

EPISODE 118

“JG: These are the three habit, come up with ideas, capture ideas throughout the day, draft at least 500 words and then edit a previous draft from another day. Do that consistently and you will be writing and you will be a writer.”

[INTRODUCTION]

[00:00:26.4] 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 and 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.

If you could only read three books subscribe to three blogs and build three habits as a creative, what should they be? Well today, we’ll ask Jeff what he thinks.

Here’s my conversation with Jeff Goins.

[DISCUSSION]

[00:01:05.5] AT: Jeff this episode is going to be really practical for our listeners and we’ve got three lists, three things and we’re going to talk about the three books that you think that if someone is consistently, dedicated and focused on wanting to build writing habit a platform to have a portfolio life. Three books that you would recommend them to not just read but keep handy and go back to for inspiration or encouragement or instruction. Three blogs that you would encourage someone to keep up with, pay attention to and then three habits that will empower them, equip them to build their writing skills and their portfolio. So does that sound good?

[00:01:50.7] JG: Yep, I will try to think of those right now.

[00:01:54.6] AT: But I think your challenge is going to be which ones to do you pick because I have been to your office and every time I see you open your bag, it's got another book in it and people send you books but you really do study writing. You study the masters as well and so I was thinking through what would benefit others and I tell people I met someone at Ray Edward's event, the Copy Writing Academy Live here in Franklin over the weekend.

They had said something about writing a book and I said, "Well, have you been to Tribe Writers?" And they're like, "No." I said, "Well, start there," right? So I have resources I point people to but you've read a lot more books and read a lot more blogs about writing and so let's start with habits. I have an idea but let's start with the habits, what are the three habits that you would encourage writers to build?

[00:02:45.0] JG: Yeah, well this is pretty easy. I teach a system called the three bucket system and I think writing is three things not one thing. It is coming up with ideas, it is drafting those ideas, taking an idea and turning it into a rough draft and then it is editing that idea and then turning it into something potentially publishable. So first of all, every day you need to be capturing ideas. Practically I recommend doing this through a physical notebook or through a smart phone app. I actually use the app Drafts, which I then immediately send to Evernote so I can access it on my computer and you could just use Evernote straight. I just like app Drafts.

[00:03:25.2] AT: No, Drafts is a great app and I'm just going to pause real quick because I am the geeky techy guy. You're going to go to Drafts on and it's only iOS app, you can't get it on the Android but you're going to say \$8 for an app? Why is that \$8, what is this?

[00:03:40.1] JG: I think it's \$12.

[00:03:41.0] AT: Yeah, it's like, "Does it give you a massage, does it tell me I'm handsome?" It does a lot of things. It's an app that does things with other apps. So for instance, Jeff would open the app, write something very, very quickly and then send it to Evernote, it would do it even faster than Evernote could. So there are a lot of functionalities to drafts and there's a lot of really geeky people that have gone before you. So if you buy it, look up Draft recipes and it does a lot of things. A lot of things but that's a great app for capturing ideas. So the three bucket system, ideas, and then drafting?

[00:04:18.0] JG: Yeah, three bucket system. The first one is capture ideas. So the first habit that you need is you need to capture ideas, every single day throughout your day so that when it's time to sit down and write, you have a big folder or file or whatever, a notebook it doesn't matter, you've got something filled with ideas and so you look at that and you use this as props basically and go, "Okay, I am going to write about that today". You want to close the gap between thinking about what you're going to write and actually writing it and so this is why most people, not necessarily realizing that it is happening.

This is why most people struggle with writers block because they sit down and they go, "I need to come up with an idea. I need to write it and I need to edit it all in one sitting," and that immediately will get most people stuck because you'll be afraid. You'll go, "I can't do this. I don't have any ideas," and you'll spend all this time and then finally you'll come up with an idea and you furiously try to type it and you're running out of time and it just feels defeating. Now if you break these three activities apart and do them at separate times, you'll be able to do a better job with each one. So throughout the day, come up with ideas and then second, have a dedicated time where you write at least 500 words a day.

So habit one is constantly capture ideas throughout the day and have a notebook or something like Drafts with you that you can capture the ideas as they come to you. Second, write 500 words a day. This is an important habit. If you struggle with this, I recommend that you go to my500words.com. We have a free 31 day, you're going to get 31 e-mails in 31 days. So be aware of that, if you sign up you're going to get a daily e-mail prompt saying, "Okay, go write 500 words now." And then there's a Facebook group associated with that that will hold you accountable. It's a free thing that you can sign up for at my500words.com, that's the second habit, write 500 words a day, in the morning, evening, whatever works for you just have a time and a place to sit down and do it.

Third, edit. Edit something that you have written from a previous writing session and so typically, I edit yesterday's draft. So I come up with ideas and I've got this big folder and when I sit down and write typically in the morning, I pull the idea out of the folder and I draft 500 words on it. I then save it and then I pull out something that I drafted like yesterday and then I edit it. What you want to do is give yourself some time to think about the thing that you have written before

you edit it because just creating some space, subconsciously, psychologically, I don't know, just giving yourself a day and then let it germinate, for whatever reason you come back with a different perspective and the edits that you make on it are significantly different and better than if you just wrote it and then went back to edit it.

And if you do this thing where you write-delete-write-delete, you're typically will not going to get to your 500 words in anytime soon and so these are the three habits. Come up with ideas, capture ideas throughout the day, draft at least 500 words and then edit a previous draft from another day. Do that consistently and you will be writing and you will be a writer.

[00:07:18.8] AT: Awesome and we'll have links to that app in the show notes, so great app. Good call on that one. All right, so those are the three habits. Let's talk about three blogs that you feel like people should be paying attention to?

[00:07:34.4] JG: Speaking of habits, years ago my friend Joe Bunting came up to me and he said, "Hey, I want to start a website," and we both started our blogs around the same time and I had a writing website, he had a writing website and I was like, "Okay Joe, what is your idea? I have a website, what's your idea?" And he goes, "Well I want to create this blog called The Write Practice and I just want to have a daily blog for writers where they can show up, they can get a writing prompt and they can go practice. It will be a place for writers to practice writing," and I said, "That's a great idea," and I said, "Can I have your idea?" I said, "This is a great idea."

[00:08:13.9] AT: You said, "That's a horrible idea and that you shouldn't do it."

[00:08:16.2] JG: Yeah, it is a great domain, thewritepractice.com. I knew immediately it was a great idea and years later, it's one of the most popular writing websites online. thewritepractice.com is a great place to go for daily writing inspiration, community and accountability. Joe is an honest and thoughtful teacher who is not trying to sell you something that you don't want to buy. It's really a gem of a website in an Internet filled with people that aren't committed to their craft and just trying to sell you the next gimmick. So thewritepractice.com is one.

Another website that I follow is The New Yorker just because it has, I think to this day, some of the best writing imprint or online that you'll find and so a friend of mine, Marianne Roach Smith told me years ago, "If you want to be a great writer, go read The New Yorker because it still has some of the best writing that you'll find," and I just find that people don't do this.

I talk to people all the time, "Oh I want to be a good writer," and they are reading just these popular books. Reading blogs from writers that are thought leaders but they are not necessarily great, great writers and I think that is all well and good. But if you want to hone your craft, if you want to get good at something, you have to learn from somebody who is far, far better than you are and I find that challenge from The New Yorker.

[00:09:42.2] AT: The New Yorker reminds me of going to a foreign country to learn a language because you get immersed and I remember when you told me to get it and I got it and I am reading it and my first reaction was, "This is hard to follow, oh wait that's because it's good writing, okay." And not that it is hard to follow. I mean that's not what I am saying, there's more of like, "This is powerful. This isn't fluff, there aren't any wasted words."

[00:10:05.1] JG: Right, you know you'll find 4,000 word articles in The New Yorker so it certainly is a time commitment but I mean this is where Malcolm Gladwell got his big break and you can go to Newyorker.com and read free articles. I am a subscriber to the magazine which also allows you to read all their stuff online and you can read on their mobile app as well but just again, a website that I go to that isn't about writing per say but has great writing in it.

And then lastly, this is a website that I have been following for years and I really do maintain that writers also have to also think like marketers. If you want your words to find the audience that they deserve, you're responsible for that and hiring a publicist or an agent or getting a publisher is not going to solve this problem. You are the one who is most invested in your success and you're the one who is most responsible for people finding your words and so you have to understand how marketing works.

Which is why for, I don't know, five, six or more years I have been following Copyblogger.com. It's just a great website about how you can take your writing and write well but also write for an audience and I am continually amazed by their consistent quality and effort to help not just turn

people into cheesy marketers. I mean they don't do that all, but rather to help a great message, find the audience that needs it and that's Copyblogger.com.

[00:11:37.3] AT: Okay, we'll have links to those in the show notes. So I think we've done these in the correct order, which is easiest to the most difficult for you. So I am excited to see with what you've come up with. What are the three books that you feel like people should have read and or continue to read and go back to? And I'm interested in that part specifically, are these like re-read, do you keep them handy, are they just guide books, or are they just inspiration? So what are the three books that people should read?

[00:12:03.5] JG: Yes, so there is a mix of inspiration and practical stuff. When I wanted to get into writing, everybody that I talked to said, "You've got to read *The War of Art*." That was step one in becoming a writer. You have to go read Steven Pressfield's *The War of Art*. A very short book, you can read it in an hour or two sitting down and yeah, you can spend months chewing on the ideas, very punchy, really about just getting your butt in the chair and doing it.

So I think that's the first book to read, to just get you motivated to go. To understand that creativity is a battle and you have to wage that war every single day. So that's number one and I would read them in this order, *The War of Art* by Steven Pressfield. Two, is a book about what it means to be a writer and there's some practical practice to it but it's mostly about staying encouraged and inspired and living the life of a writer, which is *Bird by Bird* by Anne Lamott.

The analogy of the book is Anne's brother had a book report due and I think Anne's dad was a journalist, a writer too and the brother says to the dad, "I've got this book report due tomorrow. I am so overwhelmed, I don't know how I'm going to get it done." He's going to do this book report like a study or something on like 50 different birds and it hasn't begun. It's due tomorrow and he goes, "How am I going to do this?" And the dad says to the son, he says, "Bird by bird, just one bird at a time."

And that's how you write, word by word. Just one word after another and it's that simple and not hard and that's how it's done and Anne talks about that. She talks about should a writer write to get published? All that stuff is addressed in *Bird by Bird*. A little bit longer, still very accessible and writes a lot of beautiful memoirs and is also a writer of fiction and like Pressfield, she's

really seen it all and done it all and you can trust her. The book is a delight to read but also the information in it is helpful.

So those are two inspirational ones, the last one is super practical. So a lot of people love Stephen King's *On Writing*. I think that's a very inspiring book. There's some practical stuff on there on the art of fiction. It's one part memoir and then one part writing guide, according to Stephen King. I love that book, I think it's great and a lot of people like it but for a practical writing tips where it's not like a style guide, I really, really like William Zinsser's *On Writing Well*, especially if you want to write non-fiction.

If you want to write fiction, I'd read Stephen King's *On Writing*. It's a pretty authoritative, very readable book that will give you some practical stuff on story telling but if you just want to be a better writer especially for non-fiction but also for fiction, writing essays, blogging etcetera, I can't find a better writing resource than *On Writing Well*.

[00:15:04.6] AT: I own it, I just haven't read it. It is quite readable though.

[00:15:08.0] JG: It is very readable. The chapters are short. He says something on there that I love. He says, "Writing is a craft not an art, and like any craft, cabinet making, carpentry whatever, you just have to practice it." He is very non-mystical, un-magical about it. "You just do it and certainly these are the rules and here's where the rules work and don't work," and we all know that the rules change but he's very unartistic about it, which actually makes it very approachable.

You're like, "Oh I can do this. I don't have to be visited by the muse and have been born a writer to be able to do this," and that's what I like about that book. You will read it and you will feel empowered to write better.

[00:15:55.2] AT: Yeah I love that and I'll go back and I'll say first of all, *The War of Art*, very readable, very motivating and that's a great one. *Bird by Bird*, I was so caught up on how well written it was that I forgot that I was supposed to be learning things. I think about the book and don't think it in a context of teaching me to write better. She's just such an engaging writer. So pay attention, you're learning while reading that book so that's great to round that out.

So we'll have links to all of those, where you could buy them and links to the other websites, links to the apps that he had mentioned, My 500 Words, Drafts, things like that. So Jeff well done.

[00:16:37.5] JG: Thanks Andy, good questions. Well done.

[00:16:40.4] AT: Well thank you, thank you. I like making you work and that was a lot of work and you made some tough cuts.

[00:16:45.9] JG: Yeah, I mean I'd love to add a lot more to that. In fact, I have a list on my blog at Goinswriter.com/resources of additional writing resources from where should I host my website to what blog theme should I use to things like other books and blog posts and tools and resources that I use to be a better writer and that I recommend to people.

[00:17:09.6] AT: Awesome. Well check those out, again Goinswriter.com/resources and if you're on a phone, then it shows a show notes. Just a quick tip, I use an app called Pocket Casts and it syncs with your desktop, Android and iOS and I really like it. Well one of the reason Jeff is that it really shows all the show notes. People always go, "It's in the show notes." Sometimes apps don't show those very well.

Pocket Casts really shows the show notes really well and so if you don't have one that you like, you can also listen to Jeff and I at one and a half times speed or you can make it slower which is fun as well if you want to get through this faster. So Jeff as always thank you for your guidance and I know that a lot of people are now going to head over to Amazon or have some new blogs to subscribe to. So thanks for your time.

[00:17:57.9] JG: Yeah, you bet.

[END OF DISCUSSION]

[00:18:06.0] AT: When Jeff and I make these shows, we're always curious who's listening and what they take away from them. So if you can hear my voice, can you do Jeff and I a favor?

Comment on today's episode on Jeff's site, I will give you that URL in a second or mention it to Jeff in a tweet. His Twitter handle is @jeffgoins. What is your take away? How are we helping? How else can we help? We want to know.

So you can share your thoughts on today's episode and also easily share it with your friends by going to goinswriter.com/118. We appreciate that you take time to listen to our show. I'm Andy Traub and on behalf of Jeff Goins, thanks for spending some time with us. Now go build your portfolio.

[FINAL MESSAGE]

JG: To understand that creativity is a battle and you have to wage that war every single day.”

[END]