

*the* **BEGINNER'S GUIDE** *to*

# **BUILDING** *an* **AUDIENCE**



Jeff Goins

# How I Built a Blog Audience of Over 100,000 Readers in 18 Months

Every writer needs a tribe. That much is clear.

Without an audience of readers, your words will fall on deaf ears — no matter how important or inspired they seem. But how do you do it?

Great question.

Most writers struggle with this. They “just want to write,” hoping their clever prose will some day get them picked by a publisher.

And then, they think, they’ll leave all that marketing and promotion stuff to them. Those guys. The pros.

***Bad*** idea.

Guess what? “Those guys” don’t exist. Not anymore. You know who knows the most about your audience, your readers?

You.

**The only person in charge of getting you the audience your writing deserves is you.**

And what does that mean, exactly? It means you will need to build an audience of readers who will stick with you, no matter what.

But before I tell you about that, I need to tell you a little more about me...

## **My story**

Hi. My name’s Jeff. And I’m a writer. But for the longest time, I wouldn’t admit that to myself.

**Even though I’d been writing and publishing articles, even *coaching* other writers for 10 years, I wouldn’t dare call myself a writer.**

Insecure and afraid of rejection, I wasn't taking my work seriously, wasn't thinking like a pro.

And although I was scared to death to share my words with the world, that's what I secretly longed to do.

Then something incredible happened: A friend gave me some simple but powerful, advice:

***“You are a writer. You just need to write.”***

This unlocked something inside of me, lit a fire beneath me. And the next day I went to work, changed. All of a sudden, I wasn't acting like an amateur anymore. What had changed?

I started calling myself a writer. Which led to me thinking like a writer. And then acting like one.

Once I did that, everything changed. Within a year and a half, I had launched a blog, self-published a best-selling eBook, landed a book contract, and built an online audience of over 100,000 blog readers.

How did I do it? I found my tribe. Realizing no one was going to choose me, I had to choose myself and build my own audience.

## The power of a “tribe”

What’s a “tribe”? It’s a small but dedicated group of fans who believe in your work so much that they’re willing to tell everyone they know about it.

In my case, it was my blog readership, which I built over the course of a year and a half. Thanks to a small but powerful group of people — my tribe — reading my words, I was able to make my dream a reality.

And I became a writer, a real one.

This audience helped me replace my wife’s income and then my own, allowing me to quit my job. All of this happened in about 18 months.

Now, I’m able to support my family through writing full-time, something I never thought possible. Sounds crazy, doesn’t it? But it’s not. Not if you take your time to build the audience. Not if you find your tribe.

## How to build an audience

So how do you do this? What does it take? Well, let me begin by first saying that it's not a matter of mere luck or chance. This is not something that will just happen. Trust me, I tried.

Certainly, everyone's journey is unique. But most writers who have built a large online audience have done a lot of the same things. As I studied and applied those same strategies, I was surprised to see similar results.

Having shared the same information with hundreds of writers and watching them succeed, I'm now convinced **it's the principles, *not* the personalities, that make this process work.**

And now I'm going to share with you the whole process of building an online audience and becoming a real writer. Because once you know these steps, you can glean what seems relevant for you and begin your own journey.

# Success Starts with Passion: How to Build an Audience Doing What You Love

*There is no passion to be found playing small – in settling for a life that is less than the one you are capable of living.*

—NELSON MANDELA

My writing journey began as a search for accolades and awards, recognition and fame. Instead, I found frustration and disillusionment, not realizing this search was actually keeping me from the very thing I sought.

For years, I seethed with envy, watching other bloggers succeed while I stood still. As jealousy turned to resentment, I began to see the world through murky-colored glasses, finding fault with everything these people did.

And for awhile, this feeling consumed me. However, eventually I had to come to grips with reality: being jaded was doing me absolutely no good.

- I didn't become a better writer.
- I didn't become famous.
- I didn't get a book published.

After years of feeling this way, I decided to make a change: Instead of letting external factors dictate my success, I would focus on what I could control: my attitude.

**TIP #1:** Focus on passion, not results.

## **What this changed (eventually)**

At first, nothing changed. I was doing my work, the same as I ever was. But internally, I was changing. Instead of a pay check or pat on the back, passion was now my most important metric.

If I showed up to write — for love, not accolades — then I had done my job. At least for that day, I'd succeeded. And tomorrow was another day.



This released me from the pressure to perform, gave me greater artistic freedom, and made the work a lot more fun.

If nobody but me showed up to read my words, I would still write.

If I never won an award or got published, I would still write.

If I never earned a dime, I would still write.

**TIP #2:** Do your best work when nobody's watching.

## Isn't it ironic?

Wait a second. I thought this was going to be about building a popular blog? Well, it is.

But there's a paradox in the pursuit of fame: **those who try the hardest to earn others' attention rarely get it.** Conversely, those who scorn the limelight are often the ones dodging the paparazzi.

Of course, this isn't always the case. But with writing and other artistic crafts, I've found it to be undeniably accurate. Something interesting happens when you make passion your chief pursuit: People start to notice.

The world is desperate for, even envious of, people living purposeful lives that are free from fear. We are all inspired by those brave enough to shirk the trappings of fame and do work that matters.

What happens every time you see a film or read a book about some hero who risks it all to complete a quest that matters? You're inspired. Captivated, even.

When I began to write for passion, at first nobody seemed to care. But I kept at it, kept doing the best work I could no matter how many (or how few) paid attention. And slowly over time, people took notice.

Why? Because there is something attractive about passion.

**TIP #3:** The less you care about your audience's affections, the more your audience will be affected by your work.

## **Don't do it for the money**

I've talked to dozens of successful artists, authors, and entrepreneurs about why they do what they do. And they've all told me essentially the same thing: It's not about the money.

Billionaire Donald Trump once said:

*Money was never a big motivation for me, except as a way to keep score. The real excitement is playing the game.*

If you're setting out to master a craft, to play your own game, maybe you hope to some day become famous or rich. But if you were to dig a little deeper, you might find that such a goal isn't what you're really in search of.

Of course, there's nothing inherently wrong with money or the acquisition of it. Nor is there anything immoral about wanting a large audience or a best-selling book. It's just that those things aren't enough to fulfill you.

Because what happens on the days when nobody shows up to read your words, watch your work, or experience your art? Do you still do your job? Not if it's about the rewards.

## **Creativity is a process, not a product**

Our work is more than what we do or make. It's the entirety of effort that goes into each step of the process. In a sense, it's what we don't see.

So when you're sweating and bleeding and loving every minute of it, remember: this is the reward.

What do you do, then, when you create something you're proud of and people don't appreciate it? Do you quit? Give up because your work isn't "relevant"?

Or do you push forward, remembering that history's greatest artists were often misunderstood by contemporaries?

The most memorable creations are rarely comprehended by the masses — at first. This is what makes good art. It exceeds our expectations and sometimes offends our sensibilities.

Take heart, though. Some day, someone will get it. And they will be transformed. Until then, you must learn to love the work.

**TIP #4:** Respect the process, and results will come.

## Isn't it ironic?

*You know, the Greeks didn't write obituaries. They only asked one question after a man died: "Did he have passion?"*

—DEAN KANSKY, *SERENDIPITY*

When we set sail in search of our life's work, this is what we must seek: passion. Not fame or rewards or riches, but a willingness to quietly do our work, trusting the sowing-and-reaping nature of life. Remembering that good things come in time if we do our jobs well.

So where does that leave us? Where, practically, can you go from here? Strive to do your work with gratitude and generosity. Because this part is not you paying your dues or delaying gratification until payday. This is the best it gets.

**The grind is the reward.**

And if you aren't okay with that, then quit now. Because it's only once you've mastered this mindset that you'll have any shot at making it, at getting rich and famous.

What this meant for me was admitting that writing was my passion, something I couldn't not do. And truth be told, when I was doing it for the wrong reasons, I knew it. Constantly anxious and uneasy, I wrote with apprehension. It felt unnatural.

Only when I surrendered to the work, did I find peace — and my audience. Maybe as you chase your passion, you'll make a similar discovery.

## **Next steps**

Now, wouldn't it be frustrating if I left you lingering there? But I won't do that. If you're ready to take the next step, here's what I recommend you do:

- 1. Change your mind.** Make a decision to consciously reject negative and envious thoughts, admitting these thoughts do nothing to move you closer to your goals. Dedicate yourself to passion, not the rewards.
- 2. Commit to a practice schedule.** Just for a week, set aside at least 30 minutes per day to work on your craft. You may share your work, but stay diligent to the discipline of writing for passion.

**3. Create something people disagree with.** No, don't be contentious for the sake of being contentious. But write with conviction, in such a way that can't help but offend at least a few. This is an exercise in disabusing ourselves of constantly chasing others' approval. Pick a fight. It doesn't matter if you win or lose. Just take note of the thrill you feel when letting go of that "what will people think?" worry.

After you've done those three things, take a breath and thank God for the opportunity to do something you love. And tomorrow, get up and do it all over again.

# You Have to Do This Before People Will Listen to You

We all want to be heard, not necessarily because we have anything to say but just because we're human and want to be known.

Unfortunately, that's the best way to get ignored.

How do you get people (other than your mom) to listen? How do you earn attention?

Everyone wants to believe what they're doing is interesting and worth talking about. They want to think they're special and unique. But the truth is that's not your call.

I see this attitude most often exhibited amongst writers and artists. They think that just because they're creative, the world owes them respect and attention.

Not true.



**You don't get to decide what "remarkable" is. Your audience does.**

And if nobody's paying attention, you've got a problem.

## **Never worry about attention again**

For years, I thought this way. As a blogger growing more frustrated by the minute that no one was listening to me, I failed to understand one essential concept:

Adding value.

I thought people would listen to me for my wit or humor. I thought they'd care about me, because I was interesting or a good writer or *heck, I dunno, why can't someone just love me for being me?*

Here's the truth: **In a world full of noise, the way you get people to care about you is to care about them first.**

No, we don't care what you ate for breakfast or what stupid trick your cat can do — until you show interest in us. Once you've done that, you've earned our attention, and we may start to trust you.

Communication is a two-way relationship. It involves a sender

and receiver and is held together by the glue of the *message*. Most writers don't get this. They think of what they do as art, as something to be thrown into the ether, praying that it sticks.

But even art has an audience. Perhaps, especially so.

This doesn't mean you have to pander to the masses or create mediocre work that contributes to the status quo. But you'd better find ways to add value. You better make it worth your audience's while.

## **How I did this with my writing**

When I began my blog, I knew sharing my random thoughts about inane things wasn't enough to captivate and inspire. I knew nobody knew or cared about me (yet), and so I had to earn their attention.

So I started to think:

What problems do I have that others might have, too? How have I solved those problems?

What struggles have I overcome that I could share?

What interesting stories could I tell that would help people?

At first, I didn't connect. In fact, it took months of trying different things before I found something that stuck: the topic of writing. Somehow, I'd overlooked the fact that for nearly a decade I'd been coaching writers in their craft.

So I began to **share what I knew, what I'd learned, and what I was still learning**. And immediately, people responded.

Whenever I blogged about writing (versus leadership or self-improvement), I saw a measurably better reaction (in terms of the number of comments, shares, or any way I chose to measure it). I'd found my niche.

I decided to do a few things:

- 1. I started an email list, so that I could capture people's attention for continued conversation.**
- 2. I began guest posting on other blogs to build my audience even more.**

I asked readers to share my articles (if they liked them) via social media.

From that point on, I continued searching for ways to help people, often asking questions and sharing thoughts along the way. The more this exchange happened, the more a community was established, and the better I got to know my readership.

**This is what it means to add value: listen first, speak second.**

Such an understanding didn't come to me intuitively; I had to learn it through failure. But now I get it.

Our talents and skills are not intended only to be used for our own good. They're meant to be shared as an offering to the world. A gift in the truest sense of the word.

## **Application: What you can do**

If you have a message the world needs to hear — a book you want to write, a song you want to sing, or simply an idea worth spreading — the way you get others to care about it is to not just come out and share it.

First, you must **engage**, **connect**, and **serve**. Then people will listen. This doesn't mean you can't have convictions or that you need to wait for permission to speak.

It just means you appreciate the disruptive, media-driven nature of the world we all live in. And that you respect people's time. After all, how many random strangers did you pay attention to today? (Get my drift?)

To break it down further, here's what you can do:

- 3. Find a conversation.** Spend some time listening to what people are already saying about a particular topic. Subscribe to a few blogs, read a couple of books by industry leaders. Get informed.
- 4. Engage with others.** Leave comments on blogs. Not so people see your name, but just to help. Send emails to industry experts (my favorite way is to subscribe to their email list and reply directly to them). If you don't know what to say, ask a thoughtful question that only takes a minute or two to reply to (Tim Ferriss is a pro at this — read his thoughts [HERE](#)).
- 5. Make a contribution.** If you've studied your niche, then you know what it's lacking. This should be something you feel strongly about, something that really bothers you. It could

be a grave injustice or mere ignorance. But if you can't find anything wrong or something new to contribute, then you have no right speaking up.

Repeat the process until people start listening. Then you can start a blog or host an event to continue the conversation. But don't believe that just because you build it, they will come. You need to *earn* people's attention — and the way you do that is by caring first.

So that when you eventually speak, they'll listen. Why? Because they know you're going to add value.

**(Bonus application:** Don't waste your time leaving meaningless comments on random blogs. Instead, make a meaningful personal connection, take the relationship deeper by helping someone, and then say something that matters.)

# What the Web (and the World) Needs from You

If I hear one more “expert” tell me that social media is a “conversation,” I am going to scream.

No, friends. Social media is much more than that — it’s an opportunity to build something that matters.

The world is full of people who want to be heard. But how many are actually saying something? The Internet is crowded with those who are just conversing. But who is creating stuff worth our time?

For years, I blogged in vain attempts at achieving popularity. I wanted people to like me and marvel at the profundity of my words. And I failed. It wasn’t until I built a resource of content that people began to take notice.

If you want to earn the attention your work deserves, you will have to prove you have something to say, that you’ve got something we can’t miss.

And how do you do that? You build something worth our attention.

## **So you've got connections... who cares?**

We've all heard, "It's not who you know, but who knows you." But that's not true.

Knowing the right people — even being known by them — is no longer enough. In a world where connection is cheap (more like free), it's easier than ever to get in front of folks, to add their number to your Rolodex.

What's hard is keeping people's attention.

So how do you do that? How do you influence people for the long haul? You have to create something **people care about**, something **worth talking about**, something that will **make a difference**.

Let's break down each of those...

## **Something people care about**

You get people to notice you by adding value (we've already covered that here). But how do you get them to care? That's another matter entirely.



One word: empathy.

My friend Marion Roach Smith, who has taught hundreds of writers how to tell their life's story, says:

***We have to trust you as the narrator.***

How do we build this trust? By showing our scars. Sharing our insecurities. Exposing our weakness.

The only way you get people to trust you — and care about what you have to say — is by showing them you're trustworthy. The best way to do that? Help them see you're just like them.

Here are a few ways to do that:

- Admit a recent screw-up.
- Highlight a personal flaw.
- Apologize for a mistake nobody caught.
- Tell the story of your biggest failure.
- Share a fear or challenge you still haven't overcome.

When you, the writer, let yourself be human, we readers will do the same.

## Something worth talking about

Marketing guru Seth Godin says it best when he explains what it means for a product, service, or business to be “remarkable.” Literally, it must be worth remarking on. People have to talk about it. Otherwise, it’s irrelevant.

Your best bet in getting your ideas to spread, your books read, and your influence to grow is to be remarkable. To do something truly epic.

How do you do that? Here are a few examples:

- When **Andy Traub** gave away the audio version, email series, and online membership to everyone who bought his \$7.99 eBook.
- When **Chris Guillebeau** gave away \$100,000 to a bunch of strangers, asking them to spend it well.
- When **my friend Kyle** proposed to his girlfriend with a giant piece of parchment paper.

Remarkable is interesting. Remarkable is compelling. Remarkable is worth talking about.

## **Something that will make a difference**

This is, perhaps, the most important reason we open our mouths or place our fingers on the keyboard. We want to make an impact, to leave a legacy.

But how do we know when we're doing that, as opposed to just making noise? Simple. It has to do with multiplication.

If people hear what you have to say and tell you it was “nice” or that they enjoyed it, then you're in trouble. That's lip service, friends, and nothing more.

On the other hand, if you empower a tribe of people with an idea that they take, share, and spread, then you may have something special, indeed. If strangers email you, explaining how your message has literally changed their lives, then you are making a difference, after all.

# Put It All Together

Yes, these are nice ideas. But taken by themselves, that's all they are – ideas. And this series has been about action, about creating something epic. So let's apply everything we've learned so far:

- Success begins with passion, not chasing results. If you love the work, you'll do good work.
- If you want attention, you need to add value. Help people. Solve problems. Connect.
- Until you create something, you're just making noise. You need a legacy, a resource, something that folks will remember.

All good so far? I admit that's a bit vague, so let's break it down further:

**First**, you need to take all your passion and value-adding ideas and put them somewhere. In a book. On a website. Maybe

even into a conference or event. Have a way to **archive your best thoughts** and share them over and over again.

**Next**, make sure this resource has a means of **inviting people into an inner circle**. For example, on a blog (which is my preferred medium, since it's free), you could encourage people to subscribe via email so they don't miss a post.

**Lastly**, with this thing you've built, you should be **generous**. Give things away for free or for less than they're worth. Why? Because the point isn't to make money, but to leave an impact. Get that right, and you won't have to worry about income.

Dazzle and delight. Give people more than they ask for. Over deliver. And see what happens.

The irony, of course, is that by resisting the temptation to converse and creating something instead, you are giving people a reason to not **stop** talking about you.

So go. Create. And make it worth our while.

# About Jeff Goins

Originally from Chicago, Jeff spent his twenties traveling with a band.



Now, Jeff lives with his family just outside of Nashville and spends his days trying to take over the Internet.

He's written for over 100 magazines, publications, and blogs. (To find out more about writing, check out this page [HERE](#).)

He is also a speaker, creative coach, and consultant. To shoot Jeff a note about how guest posting has helped you grow your audience, reach out to him on Twitter [@JEFFGOINS](#).

# Want to Meet for Coffee?

Me too.

I love coffee. But even more, I love meeting excited new writers.

A couple of years ago, I discovered I was spending a lot of time in coffee shops. And I discovered that many of the writers I met with asked the same questions.

So I sat down and answered them for you in *The Writer's Studio*.

*The Writer's Studio* is a four-part audio program that will teach you everything you need to know to become a REAL writer, including getting started, launching a platform, honing your craft, and getting published.

Get it today at

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