willing to try, make sure you share your notes on Twitter with #PortfolioLife. We’d love to see them. Thanks to today’s guest, Mr. Mike Rohde. And make sure you check out all of his art and his books. They’re as cool as he is smart. And he’s really smart. I’m Andy Traub, and on behalf of Jeff Goins, thanks for spending some time with us. Now, go build your portfolio.

[Music playing]

M But what the suggestion is, is when you sort of overlay these, you end up with a matrix of memory that’s better than the individual parts themselves. So, they create lots of touch points in your brain that interconnect, that help you remember in more vivid detail.

Resources

- [The Sketchnote Handbook](#) by Mike Rohde
- [The Sketchnote Workbook](#) by Mike Rohde
- Notebooks: [Moleskine](#), [Baron Fig](#), [Field Notes](#), [The Hobonichi Techo](#)
- Pens/Pencils: [Pilot G2](#), [Pentel EnerGel 0.7](#), [Retro 51](#)
- [Rework](#) by Jason Fried and David Heinemeier Hansson
- [The \\$100 Startup](#) by Chris Guillebeau
- [A Little Book of Talent](#) by Daniel Coyle

- [*The Crossroads of Should and Must*](#) by Elle Luna
- [*The Age of Unreason*](#) by Charles Handy