

**EPISODE 113**

**JG:** I'm trying to optimize with a craft so that in 25 years, I'm not just a more successful or richer writer. I'm better, to me that's what success looks like. Is I'm better and better at the craft."

[INTRODUCTION]

**[00:00:09.3] AT:** Welcome to The Portfolio Life Podcast with Jeff Goins. I'm your host, Andy Traub. Jeff believes that every creative should live a portfolio life, a life full of pursuing work that matters, making a difference with your art and discovering your true voice. So Jeff is committed to helping you find, develop and live out your unique world with you so that you too can live a portfolio life.

You know it's to play it safe. It's easy to make it everything about ourselves once we reach a measure of success so where can we take risk? Where's Jeff taking risks? That's the topic for today's show, here's my conversation with Jeff Goins.

[DISCUSSION]

**[00:01:07.2] AT:** Jeff, one of the compliments that we get about this show is the authenticity and I can see the fear in your eye already.

**[00:01:14.0] JG:** Yeah, right. I think those are compliments that we give each other.

**[00:01:18.5] AT:** No, we ask people and they say, "We appreciate your authenticity." By the way, one of the most common compliments I get, which is a backhanded compliment but I always embrace it as, "You're really average and then it inspires me."

**[00:01:30.9] JG:** They say that to you?

**[00:01:31.9] AT:** Yeah.

**[00:01:32.5] JG:** They always tell me I'm extraordinary.

[00:01:34.3] **AT:** Yeah, see you don't get that. I have a different audience. They're like, "You're a looser just like me." No but the authenticity and I think authenticity is just no pretence, not pretending we're better than them, we've got it all figured out but really, it's the idea that we have troubles. We have issues that we're trying to work through as well and so I wanted to ask you because you're one of those people that you're not okay with, "Yep, I have arrived." There's a lot more you wanted to get done in your personal and professional life.

So here's my question for this episode. Where do you need to take more risks? Going forward in your business, where do you need to take more risk? Where do you want to innovate change, do something different with your platform, with your writing, with your courses? What do you feel like, "Man, I'm not there, I want to try these things and classic it might work, it might not work"? But where do you feel like, "Wouldn't it be great if I can push myself to try this?" Where do you want to take more risk?

[00:02:39.3] **JG:** Well, that is a scary question.

[00:02:40.2] **AT:** Let's do it.

[00:02:42.1] **JG:** Where do I want to take more risk, well, I'm not okay at arriving because I just can't convince anybody that I've done that much.

[00:02:49.2] **AT:** Because then you're just there, what do you do when you get there?

[00:02:51.0] **JG:** Well, it's too messy. I'm too out there, I'm unpolished and I'm too lazy to polish it up. So you just go, "Here you go" 20 years maybe this will be something.

[00:02:58.2] **AT:** Embrace the unpolished. Unpolished is part of the brand, right?

[00:03:00.6] **JG:** Yeah, for me it really is not some sort of effort to make people think I'm just like you but I'm just not there yet and I can either try to hide that and you'll find it out anyway or just be open with I'm in process. So what I want to work on? I've been saying this for a while now to

myself and I don't know if I said it on the show or not but I have realized that in embracing this thing called the portfolio life where you've got lots of different things going on.

There's a downside to that. The upside is you can create this suite of skills that is unique to you. You're a good example of this Andy where you don't just do one thing but you have honed a few different things. You told me just the other day you did this live Q&A about Evernote, totally free for your community and people got a lot of value out of that because that's one thing that you've gone deeper than most people don't even know how to go.

People are learning stuff from you. They're not learning from this so called experts of that app, people who made it but there's a risk to that where you can take on too many things. You can spread yourself too thin and in my case, if you want to be a writer, I think you need to be good at a few things. You need to have some general business savviness if you want to make a living at it because income is an important part of any job and most writers are going to be self-employed.

If they're going to write books and do the things that I always wanted to do and didn't really understand how that worked from a business standpoint. So you're going to have to have some general business savviness otherwise somebody is going to cheat you and I've seen that happen. I think you have to have some marketing savvy. You've got to have a platform, you've got to understand how to build and maintain and even manage an audience.

You also have to be good with your craft. You have to be a good writer, and so those are the three things that I'm always trying to grow. I'm trying to be a better entrepreneur so I'm looking for opportunities to make money so that that money allows me opportunities to continue to be creative. I'm looking for ways to build the brand to reach more people because if I reach more people, I can make more money and I can keep writing.

**[00:05:00.0] AT:** Right but there's safe ways to do that and then there's creative pushing yourself kind of ways and to me, you're a good balance of both. I think that you push yourself to do things that are a little outside the box but you're also like, "But I'm not going to put all my money in on that one thing." There's healthy risk and there's like the stupid risk. I am asking you an internal question so maybe you haven't verbalized it, but I'm really interested to know will you

go, "I could just keep doing this" but you're not going to do that because you're Jeff and you're not going to keep repeating and rinse and repeat and rinse and repeat. You want to do something different. So whether it's Tribe Writers, whether it's your writing, I don't know if you're going to put out an album someday? I'm serious, what is something where you feel like with a new book, is there anything risky you've done in the new book?

[00:05:50.9] **JG:** Sure, yeah.

[00:05:51.2] **AT:** Okay, let's talk about that.

[00:05:51.9] **JG:** Okay. So I'm really motivated by craft. What I was going to say, I said this to myself before, I don't know if I've said this out loud on the show before.

[00:06:02.6] **AT:** That's what we want to hear.

[00:06:03.7] **JG:** I'd rather, if I have to choose between being a great entrepreneur or a great marketer or a great platform builder, I choose being a great writer every day of the week and I think it's really easy in this day and age.

[00:06:16.2] **AT:** Most people I do not believe when they say that. I'm just being serious. Most people I don't believe when they say that. They would really rather swim in piles of cash than be good with their craft and that's fine. They would say, "I would rather make money," but for you because you correct my grammar on text messages, you really do love your craft so go ahead.

[00:06:35.4] **JG:** Yeah and that doesn't mean that I don't care about money and it doesn't mean that I am immune to the trappings of fame or success. I think all about that stuff a little bit too much probably, but I am trying to optimize for the craft so that in 25 years I am not just a more successful or richer writer but I'm a better writer. To me that's what success looks like is I'm getting better and better at the craft.

[00:07:01.6] **AT:** The risk area for you is in pushing yourself as a writer?

[00:07:04.5] **JG:** Yeah, so you asked me about the new book, I neglected the business for six months, lost money some months, wrote okay blog posts just to get them out there because I'm working on this book and it killed me and what I was doing was a lot of research. Interviewing people, calling professors, e-mailing people in Italy. Just doing all of this deep, deep stuff that I always wanted to do that I thought real writers did that I didn't think I couldn't do that stuff.

So that's one way that I put on that hat. I'm not just another blogger coming out with another book. So in my mind, I was like, "What do real writers do?" Well this is what they do, they set aside six months and they go to their office every day and they just write for six hours.

[00:07:50.8] **AT:** Right at the cost of something else.

[00:07:52.6] **JG:** Yeah so that was one thing that I did and that's what I'm doing. Is I'm optimizing for the craft. It doesn't mean that the different pieces of the portfolio don't all work together. I still have a business. I still am a marketer in the sense that I'm putting stuff out there on the Internet and trying to understand what the audience wants and all that stuff but those are complimentary to the core thing, which is writing and that's the thing that I want to keep doing. So I just have to keep finding ways to do it well and so I can't lose my job and all of that but at the end of the day, the way I'm measuring myself is am I getting better every year.

[00:08:31.9] **AT:** So that's a risk because if you look at the other risks that people are taking is, "I'm going to optimize all for making money but I am not going to work on my craft." And frankly, the risk that you're taking is I'm going to lose money so that I can get better at this thing that may pay off or may not pay off later and I think that it's a risk because it's more secure to let the craft go down in the short term and just optimize for, "How can I launch, launch, launch, launch?" And we see that. So let me ask you some other places as you go forward because Tribe Writers is a huge part. There's 4,000?

[00:09:11.0] **JG:** 5,000.

[00:09:12.0] **AT:** 5,000 members, people have said, "I'm going to invest in myself as a writer." You and I are having some conversation earlier today about online education so I'm going to push you a little bit on this. How do you see yourself maybe trying to take some risk — that

maybe was a dumb word. How do you see yourself taking risk when it comes to Tribe Writers in the feature?

**[00:09:31.3] JG:** Yes, so one of the things we, my team and I, that we're growing this year want to do is we want to not just provide courses but we want to provide connection between writers and that happens organically. That happens at the Tribe Conference, our event, that happens in the community of Tribe Writers that was almost a surprising byproduct.

**[00:09:53.8] AT:** Yeah, it can happen naturally. It does happen naturally, organically but it's hard to do that. It's much easier to go, "Hey, it's just going to happen, kind of hands off," right? But you are saying you want to really make an effort to say, "We are going to promise we're building connection."

**[00:10:10.6] JG:** Yeah, I can't completely talk about it because it doesn't exist yet but we are working...

**[00:10:15.3] AT:** Dreaming is free my man.

**[00:10:16.6] JG:** I know but we are working on a new something, a product or a service, something that is going to do just that and it's going to connect writers to one another and to opportunities that they're lacking like agents, publishers, writing opportunities. All the things that we go, "Oh you just need to do this," and people go "How do I find," — I have a friend, a good friend who has a popular blog who goes, "How do I find an agent? I'm calling people and e-mailing them and nobody is responding."

So we realized that community creates opportunity and everybody gets that but how do you actually form and connect with a community and we have resources. I have resources that can help writers in particular do that. That's something that we're working on that is an extension of this craft thing. I can just release another course and make money but we're intentionally creating something that will endure and I think this is one the tradeoffs I'm making right now.

It's not about, "Oh I'm not going to make any money so I can build my craft and I can starve as an artist." I do not subscribe to that sort of thinking. What I am doing is I'm making short term

tradeoffs for long term payoffs. So I'm going, "Yeah, I don't need to make a bunch of money this month."

[00:11:30.6] **AT:** Well, and let's be frank, possible long term payoffs.

[00:11:33.7] **JG:** Yeah, totally. It's a risk.

[00:11:34.9] **AT:** No seriously, I'm calling it. It's a risk for the long term.

[00:11:37.8] **JG:** But what motivates me is the prospect, potential not the guarantee of creating enduring work. So in the business and the organization that I run where we help writers and creatives succeed at their craft and in their respective trades. We're trying to build things that are just kind of a, "Hey, do this course for eight weeks and come to this conference and it's great and you pay us and then we're done." We're trying to build things that are going to last 10, 20, 30 years.

I'm trying to write books that are going to last 20, 30, 50, 100 years. I want to write words that people will be reading a century from now. There's no guarantee on that but that's the mindset that I bring when I sit down and read a book and when we create products and put stuff out into the world. I want to create stuff that's going to endure and that's what motivates me. When I talk about craft, I'm talking about getting great at something. So that I can make better and better things that may or may not be immediately incredibly commercially successful.

[00:12:33.3] **AT:** Right. I think the other risk that you're taking is you are taking a risk of saying, "This isn't about connecting to me, Jeff Goins or learning from me, Jeff Goins." It's about the risk you're taking as you move forward is, "I've now got enough people around me. I want to connect them to each other," and that's a risk because then it's not about you anymore, right? And then you're not the center of attention and you can't necessarily control that.

It's one thing to say, "Hey, come to my house, we're having a party," because then it's at your place. It's another to say, "I'm going to empower people," I think about the TED conferences. It would have been much easier if they would have just said, "Well we're just doing this conference once a year." Then they made TEDx, which is local and they facilitate this local and

you think about the impact worldwide with the TED conferences not just because of the TED but because of the TEDx's.

Now, there's millions of people that can be speakers of TED conferences and I think about the risk that you would be taking if you're going to be about connecting to other people. The risk is not about you, meaning it's not more about building up your fame and the other is you have to build something that empowers other people instead of just brings more people to your doorstep right?

**[00:13:43.4] JG:** Yeah, okay. I've been thinking about this a lot actually and I just didn't know how to verbalize it. One of the biggest fears that I have is losing the thing that I've built. The blog, the influence, the books, the brand, all of it. Losing that because I've squandered it, because I've forgotten that it was not about me and I made it about me and I was selfish with it and it's taken from me or it slips through my fingers just because I did not know how steward it.

I'm afraid of that, not afraid of losing it because I'm like, "I need this for my identity." I'm sure there's some broken fragile ego part of me that thinks that but mostly, I'm afraid of it because I would go, "What if I fail?" I was entrusted with this thing and I believe by God I was given this gift, this influence, this opportunity and I didn't use it well. I used it to build my own kingdom instead of using it as a means to helping other people and it's easy to forget that.

It's easy to work really hard and hustle and go, "Oh I made this thing all by myself," and not think of it as a gift to first, be grateful for and the second, to share. And I love what Lewis Hyde says about a gift in his book, *The Gift*, which is a great book for creatives but he says, "The nature of a gift is that it has to keep moving." Like when you look at what he calls gift, exchange society's pre-industrial societies, "I give you a gift and then you give it to that somebody else." The idea is that a gift keeps moving and when I give you a gift and I hold onto it, it deteriorates.

**[00:15:16.9] AT:** You just went all Gollum.

**[00:15:18.0] JG:** Yeah, "my precious".

[00:15:19.7] **AT:** No, seriously but that's the problem. It's a beautiful picture it, I mean it's a horrible picture because the guy is freaky looking but versus "I am going to let this pass through me and go to other people". There's also a risk in saying, "I want to keep it for myself".

[00:15:33.8] **JG:** Yeah, you're right. There's risk on both sides and that's the irony as you go, "Well I don't want to give this up so I'm going to hold onto it," and it spoils and it becomes rotten or in case of Gollum, it turns you into something ugly. So the risk that I am taking right now and it's a conscious one is, and I think about this every day, "Do I keep building my empire? Do I keep building the things that I have already established or do I share it?"

And to me, somebody might go, "Oh those aren't new to exclusive," great, that's fine but in the daily decisions that I have to make, it sure feels that way sometimes. Do I go right write guest post for other blogs so that I can get more e-mail subscribers? Or do I turn to five Tribe Writers who want to write a guest post for me and work with them to help them create something that's going to be good for my audience and good for them?

And by the way I'm not saying like, "Everybody go write a guest post all the time," but those are the decisions that I am making and I go, "If I just keep building the things that I've built, I'm hoarding it". I am hoarding the influence instead of sharing it. I think this is a gift that has to be shared and has to be told.

[00:16:50.1] **AT:** Right. So the risk that people, all people have, and I think this is maybe American or Western idea of the risk you have is you just say, "I need more. I need more, I need more." But it's proven that at some point, you're not any happier when you have more. In fact, you can be less happy. So the risk you're taking moving forward, and again we're not going to give any details today, but the risk is to say, "I don't want to bring people to my doorstep, your virtual doorstep, to be about connecting with you anymore now, it's about the community," right?

[00:17:25.4] **JG:** Yeah, I'd rather take care of the relationships that I've earned instead of just trying to amass more influence. I'm not oppose to amassing more influence or saying yes to opportunities that could allow my work to reach more people, but I'm realizing that there's an opportunity cost to that and I think we see people who go, "I don't have enough, I don't have

enough," and all we're talking about is eyeballs, influence, attention and they just need more and more.

I know people like this, they don't make for very good friends. I'm talking about regular people here. You're hanging out with them at a party, they keep looking over your shoulder to see if there's anybody more interesting that's about to walk in the door. Those don't make good friends and I actually don't think they make good writers, I don't think they make good speakers, I don't think they make good people and I think that comes through in your message.

That if all you want is more e-mail subscribers, more money, more influence and you're not taking care of the audience sitting in front of you even if it's five people, you're missing something. I have a friend who did a Kickstarter for a book recently. I go, "How's that book coming?" And this person said, "Oh I think I'm going to traditionally publish it, blah, blah, blah." I go, "Okay, cool but what about all these people that gave you money to write this book? Like what are you going to do with them?" And this person said, "Oh yeah, I feel bad about that," and I said, "Okay."

**[00:18:48.4] AT:** You should.

**[00:18:49.4] JG:** And so we're just talking about it and I wasn't being judgmental, I was just going, "Don't you think you should give those people something, whatever you promised them and then maybe still go on and publish the book. I think that's okay too?" And this person said, "Yeah, that's what I needed to do. I'm going to go do that," which is the right choice but I think we all look at our doorsteps whatever that is.

The five people listening to us today, the hundred people who subscribe to our blog or the eight people in our family that listen to us play music in the living room or whatever and go, "That's not enough." And I don't know what enough is but I think often, the way that you get more is by treasuring the enough that you have. I think that's true. What I know is true, the way that you lose the enough that you have is being ungrateful for it.

I don't know that going, "Oh I have enough and I feel good about it," necessarily gets you more. I know that if you're ungrateful for what you have, you tend to lose it.

[00:19:44.9] **AT:** Yeah, you lose it, you're not going to get more of it, you'll never find contentment. I mean I remember picking up a, it's one of his smaller books. I remember picking up a Dave Ramsey book at Barnes and Noble and this is probably 15 years ago and there's this one sentence that said, "The key to financial success is contentment."

Contentment, well how do you know when you have enough? When you feel like you have enough. How much is that? When you feel like you have enough, that's when you have enough. When you feel like you have enough. For some people, that's selling a million copies. For some people, it's having one person comment on your blog, right?

So Jeff, I want to end the episode with this which is, if you could just give some encouragement, some advice to folks who feel the tension to stay safe, what happens when we do risky things? I love this, when Seth Godin published an anthology, his books of all his blog posts, it's this massive book that weighs 40 pounds and on one side it says, "This might work," and the second side it says, "This might not work." How does risk good for you? For those who are listening, how can we use risk to make our lives better and the lives of other people better?

[00:20:58.8] **JG:** Well I think for a, I will often approach this sorts of things as a creative person. This is how I think about all of this stuff and I think that you do more interesting work when you aren't afraid to lose what you have and you do boring, less interesting work when you're afraid to lose it because typically what you do is you do more of the same. We know film makers who do this. They go, "Ah I found a formula." We know authors who do this, painters, they hit some sort of success formula.

They can just keep bringing the money all day long and maybe that's a good business strategy. I don't know? I have to separate what I do creatively and then what I do to make a living and not get too caught up in that but at the end of the day, what feeds me as a person is doing stuff that might not work and that for me always looks like holding the things that I have, that I feel like I own with open hands and being willing to let them go.

Saying, "I don't need this," and it's thrilling. It's exciting to go, "I can let this go and I don't know what will happen as a result of it, but I know that if I try to hold onto it and treat it like my

precious, it's going to become rotten. I'm going to spoil it." So I would rather let it potentially go than spoil it. So I think that's the encouragement. It's better to let go of something that maybe you've rightfully earned than it is to horde it and turn it into something rotten.

[END OF DISCUSSION]

**[00:22:34.9] AT:** So where are you taking risks in your life? Where do you need to seek out risk? To leave your thoughts on this episode and also to easily share with your friends, you can go to Goinswriter.com/113. If you've benefited from this podcast, please share it with a friend. I am Andy Traub and on behalf of Jeff Goins, thanks for spending some time with us.

Now, go build your portfolio.

"**JG:** I don't know what enough is but I think often the way that you get more is by treasuring the enough that you have. I think that's true. What I know is true, the way that you lose the enough that you have is by being ungrateful for it."

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