



# JUST FUCKING SHIP

Amy Hoy

# Are you ready to Just Fucking Ship?

*Helloooooo, helloo!*

*This edition of JFS is chapter complete and fully edited.*

*Some minor niggling issues remain with the typesetting. The next edition will feature a hand-tuned layout that will be just lovely.*

*You'll get it free in your inbox just as soon as it's done.*

*In the spirit of JFS, though, here we are!*

*Hold onto your butts!*

*– Amy Hoy*

*@amyhoy*

*teachers@slash7.com*

*Special thanks to my husband, Thomas Fuchs, and partner in crime Alex Hillman. I literally could not have done this without you. No, **literally** literally. You're awesome.*

# Why don't you have what you want?

If “what you want” is to become the next astronaut to walk on the moon, well... the answer is obvious. Some things you just can't make happen.

But what if your aspirations are totally achievable?

What if all you want is to...

- start a side project
- ... finish a side project
- actually pull the trigger on *launching* your side project
- and effectively market your project so that it gets into people's hands
- and make money doing so?

You could make money, gain respect, reach people, help people, get a better job, make a name for yourself, soak in the satisfaction of a job well done.

So why don't you?

**You're smart. You're capable.** You know what you should be doing and you can see the kinds of results others are creating for themselves.

## What's stopping you?

You get things done in your job... why can't you just make this happen?

The bottom line is this:

- when you're a child, your parents tell you what to do... and then they either reward you, or punish you
- you go to school... and your teachers tell you what to do, and then they either reward you or punish you
- you go to college and... you pick your classes but somebody else tells you exactly what to do, and then they reward you, or punish you
- and finally, you get a job... and yet another chapter in the People Tell You What To Do And Reward Or Punish You Saga

Put that way, it's pretty clear, isn't it:

## **You never had the opportunity to learn, much less practice, the skills you need**

The skills required to navigate these top-down, authority-driven, extrinsic reward-or-punishment systems are *polar opposites* from the ones you need to be able to research, decide, plan, start, work, adjust, work, review, work, finish, ship *anything* on your *own* time and under your *own* steam.

It's no wonder you're struggling.

You're trying to use your old way of working to do something that looks similar but is actually the *complete opposite*. That old way worked, it always got you grades and praise and even raises in the past... but it won't work now, not for this.

**There's good news, though: You can learn the skills and habits and techniques you need to achieve what you want.**

I learned them. Alex learned them. We've successfully taught them to our students, who've gone from doing & shipping nothing – always waiting for an authority figure to poke & prod them – to self-powered juggernauts with blog posts, workshops, ebooks, marketing plans, customers, and businesses.

Now we want to help you, so you can use them to create whatever it is you want – whether you want to take 30×500 or not, whether your side project is a hobby or a business. Whether that side project is a book, an app, an open source project, to actually blog on your fancy blog, teach a class, learn something new, get a better job... the rules are the same.

## **Learn how to Just Fucking Ship**

This isn't just a book to read end-to-end and then leave on a shelf, but a troubleshooting guide to dip into when you're stuck. With actual, tactical, actionable steps you can take right away.

The 21 techniques you're about to learn apply to every type of project:

- writing a book, fiction or non-fiction
- writing a white paper or report
- writing a single blog post
- laying out a book
- designing a logo or complete branding package
- designing a web site
- designing a web application or iPhone app
- developing an open source project
- developing a library to sell
- developing a web app, for fun or profit
- creating things as a hobby (woodworking, painting)
- planning & running an events, conference or party
- creating & executing a marketing plan
- planning a kitchen remodel
- building a shed

And a million more that may not come to mind immediately. A wedding? Yes. The things you have to do to maintain a yard and house? Yes. And on and on. The techniques are fundamental to any & every human endeavor. It's not about what you're doing, but *how you do it*.

Apply them consistently and be amazed by how much ass you'll be able to kick.

So let's talk about the first roadblock that stops people from trying: that sneaky feeling that *Sure, that's all well and good, but it won't work for MY case...*

# Your problems aren't new.

Not at all. They're thousands of years old, biblical even:

*My own behavior baffles me. For I find myself not doing what I really want to do, but doing what I really loathe...I often find that I have the will to do good, but not the power. That is, I don't accomplish the good I set out to do, and the evil I don't really want to I find I am always doing...What a wretched man I am!*

- St Paul Romans 7:15-24

Get the message? It's not you. Your problems aren't special. Not specially good, not specially bad. Not rare.

As long as there have been things to do and goals to achieve, man has procrastinated. (For much of history, woman probably didn't have much opportunity to.)

Yes, your excuses, your stumbling blocks, your worries... they're old news. Old as dirt.

You're not special, not when it comes to your struggles with just fucking shipping.

I'm sorry if it sounds mean, but think about it: It's actually freeing. It means that not only are you not alone, you have the full weight of human history behind you. You're at no special



disadvantage. *They* figured it out and created all the wonderful things we have in this world today. Why can't you?

You can learn to *do*, just like the many, many generations before you.

There are techniques that never change, that always work. They're in this book.

You just have to put them to good use.

## **Sidebar: Do you really want it?**

I'm no big proponent of "passion" – *the word comes from the Latin root "to suffer," after all* – but to create something from scratch outside the structure of a traditional day job or client gig? You do have to have some fairly strong feelings about it. You can't be wishy-washy.

You'll need to develop a certain amount of grit. Which you'll only do if you care.

So before we get into frameworks and techniques... take a moment and ask yourself:

*Do I actually, really, genuinely want this? Or do I just... want to want it?*

Because, as Francois de la Rochefoucauld once wrote,

*"We do not wish ardently for what we desire only through reason."*

## What you “should” do...

Ardent wishes come from personal meaning, not from the idea that you “should” do something. So much pain has been caused by the phrase, “I *should* write a book.”

If you don’t “wish ardently” to finish this project, no amount of productivity techniques will make you.

## But what is *your* ardent wish?

Here’s where we’ll split ways from “passion,” because when people talk about passion, they mean obsession, tremendously deep feelings, all-over blind love for the thing itself.

You don’t need that. You don’t even need passion *for the project itself*. Or the topic area. I’m not “passionate” about time tracking, but I love running Freckle Time Tracking (which just turned 6 years old!). What I love is creating something that makes people happy *and* helps them run better businesses *and* creates a great life for me, my husband, & my team.

That’s what I ardently wished for from the outset... and 6 years later, it’s just as fresh & awesome.

Satisfaction comes from *doing*... and achieving *results*.

Your motivating ardent wish might be...

- to share what you know
- to create something useful, beautiful, good – especially

- without the interference of a meddling boss/client
- to forge a better life for yourself & your loved ones
- to be able to travel the world while doing work you can enjoy
- to help your *customers* forge a better life for themselves
- to give joy to your customers, and take away stress, pain, & wasted time

So, don't fret if you don't find yourself swelled to bursting with *passion*. Think about the much more genteel *ardent wish* that persuaded you to pick up this book.

And let's get on with it!

# How to use this guide

1. First, read it end-to-end.
2. Then, dip into it before you begin each project.
3. Then, dip into it whenever you get that “I don’t know what to do next so I’ll just watch TV and read BuzzFeed” feeling.
4. Then, dip into it whenever you’re stuck.

When you slip, return your attention to the tools that can help you. When you feel anxious, seek guidance that will ground you.

Those are habits that will help you Just Fucking Ship.

# A scene from last week...

Thanksgiving Day: 5pm. Our friends & family are here.

The table is set with linen, napkins, place mats, glasses, candles, and salt cellars. There are extra leaves in the table, making it bigger. There are extra chairs. 1940's jazz is playing.

We sit down to eat truffled cauliflower soup, turkey, gravy, maple ginger cranberry sauce, stuffing, corn bread muffins, mashed potatoes with brown butter and cheddar, and green beans with candied almonds and bacon. There's mulled cider to drink, and dessert, too.

This is an ordinary scene, played out in dining rooms all over the country... at the same time. In other countries, too, just on different days, and different dishes.

## **In other words, it's not a big fucking deal.**

That's because dinner parties are a pretty known quantity. You have...

- an audience, all of whom have specific needs & wants
- a work environment, with certain tools
- a list of requirements that need to be met
- raw materials
- a process to turn those raw materials into something

- your audience can *use* (or at least eat)
- a deadline

Sounds familiar, right?

## **It's just like making a product.**

But while dinner parties aren't everyone's cup of tea, could you do it? If you had to? If your health & happiness depended on it?

Yes. You could. You know you could.

## **If you can plan a dinner party, you can ship a product.**

People get all lathered up about books, blogs, screencasts, video courses, workshops, presentations, themes, icon sets, templates, tools, libraries, open source projects, and software because it's their *work*.

But those same people would agree: *I could host a dinner party, if I had to.* (Even if it wasn't the funnest, sexiest dinner party ever.) (Even if it involved lame party games.)

**You** can serve a dinner, complete with side dishes and beverages, in a suitably attractive environment, to people who want to eat it, roughly on time.

You absolutely can.

## **You just need to equip yourself with:**

- The right approach
- The right techniques
- The right ingredients
- The right tools

And that's what this book will give you.

## **Don't think Big, Scary Product.**

Think dinner.

# The techniques you'll be using

Now it's time for us to talk about *how* you can apply that grounded, always-useful Dinnert Party Thinking to your product - whether that's a *product* product (something you'll make for sale) or any project you want to complete.

The rest of this book is a set of rules, principles, and techniques that I've used to:

- write two full-length technical books
- design, develop, and ship two separate SaaS apps
- market those apps over the long haul (6 years!)
- design & deliver 3 different live or recorded workshops (including multiple versions of each)
- plan and script many a conference talk
- do everything in the 30x500 Universe, including the original 3-month class, and everything that came after
- run multi-month-long classes with a weekly live event component
- design, & run, 3 in-person conferences
- write and ship the first version of this book in 24 hours, natch... and then refine it over the next week

Not to mention run more than my share of dinner parties, from



6 to 22 people.

From prep work to creative blocks, from fear to fatigue, from mistake to recovery, from start to end.

And these are the very same rules, principles & techniques that we've taught to our 30x500 students, who've gone on to generate over \$3 million in revenue from the products they made.

They work. For anyone. For any type of project. Full stop.

## **Are they set in stone?**

Yes... in the sense that, absolutely, your project will go better when you follow them.

Many folks have completed & shipped their projects using only a few of the rules, while violating others. It's not only possible, it happens all the time.

But they had to work harder because of it. These techniques are designed to minimize time, stress, exertion, and procrastination... and maximize results. It's tempting to assume that those things are "just the way it is" – just the nature of creative work – but trust me, they're optional.

The more of these strategies & tactics you use, the easier your life will be.

## **Should I read the whole thing straight through?**

Yes. As I said before – get all the tips & tricks into your head

ASAP, where they can settle in, rub shoulders and make friends.

Then, dip into it whenever you need advice or a swift kick to the ass.

## **Are you really gonna stick to the dinner metaphor?**

Yep. It's the perfect metaphor. We'll also talk code and words and design, too, so don't worry.

# Always consider your guest

This rule is first, because it's the most neglected. If you make the mistake of neglecting to consider your guest, you can do everything else right and ship... a flop. A cascade of sogginess.

So let's warm up, shall we, with three Choose Your Own Adventure scenarios:

1. You're about to open a brand new vegetarian restaurant. One of your suppliers offers you an *incredible* deal on 500 lbs of rack of lamb. Should you buy it?
2. You're a Michelin-starred restaurant. Should you serve frozen broccoli with canned cheese product?
3. You're just a regular ol' home cook, and one of your upcoming dinner party guests is deathly allergic to peanuts. Should you choose chicken satay (with peanut sauce) for your main dish?

The correct answers are: 1. *No way*, 2. *duh... nope*, and 3. *are you fucking kidding me? that's practically murder!* Yikes.

We all instinctively *know* that food is personal. *We literally stick it inside a hole, mash it up with our bones, and squelch it down into our bodies.* Yep... personal. And therefore loaded

with opinions, likes & don't likes, and even potentially deadly conflicts.

Those things we buy, that we stick in our minds, carry in our pockets, hold in our hands, use day after day, these are *also* personal. Books, videos, workshops, software – deeply personal. Why wouldn't they be?

But so often we, the creators, get so wrapped up in *making* that we forget to ask the most important questions of all:

- *What do these people like?*
- *What do they need?*
- *What would be the worst fit for them?*
- *What drives them crazy?*
- *What, metaphorically, makes their airways close up?*

And when we don't ask these questions, we end up making:

- products nobody wants
- products that just don't fit your audience
- products that offend/repel the very people you want to attract
- products so wide-ranging and vague that they almost seem... suspicious

In other words: Yuck.

If we make anything at all, because without knowing those

answers it's hard to know what *exactly* to make.

## **And then scope creeps in...**

It's easy to think you're going to Write A Book About A Topic. *Everything You Need To Know About Consulting*, for example, is a book that's been written several times. I've rarely met a person who cites a book like that, because it's so broad ranging as to be nearly useless. A restaurant that offers every dish ever.

And it's hard to just fucking ship, too, because where does it end?

It's a lot easier to JFS & sell a tight, focused book like **Double Your Freelancing Rate in 14 Days**. A product by 30x500 alum Brennan Dunn who always considers his audience: DYFR respects how busy its readers are & helps them stay on track with structured email lessons on top of the book itself.

## **Remember: *Your* customers aren't Everyone.**

*Your* customers are bedeviled by *specific* problems. They have things to get done, things they need & want to achieve. They have tools they already use, and others they hate. They prefer video... or they prefer to read. They like self-serve... or they like hand-holding. They want to DIY, they love hard work, they want to know everything... or just want to pay to make the problem go away.

Don't make the mistake of offering them Velveeta when they're triple cream brie folks. And don't try to sell them on a magnum of Dom Perignon when they think branded alcohol is a scam.

Don't tell them "Get rid of Excel forever!" when they actually *love* Excel. Don't offer to take away all their pain – *like magic!* – when they're controlling, by-the-numbers folks.

### **Always focus on the customer. *Your* customer.**

Learn what they need & want. Learn what they hate, what makes them sick, what they never value enough to pay for. Learn what they *do* buy.

Apply it to your paid products and your free stuff, too – from blog posts to apps to books to conferences.

That's how you craft a menu (and a product) that will appeal.  
(And, bonus: that won't kill them.)

# Set a deadline... and mean it

*"Hey, I'm having a dinner party. Wanna come? When? Oh, probably next week. Maybe Thursday. Whenever I get done."*

Yep... that's a nonstarter. It's a nonstarter for products, too.

Your guests – your customers – need to know when to show up.

You need to know when you'll be done.

## A cut-off date is good for everyone.

Product launches require anticipation, and anticipation requires a date & time. And you can't launch what you haven't finished.

So pick a deadline. And mean it.

Even if you don't hit it dead on perfect – and it may take a while to get good at this – you'll have made significant progress, simply by taking it seriously.

## Don't like deadlines?

You're not alone, there. For a long time, I rebelled against my bad work & school experiences by refusing to set deadlines for myself. (Or I set absurd deadlines that I couldn't possibly achieve; more on which later.)

I had been – *and you are* – thinking about deadlines all wrong: Deadlines aren't a flexing of arbitrary power.

Deadlines are a tool to help you get *what you want*. A deadline you choose yourself isn't a threat of punishment or failure – it's a fun challenge to get excited about. Something to run towards and tackle. To show *you can do it*.

This very book is the result of a 24 Hour Challenge. Which differs from a 24 Hour Deadline in name only. And it was fun as hell.

It can be a real joy to beat the clock, pull it all together, and deliver a delicious meal (or ebook, or v1 of your app, or...).

## **Self-imposed deadlines driving you crazy?**

Finding that no matter how many deadlines you set, you never meet any of them? Refer back to that "Do you really want it?" sidebar in the introduction.

If you set deadlines in order to trick yourself into buckling down – if you say to yourself & others, "I thrive on the pressure" – then you've got a dysfunctional relationship with your work. You wait until The Pressure™ makes you do it, instead of working steadily with a plan.

You know what sucks if you wait til the last minute? A dinner party. You know what else sucks if you wait til the last minute? Everything.

Don't freak out, you can fix it.

The first step is truly *wanting* to.



The second step is to follow all the rest of the techniques in this book, because they're designed to help you replace The Pressure™ with constant, measurable progress.

## **Deadlines always whooshing by?**

Do your self-imposed deadlines turn out to be unrealistic, time and time again? They're telling you something. You're either:

- no good at estimating (less likely)
- forgetting what all the work entails (more likely)
- biting off more than you can chew at one time (extremely likely)
- working inefficiently (almost certain)

The rest of this book will help you build up those skills, and do less work for more impact. Keep reading!

# Work backwards

Speaking of deadlines... when should you eat?

You're going to do a roast. The roast will take *hours*. Dinner at 11pm? 12am? Maybe if you're in Spain or Portugal, but for our other readers...

...this would be considered quite the faux pas.

No, you don't extend a dinner invitation without a time, and you don't set a time that's crazy late by your culture's standards. It's Just Not Done™.

## **When it comes to eating, we all instinctively understand this.**

So how do you whip up a whole complex meal with main courses, side dishes, beverages and desserts? You work backwards, naturally:

1. You pick a good time to eat – let's say 7:30.
2. You do a little math: If the roast takes 8 hours, and has to sit 30 minutes before eating, and we eat at 7:30pm, I have to put it in at 11am.
3. You slot in your other dishes accordingly...
4. ...including ingredients that have to be prepped before

you can cook, things that have to go in a specific order...

5. ...and if this isn't your first rodeo, you know to plan in time to set the table and deal with the inevitable mishaps while remaining cool, calm and collected.

Et voila! Dinner complete, and on time.

## **That's the power of a backwards plan**

The same approach applies to your book, your app, your workshop, your conference... whatever creative thing you're about to undertake.

Like for the dinner party, you first have to know what Done™ looks like – you've got to set your "menu" in advance (more on that later). Then you have your deadline (from our previous chapter).

It's time to put on your planning cap and draw your roadmap... in reverse.

## **What does a backwards plan looks like?**

I don't have the space to reproduce my whole Thanksgiving roadmap – and I do mean roadmap. I used Trello to manage it. Yes, my friend Vanessa teased me.

But here's a sketch of my backwards plan for just the star of

Thanksgiving dinner: the Turkey. I cook my turkey sous vide, which is both easier and a little bit more complicated than traditional roasting, so it's the perfect illustration.

## **A backwards plan for turkey**

### **Thursday**

- 05:00 Carve and serve turkey
- 04:45 Stir reserved juices into the make-ahead gravy
- 04:30 Brown turkey in hot oil to crisp it up
- 04:15 Start removing turkey from sous vide pouches, reserving juice
- 02:00 Turn sous vide to "Keep Warm" (130F), and add in dark meat
- 10:00 Put vacuum-sealed white meat into sous vide
- 09:30 Preheat sous vide to 145F

### **Wednesday**

- 01:30 (am) Place chilled dark meat into fridge
- 12:30 Remove dark meat and put in ice bath
- 12:00 (midnight) Prepare ice bath
- 02:30 Place vacuum-sealed dark meat into sous vide
- 02:00 Preheat sous vide to 180F

## Monday, no specific times

- Roast wings with mire poix in the oven
- Dry brine and vacuum seal the turkey parts (except wings + giblets)
- Ask them to carve it for me
- Buy turkey from Whole Foods

## Saturday

- Buy dry brine from Williams-Sonoma
- Check that I had enough vacuum seal bags

As you can see, I started on Saturday to make sure I had the *stuff* I needed. And... because I chose to brine my turkey, I had to start a full two days earlier than I would have otherwise.

If I hadn't known that I needed to brine, or if I didn't know how long brining took, I'd have been shit outta luck. That's why detail matters.

That's how most people approach large projects, though: They look forward from where they are ("OK it's Wednesday and I have my turkey, now what?"), instead of backwards from where they want to be.

# Questions to ask for your backwards plan

When you sit down to make your backwards plan, you have to figure out what you have to figure out. Nope, not even kidding.

These questions are the place to start:

- What's the end result look like, exactly?
- How many chapters/videos/features?
- What is absolutely required, what's nice to have?
- How perfect does it *have* to be?
- How long will each of these take?
- What has to come first?
- What do I need to prepare?
- How long will that take?
- What do I need to find out?
- How long will that take?
- How much, or how little, defines success? And who controls that?

The rest of this book is all about how you can answer these questions for *your* customers and *your* product.

As you read forwards, keep thinking about going backwards.

# Break it into pieces

Here's a picture of my Thanksgiving spread. Just kidding – we were too hungry to remember to take a picture, but trust me, there was turkey, gravy, maple cranberry sauce, mashed potato casserole, stuffing, corn bread muffins with parmesan, candied almond bacon green beans, and mulled cider with ginger beer, and pumpkin silk pie.

Damn, that's a lot. Where do you even start?

If you set out to straight up Make Thanksgiving™, you'd be instantly overwhelmed. That's why you don't Make Thanksgiving™, you make the cranberry sauce. Then you mix the stuffing. Then you stuff the bird. Then you bake bird. Then you make the gravy.

## That's why recipes are always for individual dishes

...and not for whole dinners.

Yes, you're right, whole Menu Plans are a thing that exist, and sometimes they even break down which thing to work on and when. But they always refer to individual recipes, in discrete chunks of work-time. You'll never read a menu plan that has you working on two or three dishes *concurrently*.

That'd be madness.

But that's the "natural" approach to working on a project by



yourself: a little bit of this mixed up with a whole lotta that, in no particular order, no finish line in sight.

## Take a hint and break it down

When you're working on your backwards plan, break it into separate components – the dishes, if you will, for your dinner party. Whether it's sections, chapters, lessons, individual features a single blog post, or a small set of bug fixes... Break it into stages.

Instead of infinite choice, box yourself in a little. Or a lot.

Work on *one* thing at a time.

You'll be glad when you can focus, and when you can feel the joy of accomplishment at completing one whole component in one go.

## Sidebar: *One thing* can mean a lot of things

A component may not be as obvious as cranberry sauce vs gravy. With creative work, our components are often stages of what appears to be "the same" thing:

- first outline, then write
- first write, *then* edit
- tests first, then reload, then more tests, then reload
- a first iteration, then a second iteration

- a design draft, then a revision

When you work in discrete stages and take credit for each stage, huge projects will seem a *lot* less daunting.

Processes can be components, too. A *launch* is a component: there's a strategy, the content, the timing... and you can build and even ship a product without having built the launch component (more on which later).

This book is only being laid out professionally when I'm done writing it.

So keep your eyes peeled for "hidden" components. And break 'em down.

# Get crispy

Which of these is a description you can immediately act on, to bring to your friend's dinner party?

I want you to make...

- a side dish
- a casserole
- a casserole with vegetables
- Dijon Maple Green Beans with Carmelized Pecans, Bacon & Feta

If you're an experienced cook & love improv, and if your cupboard & fridge are always stocked, then you could indeed waltz into your kitchen and turn out tasty "a side dish" or "a casserole with vegetables." (Alternatively: you can also do this if you don't give a fuck, and just plan to open a can of whatever.)

You'd quite possibly dream up a dish the other guests won't like. They might even be allergic to it. That's a risk you'd be choosing to take. Doesn't mean you couldn't whip up *something*, though.

But what if you're not an expert in transforming vague requests into delicious dishes?

## **You need to get specific**

You need to know what you're going to make *in specific detail* so that you can go shopping, get all the right ingredients, plan your attack, start it with enough time til dinner, etc. You need to figure out what skills it demands, so you can know if it's something you can achieve.

Everybody knows this. They ask, "What's for dinner?" and "What are you in the mood for?" And recipes have difficulty settings and the activities listed right there.

And yet, how many times have you heard someone say, "I'm writing a Book About X"?

Even given the most modest and boring topic in the world, you could go on for hundreds and hundreds... and hundreds... and hundreds... of pages.

Charles Darwin wrote a 673-page book on barnacles. And that was just volume 1!

## **Infinity is no friend to the JFSer**

No... writing a "Book About X" is not the way to Just Fucking Ship because you could go on forever... and ever... and ever. It's a direct line straight to scope creep hell.

You can't deliver "about consulting" any more than you can deliver "casserole" – well, you can, it's possible and people have done it. But there's no telling how to start or when to stop, or whether it'll suit your customers' taste and purpose.

Nobody likes a mystery casserole.

They tend to be... soggy.

## **The solution? Get crispy.**

Crispy is the opposite of soggy. Crispy is specific, vivid, detailed. Crispy things have *hard edges* and that's how you know when you're done.

When you define a crispy problem, you can come up with a crispy solution.

Crispy products are easier to start *and* easier to finish, and much, much easier to sell.

DON'T write a a book "about consulting." DO focus on a specific, crispy problem: Double Your Freelancing Rate, or Get Clients Now.

DON'T promise that "you'll learn CSS." DO offer, "How to use the new flexbox module to get exactly the layout you want."

DON'T call your app "user friendly." DO explain that your new customer could "Log time with 4 key strokes."

DON'T set out to create "a project management app" or "an email marketing tool" – there are a million of those...

DO Consider Your Guest first and foremost, and solve a *specific problem* they have, *to their taste*.

*"Crispy" is a term I learned from BJ Fogg, who uses it to describe goals and behaviors. But it applies so*

*well to everything.*

# Start small

You've never had anyone over to your place for dinner before. Heck, really, you've lived off Lean Cuisine and Toaster Strudel til this point.

But for your first effort, you're inviting all kinds of important people, and you're planning a 7-course extravaganza.

Great idea, right?

## This is a form of self-sabotage

And everybody knows it's a mistake. At least, they know it's a mistake when it comes to a dinner party.

When it comes to designing, developing, and writing your very own products, that knowledge goes *\*zip\** out the window.

This is what happens when you get excited and try to bite off *everything*:

1. You fill a hard drive full of ambitious, but dead, projects.  
Your dinner party sucks.
2. Ouch. That hurts.
3. You feel demoralized, so you don't want to try again.

This is so not the way to JFS. JFS doesn't mean *ship the biggest thing you can!*

## **So start small, and easy**

Don't start with the product equivalent of a 7-course meal. Or a 3-course. Stick to *one* course: one main dish, and maybe a side if you're feeling ambitious. *Get it right*. Get a win under your belt.

Don't set out to write a book on day 1. Write blog posts, instead. Answer questions. Share your knowledge in crispy bits. If your blog posts turn out well, you can roll them into your future book *at any time*. You don't lose a *thing*.

Don't set out to build a huge web app on day 1. Write about the problem space. Do drawings. Create a small library. Create & ship a single feature app (like a micro-site). You'll learn a lot about what it's like to work with complete independence, and if you play your cards right, even your writing and your single-feature app could be very useful to your future users. You can always roll it into a bigger app later. You don't lose a *thing*.

Definitely don't start with a 12-week course your first try. (Speaking from personal experience here.) Write a short guide, instead. Don't start with a 2-day workshop, start with 3 hours. Or try a free, 45-minute webinar.

Start small. Start with a single, perfect dish. You can always go bigger.



But for now... Limit your exposure to risk. Increase your chances of success. Enjoy the pleasure & self-esteem that comes from finishing something small but *good*.

# Start on the atoms, not on the edges

You have to write before you can edit; you have to code before you can compile. Yes, I'm Captain Obvious, but there *is* an order to things.

When there's more than one place you *could* start, where should you choose?

Start with the small things you can finish, now. Start with things that will move you forward towards your goal of shipping, both tactically *and* emotionally.

You've already broken your work apart into components, right? And each component into still smaller bits of work, right?

You did that so you could identify & pick the smallest units of work that will move you forward to that next, slightly bigger step in your backwards plan.

Start with those little things that you can *finish*. Start with atoms.

## An atom can be finished, used & reused

Back to my complex dinner party, for a moment:

My discrete dishes were soup, turkey, gravy, mashed

potatoes, stuffing, green beans, cornbread, mulled cider, and silk pie. Those are our components.

Of these, *four* dishes used turkey fat or turkey stock as one of their ingredients. (And if I'd made the soup, it would have been five.)

I made the turkey fat and stock myself, on Monday.

These are atoms.

Making the stock was a really rewarding first step. Without it, I'd have had a lot more work (and a lot less turkey flavor) on the day. Not to mention, this way, I used *all* of the turkey I'd already paid for.

## Finishing an atom is satisfying

And, even though it wasn't an ingredient in anything else, I made the cranberry sauce two days ahead. Why? I could make it in one pot, start and finish in just 10 minutes, and keep it in the fridge til it was needed.

Making the cranberry sauce gave me a real sense of *finishing something* at a time when everything else required many steps and lots of waiting.

Start with the tiny little things you can finish, and especially those you can use to make bigger things, and make you feel good about making **actual** forward motion.

## Beware of NIH

Now, if you're a software developer, don't go thinking I mean you should write your own libraries. If you're a designer, don't think I mean you should design all your logos and templates up front. Don't fall prey to NIH (Not Invented Here) syndrome.

That's a waste of your time & energy, and worse, gives you a *false* sense of progress. That kind of work doesn't actually bring you closer to helping your customer (or your dinner guest).

Remember, always consider your guest. They don't care if you used a pre-built library instead of writing all of your code from scratch. They don't care if your Wordpress theme is 100% original.

## Atoms are building blocks for work.

What are the *little* blocks you can finish quickly and *use again and again* to build your way forward?

**Writing an outline** of one blog post, or one chapter.

**Or creating a list** of the 15 points that belong in your full-length book...

**...or the three things you hope your reader will take away**, when they're at the end of your blog post/chapter/or book.

**Doing a couple hours of research** that turns into a valuable mini-report on what your audience likes to buy.

**Handwriting five emails to get to know a few of your best**

**customers**, which you can reuse later in an automated customer relationship sequence.

**Choosing a tool, library, process, or vendor...**  
procrastination on which has been delaying you.

**Organizing a free webcast with some people in your industry**, which later on could turn into a real (even paid) event.

**Outlining a process your reader can apply to their work** (like this one!) – just tell it to them now at a high level. Later you can turn it into a whole educational experience, or even create a tool or software to support the process, once proven its usefulness.

**Completing a blog post that solves a *small problem* for your reader** – you can turn that into a recording, a lightning talk, a work sheet, a newsletter email, a chapter in your future book. That book might become a workshop, or a huge package with videos and exercises and interviews, or even spin off a conference. Or it may not.

These are all examples of *starting small*, and with things that *move you forward towards your goal*.

Whatever you do, don't choosing WHICH atom stop you from choosing at all. When you can't figure out what to do, just pick something small that will be useful, that you can finish, and do it.

Set yourself up for a win. Pick an atom.

# Track your progress

When you're working on a dinner party, you get to see, feel, and smell the fruits of your effort: Finished dishes accumulate in your fridge or on your table, and things smell just wonderful. Ingredients are transformed. They go from pantry or fridge to stove or oven to counter, fridge or table. Then you light the candles, fold the napkins, and eat.

There's nothing as gratifying as watching your work shape up before your very eyes.

With software, writing, design, teaching – the process is far less tangible, less final. It takes a lot longer. It's easier to get dispirited. It can feel like you've spent a lot of time doing nothing, and yet you're still not done.

But it doesn't have to be that way.

You can *make* your work tangible. *Create* milestones. Give yourself the joy of watching the progress bar *move*, of saying "Hey! I finished something!", even when it doesn't feel like it.

Use a kanban board like Trello, and move things from left to right. It's gratifying to drag something from the Features to Working to Testing to Done... or from Outline to Writing to Edit to Done.

## Feel the burn

We once holed up in a rented cabin in rural Austria to work on Freckle Time Tracking. We wrote our hit list out on little slips of paper.

Every time we finished a bug or small feature, we took the slip of paper and tossed it in the wood-burning stove. We watched our huge list of tasks go up in flames.

Fixing bugs isn't awesome. Watching them burn *is* awesome.

## Drag & drop

I'm as distractable as the next person, so I've got a bag of tricks for all those pesky times I can't retreat to the countryside.

To write this book...

- I gathered all the things I had written on this topic before, and skimmed them
- I distilled that into a list of all the chapters and other things I knew I had to do.
- Every time I started a task, I started my timer, moved the task's card from "Outline" to "Doing."
- When it was finished, I moved it to "Done."
- If I ended up spotting something in the moment – that wasn't on my to-do list – I added it to Trello, then moved

it to Done.

And once this book was *written*? Then came editing. I put the chapter cards back in the To-Do list, in order, and worked through them one by one: from To-Do, to Doing, to Done.

My “Done” list is huge now. I can see where I’ve been. And, thanks to my Freckle timer and reports, I can see exactly how long it took me to get there, and what I was doing for how long and when.

I’ve spent 44 hours and 15 minutes on this book so far. And it feels awesome.

## **Visible progress is a fantastic motivator**

Especially when a project is large – it can take a lot of work, sometimes, to ship a single feature or stomp out a bug. Even when you Start small and Break into components.

So... use a kanban. Burn your sticky notes. Rip up things when you’re done and toss them like confetti.

Track your time. (Using Freckle, perhaps!) If nothing else, watching your time log get bigger will help you *see* and *feel* that you *are* working.

It's easy for memory to let your normal, every day accomplishments slip away.

Keep them in front of you. Make it visible.



# Shop the shelf

Stop me if you've heard this one before:

- *"I need a billing system to sell & deliver this SaaS. I know... I'll build my own from scratch, exactly what I need!"*
- *"Yuck, this default theme sucks. Before I start blogging & building my audience, I need to design my very own theme! It's gonna be the bestest ever!"*
- *"I'm going to lay this whole damn book out by hand in InDesign! The typography is going to make 'em weep!"*

If you want to Just Fucking Ship, these thoughts should send you screaming into the night.

## Always consider the customer

Remember – your job isn't to just "make a thing the bestest" – it's to *just fucking ship*, because the goal is to get your project or product into the hands of someone who will *use* it.

If a thing doesn't help or even impact the customer, does it matter? Should it be done?

If a developer creates a brand new ecommerce platform, does it sell more software?

If a designer makes the perfect blog theme, but never gets

around to actually blogging, does it make a sound?

If a writer creates the most efficient process for writing a book but doesn't leave any time to write it, could it change a single mind?

## **You've got enough to do already**

Makers make, right? Why wouldn't you do *everything* exactly the way you've dreamt it?

**Simple: You've got enough work on your plate already.**

The product itself? *Plenty* of work. Loads. *Always* more than you imagine when you start.

It's the *product* that gives value to your customers, not the little details around it.

Think of those "little details" as their own projects. Exponentially increasing your risk of never finishing at all.

## **Don't be afraid to shop off the shelf**

My fancy Thanksgiving had the following off-the-shelf components:

- truffled cauliflower soup: Premade, local vendor (frozen!)
- gluten-free stuffing: From a box
- gluten-free corn bread muffins: From a mix

If I'd tried to make all those from scratch – *the first time I'd*

*ever tried* – my dinner party would likely have been a flop. I had enough to do already.

DON'T invent membership systems, billing systems, ecommerce delivery platforms, from-scratch Wordpress themes, marketing tools – use what's already out there.

DO shop around and use an off-the-shelf component.

The riskiest part of your project is before you ship. That's where most failure happens, before there's even a chance to succeed.

When the component isn't part of the core value your customer needs, *use the best available thing*. Good enough, shipped, is far better than perfect, not shipped. And you can jazz up Good Enough with a couple custom touches and chances are nobody will ever know.

You can always switch to custom, later, if you really need it. But you almost certainly don't.

# Every version better

You invite a couple friends over for your first dinner party ever. *Shit!* The steak's a little overcooked. Are you doomed forever? Is that the only chance you'll ever have? *Will anyone ever eat at your place again? Will they unfriend you IRL?!*

Yes, it's only natural to be concerned that if you mess up your first time, there will be consequences. But it's a bit silly to catastrophize it.

**Doing is the only real way to learn.** Everybody knows it. And nothing, and nobody, is perfect. Few things in this world cannot be improved upon. And yet many of them sell like gangbusters anyway.

Work backwards, break it into components, start small, learn from recipes, track your progress – these techniques aren't just for The Bestest Most Final Product Ever. These are the techniques you use to go from your version 1 to your version 10, over time.

Don't bite off a 7-course meal your first time, but also don't feel stuck at 1-course when you've gotten good at it.

## Good products grow over time

Remember the original iPhone? Slow, buggy, no apps. Sold millions upon millions.

Freckle Time Tracking, my app, launched with an extremely bare feature set. It didn't have invoicing, expense tracking, or a timer, or a Mac app, or a permissions system... lots of other things people consider requirements. It barely had reporting.

What it *did* have was a *really superlative* time entry interface, to make that dreaded task as painless as possible.

The rest was pretty janky. Our first customers couldn't even reset their passwords automatically. They had to *email* us.

But still, we got to \$1,500 in revenue from the first month. Today, of course, we've grown revenue by >30x, and have a rich feature set.

Freckle is still getting better all the time. [IndyHall](#) started as a group of friends working together in someone's restaurant, for free; 7 years later, they've got over 300 members and a permanent 10,000 square foot office.

[Getting Things Done](#), the productivity book juggernaut, started as little live workshops. So did Dale Carnegie's perennial smash hit *How to Win Friends and Influence People*; Dale started teaching at the YMCA, because nobody else would hire him.

Countless great books have started as single essays, and many great paintings started as sketches.

And remember that first iPod? It was a huge clunker, with so many problems. But that's what *made* the Apple that we know today. If there'd been no iPod, there'd be no iPhone, no iPad... no Apple.

## **Plan your way to version 10**

Use your best product vision as your backwards plan, but don't set out to build it in one go.

Use the techniques you've learned to chunk out components & choose which to leave out of v1, so you can ship v1 quickly, and grow from there.

Remember the very first iPhone – and before that, the iPod that paved the way. Plan for every version better.

# Learn from recipes

We've all met cooks who seem to *breathe* cooking. It's enough to make a newbie feel utterly without hope. They don't measure, they eyeball; they don't crack open a cookbook, they just *know* what to do.

But at one point, they didn't.

Nobody becomes an amazing cook in a vacuum. Some go to school; others learn from a young age from watching & helping a parent or grandparent. Others cook from recipes and TV shows so long that they get a sense for it.

Everyone learns by reading, watching, trying recipe after recipe. That's how you build up a feel for what works, what's great, and how to make it. You aren't the first person to write a book, develop an app, teach a workshop. You just weren't party to the "effortless" expert's training regime. You were outside their process.

It's time to get inside it.

Learn from those who came before. Watch how they do it. Read biographies. Look at corporate histories. Subscribe to blogs, follow on Twitter, and sign up for mailing lists; watch as people grow their skills, their businesses, and how. Ask what came before. Take notes.

When experts do well, borrow their recipes. Don't steal their

style or their material... always be yourself, do your own work.

*DO* borrow a marketing idea here, a process idea there, a pricing strategy, a productivity technique, a style of growth.

From 37signals, I borrowed productized consulting (a fixed price package), then later the goal of running a small business-oriented SaaS, and publishing a PDF ebook before (even instead of) a paper book, and and even professional workshops about the business I built.

But I never *copied* what they did; I did it my own way, with my own experience, and my own content. And it worked. Here we both are.

So, go immerse yourself in cookbooks. Absorb the hidden patterns. Learn from proven recipes.



# Choose your difficulty setting

“Most projects fail,” says a person who thinks there’s a platonic ideal of Success or Failure. As if “Failure” is an immutable fact of physics and not simply a matter of viewpoint. That same person, faced with a 100 dinner parties, would *not* say “Most dinner parties fail.”

For most dinner parties, the goal is 1. tasty food, but more importantly 2. great company.

You might host a dinner party in order to impress important people – so everything *must* be *perfect*. Host for your friends or family, though, and the company’s much more important than the food. Great food’s a great bonus. You could enjoy their company over a pizza.

If the food was the highest priority, you’d go to a fancy restaurant instead of hosting it yourself.

So, the deciding factors for a dinner party are:

1. pick the right people
2. give them an environment where they’ll be their most charming selves

Somehow, though, it’s always the *food* that stresses us out.

Success or failure aren’t states of matter. They’re totally dependent on the observer effect. *What matters most... to*

you?

## **You can choose how to define failure & success**

You can choose your *difficulty setting* – your chance of failure, amount of work, time to market, risk vs reward.

You can choose to cook up a brand new recipe, complex and crazy intense with lots of curlicues. You'll also be cooking up extra risk... when the food isn't really the point.

This book's a great example: Its format isn't a platonic ideal. It could have been a series of video lectures, or a huge book with a million case studies. It could have been a live workshop. It could have been a "real book" two years in the making with a "real publisher."

But our goal was to get this in your hands so you could use it. *Now*. Not to impress you with our fancy publisher's name or slick video, nor to answer every potential question ever... but to get these techniques in your hands so you can try them, right now, *today*.

So, we chose to keep it simple.

No dependencies. No video editing. No contracts. No waiting on interviews with important people.

And, obviously it worked because here we are.

## **How I calibrated JFS**

Back in 2009, I was freaking out before the launch of my first

ebook ever, JavaScript Performance Rocks. My wise friend Erik Kastner disrupted the freak-out spiral with a simple question: “How many copies would you have to sell to be satisfied?” I hadn’t thought about it before. “50,” I said. Then I had a target – a *crispy* target – and I could calm down. We sold many more than 50, and all those extra sales were wonderful icing.

For JFS, I defined my definition of success: Immediate sales, and those customers getting immediate use. I would have been pleased with 200 copies sold in the initial launch. I aimed *all* of my effort towards achieving that goal, no more no less.

Right now, we’re nearly at 900 copies sold. That’s 900 people I wouldn’t have reached, if I’d spent 2 years for a Real Book™.

I calibrated my definition of success. I hit it. Then I exceeded it. Then I celebrated. Then I had a hangover. And it was worth it.

## **Calibrate your next project**

Before you start on your project, look out for:

- moving parts
- dependencies
- crazy big ambitions
- complexity
- gatekeepers, whose approval you “require”

- for people who might let you down (on purpose or otherwise)
- for reinventing the wheel

Take on that extra risk *intentionally* or not at all.

And define a *reasonable* success metric. Then aim all your effort towards achieving it.

Choose your difficulty setting carefully.

# Mise en place

You're cooking from a recipe, and it calls for 3 different types of chopped and sliced vegetables, a variety of spices in specific measurements, and a few items from your pantry.

How do you tackle that?

Do you cut the veggies when it says so? Do you measure the spices at the time you're supposed to put them into the dish?

That's how most cooks work, because the recipe says so. But that means constantly jumping from one type of task to another – from measuring to cutting to stirring to adjusting the heat to moving the pot. You're running on rails, which is good because it reduces decision fatigue. But those rails aren't a direct line between two points. Not even *close*.

The more efficient way to work is to prep all your ingredients before you start cooking:

1. chop all your vegetables, in the correct quantities
2. measure out all your spices, ready to combine
3. open the pantry cans or boxes; measure them out as called for
4. place everything on your counter, next to the station where you'll use it

This technique is called *mise en place*, exciting sounding French for “putting in place.” But it’s a lot more than layout.

It’s efficient for you, a single cook – **and** it’s even better for teamwork, because it makes small, crispy components you can easily delegate.

## **The same goes for any creative act...**

When I set out to write this book in 24 hours, I started by gathering my ingredients:

- stuff I’d written before on the topic
- notes about what I’d intended to write (ages ago)
- I wrote up all the topics I *might* include
- then I sorted *some* of them into an actual outline
- I put the outline in a usable form: Trello, so I could move it from “Outline” to “In Progress” to “To Edit”

I made it so I never had to decide: *What should I write now?* I just picked the next thing off the outline.

And when Alex decided to join me, we had a brief conversation about non-writing tasks that he could do any time, totally independent of what I was working on.

While we were screensharing and chatting, he said “Can we create another Trello board for these tasks?” and I just scrolled to the right, because I’d already done it. *Bam!*

And when I stopped writing for the night, I left little notes on

the outline points so I could remember the specific examples and points I wanted to make inside each chapter. Now I can just copy & paste those notes into each chapter as I start it, and go from there.

When it was time to edit the book I'd written, I read through the entire thing, and marked it up with my notes in Apple's Preview app. Then, and only then, did I start editing each individual chapter... by following my notes.

Eliminating in-the-moment decisions is one of the most powerful techniques in your arsenal. The fewer times you must pause to think, the more you can *do*.

## **What can you prepare in advance?**

It'll vary depending on the project at hand. Here's a list of ideas to start you off:

- research & resources
- quotes & references
- examples
- snippets
- colors
- screenshots
- to-do's
- outlines, scripts, points to hit
- edits to make

- graphics, fonts, libraries to use
- ideas you are sure, in the moment, that you'll remember but will most certainly forget

Set up your workplace, physical and mental, with *mise en place*. Instead of leaping around, flustered, you'll be able to sit down and simply *get to work*.



# Niceties vs Necessaries

Our Thanksgiving Dinner was supposed to have popovers. The mashed potato casserole was supposed to have a toasted breadcrumb topping. I had originally planned to have a salad, too – spinach, apple, pomegranate seeds, slivered almonds and goat cheese. My husband was going to make his really excellent honey mustard dressing. *Nom*.

None of these dishes happened, and my guests didn't care one whit. I hadn't promised it, and they never even knew it was missing.

Things got busy and complicated, I jettisoned the ballast.

That's life: Despite your best, crispiest, smallest, atomic backwards plan, something will inevitably go wrong. You'll find yourself faced with a dilemma: *Recover, or cave?* To decide, you need to know what you require, and what you merely want.

Some things are absolutely **Necessary** – guests, for example. You *can't* have a dinner party without guests. A main course, too, pretty important (although it doesn't have to be the main course of your dreams; a pizza will often do in a pinch).

**To sell a product, you have to *have* a product.**

But what does "a product" mean in this sense? It demands less than you think.

## Things that are Necessary

True Necessaries include things like...

- beta content for a book (like this one)
- a couple *really excellent* features for software, that can integrate with something bigger, or stand alone
- a couple videos (early cut) for a video series

Also necessary: whatever protects your customer from great harm. I.e., it's **necessary** to have a sound & secure backup strategy for your customers' data, but not necessary to have almost any other "important" features.

You could start with a 45-minute Q&A session to work up to a real workshop.

## Niceties aren't necessary

Other things are simply *nice to have* – **Niceties**. Popovers, you might say.

Other Niceties that can seem like Necessaries...

- Bonus chapters
- perfected editing
- perfected design
- pricing packages
- interviews, extras...

- a clever launch sequence
- a fancy landing page with its own domain name
- split-tested calls to action

*(Sound familiar? Yep, those are components.)*

In the case of Freckle v1, we shipped with **no** invoicing, **no** timer, **no** budget notifications, **crummy** reporting. We didn't even have an automated password reset. Customers who lost their passwords had to email us.

We even started taking credit cards before we had finished the billing code. Credit card details were stored securely with our credit card processor, as per their requirement, but the code that would bill them at the end of their 30-day trials? Wasn't done yet, when we put it online.

And still months after we wrapped up *that* code, we had no failed payment lock-out mechanism. Quite a few customers got some free months that way.

We did, however, have redundant off-site backups from day 1.

## **"Is this absolutely Necessary?"**

*... or merely (very) nice to have?*

That's the question to ask yourself whenever a component blocks you from shipping. Or you *think* it might, or should, block you from shipping.

When you're faced with *Recover or Cave*, you'll need to know:

1. What you absolutely *must* have.
2. What you can drop.

Often times the latter will pretend to be the former. And when you're stressed out? That's the very worst time to make that judgment call. Prepare in advance.

Keep a list, even if it's only in your own head. Always know what you can drop. Then when the inevitable happens, you won't have to sit & think & torture yourself. You'll *know* what's only nice-to-have.

Because the inevitable really is inevitable. You *will* have to cut something. Drop it like it's hot, and move on.

# Cut without remorse

Yes, the inevitable *will* happen. Murphy's Law applies to dinner parties and product launches.

On Thanksgiving day, I sure would have liked to have those popovers. I love a good popover. I'd scoured the internet for a good recipe and bought the right kind of flour for my gluten-free friends, but things just got too hectic that afternoon.

We already had cornbread (from a box even! easy peasy, not delicate) – we didn't *need* popovers, too.

And... popovers are tricky even at the best of times. You can't really make them ahead, either. Like so many delightful things, you really have to make them *in the moment*.

Popovers are a perfect example of a Nicety. An obvious choice to cut when things get tough.

Nobody knew I had planned to make popovers.

Nobody missed them.

"I'm sorry we didn't have this sheer deliciousness I was going to make but didn't," I did *absolutely not* say to my guests. No need to make them want it, then take it away.

Only *I* knew what was missing from my crispy vision of the perfect Thanksgiving dinner.

So I cut the popovers from the menu (alongside a couple

other things), and chose not to think about it at all.

Maybe I'll make them this week for breakfast instead. (Mmmm, popovers.) With regular flour. For myself.

## **You have your Niceties. Now cut them.**

It's better to ship. Always. Products are quantum: If nobody can use them, they're not products.

### **Shipping is what makes a product a product.**

A non-product, hidden away from the world, *waiting* in stasis for some seemingly mandatory frills?

Virtually worthless.

Nobody can see inside your head. Nobody but you (and maybe your team) will know what's missing, not unless you tell them and make a point out of it and apologize. Which you don't need to do.

So, now that you know what's necessary vs what's simply nice, get ready to cut. Life *will* interfere with your plans. You *will* have to choose. You *will* have to cut.

Do it. Get on with it. Don't look back.

And remember: that's what separates a product from merely a fun idea.

# Feeling to fact

Are you executing on these techniques yet? Considering your guest, getting crispy, planning backwards, starting small... with a blog post, maybe?

If you haven't yet... will you?

Or will you beg off, because you're afraid? Afraid of failure. Afraid of success, maybe. Afraid nobody will read you. Afraid lots of people will.

What if you got the price wrong? What if they don't like it? What if they think you're the world's biggest asshole for asking for their email address in order to get the free goodie? OMG!

We've watched countless friends & students tie themselves in knots over these false feelings. No, I'm not mocking you. But I am going to share some hard truths:

## It's not fear you're feeling

Fear is a real thing. It's a physiological response coupled with subjective interpretation of the symptoms. We all know what fear feels like:

- sweating
- heart skipping
- butterflies in your stomach

- that hot itchy feeling in your muscles that makes you want to pace, or kick a hole in the wall, or run away and hide

But... is that really how you feel when you fail to sit down and write your sales letter? Is that why you haven't launched your product? Is that why you haven't flipped the switch from free public beta to show me the money?

Be honest, isn't your experience more accurately described as a subtle... *s l i d i n g* away of attention?

Who would describe fear like that?

Nobody, because it's not fear.

## **It's not nearly that big of a deal**

Fear is scary and physiological and makes you feel sick. That's not what you're feeling. (*If it is, check out Appendix: Temper your feelings.*)

What you're feeling is **uncertainty**. Mild uncertainty.

## **Uncertainty about what to do**

Maybe you feel like you *don't know where to start*, probably because it feels like you could be doing a million different things, and/or *you can't picture the outcome*. Well, those two issues are solved with a crispy backwards plan, chunked small, and a good mise en place, and a system for tracking your progress.



**Unless**, of course, you'd rather find yourself on your deathbed many years hence, realizing that the thing that stood between you and achieving your dreams was your refusal to create a to-do list.

### **Uncertainty about your ability**

Maybe you're *unsure you can do it*. Well, why wonder? *Try and find out*. You're not shaking and sweating. You can do it. Then, when mistakes happen as they inevitably will, *try again*. Every version better.

**Unless**, of course, you want to live your life never learning or doing anything new, from this day forward... all because you think you *might* not be a virtuoso on your very first attempt.

### **Uncertainty about other people's reactions**

Maybe you're *uncertain if people will like what you create*. Blog posts, email newsletter, first few chapters of your book, the single stand-alone necessary feature of your new app... what if not everyone adores it?

If it's not giving you an actual panic attack, well, you know what I'm going to say: *Who cares?*

Why do you think there's a damn thing you can do about it? Has there ever been anyone in the entire history of humanity who was universally loved? *Of course there will be people who don't like your work*.

Unless, of course... Do you think you can do better than Jesus? *Jesus* had haters.

Yes, that's a ridiculous thing to say, and I'm saying it because when you're caught up in a doom & gloom uncertainty spiral, it helps to see how goofy that is.

## **From feelings... to facts**

Your feelings are lying to you. They're whispering:

- YOU, alone – out of the entire human race! – must always instinctively *know* what to do and must never rely on something so pedestrian as a *plan* or a *to-do list*.
- YOU, alone, must be perfect the first time you do something, or else you will always be a failure.
- YOU, alone, must please everyone in the entire world, or you must do nothing at all.
- YOU! YOU ALONE!

*\*Cough\**. Ahem. Watching my precious students fall prey to this again, and again, and again, is not unlike being stuck in a horror movie. That scene where *the girl goes into the dark basement by herself*, over & over again.

That's why I'm here to teach you the power of *facts*.

## **Facts are better than feelings**

When you have these feelings of uncertainty and your habit is to respond by shirking, remind yourself of the facts:

- **Everybody who does creative work has a process.** No, it's often not apparent from the work you actually see, because that's at the end... that's the work that *survives*. There is a process, guaranteed. Even you have a process. Maybe you're thinking, "Well, I don't have a process, I just do things," – that's proof. You actually flail around til something sticks and *that is your process*. It just *sucks*.
- **Everybody starts off sucking and must work to get better.** You may "feel" instinctively that they don't, but that's because you haven't been with them every day of their lives. Even Mozart had to have piano lessons as a child and his early compositions, while absolutely precocious, aren't very good.
- **Nobody can please everybody, not even part of the time.** Not even Jesus. Or Buddha. Or Mother Theresa. Or Gandhi. Or anyone, fictional or real. Nope, not even you. Sorry.

So... if the feelings are ridiculous, and counter-factual, but they keep coming, what do you do about it?

### Ignore them

Some days it will rain. Other days will shine. When it rains, do you hide under your bed all day? No... because you know rain doesn't mean anything, and it's inevitable. It'll happen no matter what you do.

Well, the same is true of certain types of feelings, like these.

Is it worth it to listen to them and live a life where you try nothing, do nothing, offend no one, just to theoretically save

yourself a few moments of mild discomfort that you'll probably feel *anyway*?

Nope.

Feelings are a decent feedback mechanism, and a really shitty driver.

## So work through it

That's why it's best to drive your work forward with *action*, *feedback*, and *results*... with systems and techniques, rather than your (mild) momentary weather-feelings.

Get clear about what you're doing. Make it crispy. Make your backwards plan. Attack things in order, broken into small components. Get better every time. Choose your difficulty setting. Prep your workspace, real and metaphorical.

In other words, use all the techniques you learned in this book to make steady progress.

Learn to love *objective* measures: your work, your progress.

Listen to your feelings when they're telling you something important – like that you *love* or *hate* what you're doing. But otherwise? Crack open an umbrella.

If it's gonna rain anyway, might as well use the rain to water your garden.

# Mistakes happen

You will make mistakes.

You will make many mistakes.

Some of them will piss off readers. Some will piss off customers. Some of them will be angry at *you*.

There is nothing you can do to stop it from happening. Not a damn thing.

The only thing you can do is cover the most critical bases: Store credit cards securely, or use a platform that does. Create redundant off-site backups for your customers' data. Be clear about what they are buying. Offer a refund policy. Do your best, within reasonable constraints.

Still, you'll make mistakes, or your customers will, there's not a damn thing you can do about it. There will be bugs; service interruptions; typos.

The key is to have a plan in place before it happens so you can handle it gracefully. What's that look like?

Well, try this problem scenario – and 3 common support responses – on for size:

## Scenario #1

`YOU, BITING INTO DINNER AT MY HOUSE:

“Oh... uh... Amy, I think there's something wrong with this

steak. It's... um... bad.

``ME, ANTAGONIZED:

``No it isn't!! How dare you!

,

## Scenario #2

`YOU, BITING INTO DINNER AT MY HOUSE:

`Oh... uh... Amy, I think there's something wrong with this steak. It's... um... bad.

` ME #2, IN DENIAL:

`` \*ignores you\*

,

## Scenario #3

`YOU, BITING INTO DINNER AT MY HOUSE:

`Oh... uh... Amy, I think there's something wrong with this steak. It's... um... bad.

` ME #3, EMBRACING THE WORST CASE SCENARIO:

`` OMG you're right! That's naaaast-ay. No, no – don't eat it! Don't be silly. I'll order a pizza.

,

## Which is the winner? No brainer

Yep... deal with the problem straight on, and it will defuse

almost any situation. And give you the opportunity to shine as a host who cares for your guests.

Repeat after me:

- If it's a bug: "Oh, I'm sorry, that IS aggravating. I'll fix it." Then fix it, and let them know.
- If it's a customer misunderstanding: "I'm sorry it was unclear. Here's a refund/I'll help you now. Could you tell me, was there a way we could have prevented this problem for you in the first place?"
- If a customer is pissed but not necessarily a total asshole: "I've fixed it/How can I make good on that for you?" – if they respond politely, help them.
- If a customer is crazy angry and behaving badly, fire them politely: "I've refunded your money. Cheers."
- If a customer asks for a refund, give it to them. It's not worth the fight.

That's not so hard, is it?

This approach will defuse most tense situations.

And if you have your response prepared ahead of time, it'll resolve *stress* for you, too.

It's always best to be prepare for the "worst."

# Firm up your worst case scenario

*How can you punch a cloud?*

Most of us spend a lot of our time angsty over concerns with fuzzy borders. They leak into everything. But, when *examined* and *counteracted*, fade away like a mist in the sun.

When you're overcome by vague, mist-y uncertainty, the best thing you can do is make it specific, concrete, and tethered. So you can punch it.

It's time to start thinking about worst case scenarios.

Feeling vaguely uneasy about your dinner party?

Here's how you firm up vague unease so you can melt it and punch it:

## **What's the worst case scenario?**

- *What's the worst that could happen?* Everybody dies from the worst case of food poisoning in years! It's so bad there's national coverage for weeks afterwards!
- *How could that happen?* Perhaps if you dragged your raw meat and eggs all over a dirt floor outhouse, then failed to cook them before serving.
- *What's the chance of that happening if you follow*



*elementary rules for food safety? Zero.*

OK, that's literally the worst thing that could happen, unless you're cooking with a nuclear warhead.

### **What's another really bad thing that could happen?**

- *What's, uh, the next worse thing that could happen?* You could burn down your house accidentally.
- *How could that happen?* If you dangle your hair or clothes into your gas stove, if you put magnesium in your oven, if you leave the house while things are cooking, if you cook everything on SUPER HIGH with lots of grease.
- *What's the chance of that happening if you follow elementary rules for cooking safety?* Extremely low. Plus you should keep a fire extinguisher on-hand. And, if you accidentally start a grease fire you know to smother it, not drown it. So, again, basic knowledge and technique will avert this potential disaster 999 times out of a 1000.

### **OK those scenarios are both realllly out there, what's left?**

- *What's, uh, the next next worse thing that could happen?* What if your food sucks so bad it's inedible? What if your dish comes out like char?
- *How could that happen?* If you cook a new dish for the first time ever on a stressful day with company instead of going for something that you are good at. If you have rotten luck and the ingredient's gone bad or your stove

goes haywire.

- *What's the chance of that happening if you follow elementary rules for smart entertaining?* This still isn't common... but it could totally happen.

STOP THE PRESSES! We found a worst case scenario that might actually happen!

### **WHAT DO YOU DO?!**

Order a pizza. Laugh about your misfortune – or poor choices – and walk with your guests to a local restaurant.

It'll be a great reason to share a glass of wine or three at dinner, and a story you'll be able to laugh about for years.

Not so bad at all.

### **What the worst case scenario for your product?**

Is it really worth avoiding? Truly? How bad can it really be?

- What's the worst case scenario if you JFS that blog post?
- What's the worst case scenario if you JFS that "salesy" call to action?
- What's the worst case scenario if you JFS that price increase?
- What's the worst case scenario if you JFS an app without a feature the competition has?

Will you die? Blow up your house? Kill people? Go bankrupt? Destroy your career? Trigger nuclear war?

Faint at the injustice of it all?

*Very rarely* are worst case scenarios actually very bad *and* also remotely possible. Example: Losing all your users' precious data. This is very bad. And this has happened. But it rarely happens to people who don't exhibit gross negligence – those who did not set up a backup plan, didn't design redundancy, did not test their backup scripts, never tested restoring from backups.

It didn't "just happen." *Oopsies!*

Less rarely, something terrible happens that is *entirely* out of your control. An *act of god*, in the legal terminology. An earthquake wipes out your data center. An invasion destroys the government and thus the economic base. An entire industry explodes overnight.

Unless you're all-powerful, there's nothing you can do about it. So why worry?

## **So what do you do now?**

Many of the worst case scenarios are verging on impossible. Consider their absurdity, then get on with your life.

Nearly all the rest are things you can avoid if you do your job. So, do your job.

Lastly, there are a handful of worst case scenarios that will happen no matter what you do, so you can either do nothing

for the rest of your life, or simply get on with it. You can't control the universe.

But what's actually *likely* to happen?

Based on years and years of business, and even more years of helping our students, this is likely the worst you will face:

There'll be a bug. A customer will disagree with you. You'll get an angry email. You will have to listen, then apologize. You will very likely need to issue a refund.

Scary stuff.

So: Be ready to say "I'm sorry," keep money on hand, make it your policy, and get on with it.

When your roast is ruined, order a pizza. You'll laugh about it later.

# Exploit the Pauli Principle

Here's a dilemma for you: You can't host a dinner party with tried & true dishes, *and* a dinner party with all-new exotic recipes.

You can't reap the gains of shipping early *and* the gains of waiting to ship til perfection. You can't both ship and unship.

Every time we ship and make money, there are things we *could* have done to make *more* money than we did.

But which is better:

- a good amount of real, quantifiable money *now*
- more *theoretical* money, potentially in the future

No contest, my friends.

It's better to host a dinner party now, with people you know, and dishes you can make, than it is to hold off in the hopes that if you wait long enough and try hard enough, you'll be able to host a dinner party with the Queen of England.

*Especially* if you hope to be good enough & connected enough to dine with the Queen, *you need to get to work*. The more you host, the better you'll become at hosting, the more people you'll get to know, the more connections you'll have.

## You've heard of creative destruction

But you probably haven't heard of creative *loss*. Of choosing to *learn* over what could have been.

You probably haven't heard of the Pauli Exclusion Principle, either, but you've heard the way it's expressed – “Two objects cannot be in the same place at the same time.”

It applies to action, too. You can't both do, and not do. You can't get paid, *and* not ship. You can't build your reputation *and* never, ever risk it.

It's not just a law of physics, it's simple logic.

But when it comes to creative work, it's tempting to *hold off shipping* in the hopes that waiting will somehow get you *more*. But the *more* is theoretical. And the more you wait for more, the less you will ever have.

Don't do it. Don't wait.

Don't conflate “money you *could* have made but didn't” with “money you lost.”

Don't wait for perfection and riches that may never come.

Willingly choose to earn less now, so you can earn more in the future. Help people now, get out in the world, learn and grow from the experience. That's what makes you better in the future, not *waiting*.

Vote with your feet for good quality, and real money, and real impact. Embrace creative loss.

Just fucking ship.

Then, onto the next improvement.

# Your next launch

*What if your launch flops?*

If your launch flops... is that it? You know, **it**? Fin, fini, dead-zo? Shouldn't you better be cautious, careful, wait?

## Well, it actually happened to me...

Years ago, I emailed out that "30x500 Doors are Open!" on a Friday afternoon, and eagerly awaited the piles of money I'd come to expect from previous launches.

I made one sale.

For an hour or so, I fumed. Then I mentally smacked myself upside the head and asked myself the pertinent questions:

- **Why** did nobody buy?
- **How** is this launch different than the last one that worked so well?\*

The answers gave me some hard news: *Whoops – it very clearly all my fault*. I'd gotten lazy, and failed to apply my own damn system.

Here's how I (almost) always launch:

1. 2-3 blog posts 2-4 weeks before, to build up my list



2. and 3-5 emails starting 2 weeks or so before, to build anticipation, each one leading to the other
3. announcing the launch date & time 2-3 days ahead
4. reminding the list about the launch a few hours ahead...
5. emailing once more when the launch begins

This time, the time that sucked so much, I sent just one other email, and it wasn't very good.

### **What to do?**

The launch was launched, after all. Was it too late to do anything about it? Had the ship sailed? That is what the word "launch" implies.

But etymology isn't a good guideline for behavior. So I took 30x500 registration offline again, built a real launch, and launched it again... just two weeks later.

Bam! 30 sales – \$40,000 or so – in the first couple hours. Over the next week, all 75 seats sold out.

The product hadn't changed. The audience hadn't changed. The sales page hadn't changed. The price hadn't changed.

All that changed was my launch content: I followed my own recipe to build awareness *and* desire, *and* anticipation for the specific date and time.

Nobody breathed a word about my egregious mistake. I

don't think anyone even noticed.

It's as if I told *myself* I was hosting a dinner party, and did all the major preparations, and cooked, but didn't actually... you know... *invite* anyone. So I ate by myself. And the next day I vowed to not be so silly next time. I called my friends to set a date.

## Don't worry about blowing your "one shot"

You're not shooting for the Olympics, here – you don't have to wait 4 years before you try again. You're working on the internet. You can launch again any time, for free. There's nothing to stop you.

Naturally, it's *very nice* to launch to instant sales. That, of course, is the whole point of our 30x500 class – to be sure that you are making something people want, and have them drooling, ready to buy.

Oh yes – fairytale Big Launches do exist, and I've run a few myself. But the idea that you have *one shot* to succeed or fail? Utter hogwash. Remember that success and failure aren't absolutes, but a matter of vantage point.

So what if you fuck up your launch? Big fucking deal. It's not *The Launch™*, it's just *one* launch. You get a do-over.

You get as many do-overs as you care to do.

Just Fucking Shipping your product puts you in position to learn loads, and *launch again*.

## Launch windows come whenever you want them

You don't have to wait til you have "news" to "announce":

- you can run a launch any time, no need to wait for something "new" to report
- you can run *many* launches for the exact same product
- you can run a rolling launch forever

That last one is how we primarily sell 30x500 these days – a rolling launch. Folks sign up to get our free 7-part guide by email, and at the end, we add a pitch for the class, if it's available.

When I'm done with this book, we'll set up a rolling launch for JFS as well. There may be *webinars*.

## What is a launch, really?

A launch at its most effective is a path of persuasion through action:

- This will help you, just try it out
- ... ooh, and this too
- Wouldn't you love to have some more?
- Guess what... you can! Coming right up...
- Buy now! Here's a reason you should act soon.

Novelty is just *one* way to get somebody's attention. It's not the only way.

Helping someone with a free sample, a video, a Q&A session, a quote, a graphic, a trick they can try... you'll:

1. lure them in,
2. whet their appetite,
3. get them results, which
4. naturally makes your work both valuable and trustworthy – *and*
5. encourages them to share it, too

If it sounds simple, it's because it is. If it sounds familiar, well, that's because...

## **Your next launch is a product**

After all, launch content – writing, video, emails, samples – are just mini products that you make & ship and for free. The launch itself is a component, made of other components, made of atoms.

That's why this chapter isn't a concise how-to like the other chapters: launching isn't a single technique, it's a microcosm of all the techniques you've already learned.

It's backwards planning all the way down.

For best results, apply all the JFS principles to your next

launch:

- **Break it down into component parts** – launch is a component as much as any feature; don't worry about it for the first time you ship
- **Start small** – definitely don't try to start out with a fancy automated rolling launch or lots of special launch content;
- **Shop the shelf** – in this case, shop your own shelf... reuse your own blog posts, stuff you've already made, samples of the product, or how-you-did-it material (because you do already know how you did it);
- **Work backwards** by imagining the experience that will make your customer desire your product the most, and *then* figuring out what kind of content you can deliver (and in what order) to build that feeling;
- Make **Every version better** – sure, you can imagine your ideal launch (automated & all), but start with what you can do now and reuse later. Write a couple emails, easy... set up a bunch of complicated analytics and automation tools? *not* so easy, but when you do, you can reuse those emails you wrote first;
- **Choose your difficulty setting** – you know now that you can launch again & again, so why not pick a goal that you can achieve your first time out? Say, 50 copies of your ebook, or 10 new customers for your SaaS?

JFS your product, and JFS your next launch. Rinse and repeat.

# Create good habits

My friend, we are almost (but not quite) at the end of this book. This is last of the 21 principles.

None of the principles and techniques you've read about so far are *difficult* to read, to understand, or even to apply in a specific situation.

But don't let that fool you into thinking everything's going to be easy-peasy from here on out. Your biggest challenge will *always* be to apply them *consistently*.

It's the force of so many years of doing things inefficiently, badly, cumulatively, doing them the way that society teaches you... that's the thing that'll trip you up.

Trainers say, "Practice doesn't make perfect, practice makes permanent." And we've all had a *lot* of practice doing projects wrong.

That repetitive action has created semi-permanent, automatic behaviors that just "feel right." Also known as *habits*.

The best way to do the *right* things is to make *them* automatic. To replace the automatic, invisible scripts that hurt you with the ones that help you.

Here's how:

1. Keep good habits top of mind
2. Use mindfulness to spot automatic behaviors
3. Build new habits effectively, using science!

## 1. Keep good habits top of mind

You know that awkward, just-getting-started phase when you first start on a project? That awkwardness is a sign that you're doing everything consciously, nothing is automatic... yet.

This is the *ideal* time to prime your brain to do the right thing:

1. Flip through this book to remind yourself of how to do things right.
2. Take notes, make a cheat sheet, create a process diagram – whatever will set you on the right track to start with.

What about all those other in-between times? Well, *you* know yourself best. *You* know your biggest struggles, your most pernicious habits. You can craft a set of tools to help you bypass them:

1. Write down the biggest “bad” automatic behaviors you fall prey to that stop you from JFSing
2. Take a few minutes to write about what you could do,

intentionally, instead.

3. Put them on index cards, keep them near your desk (or wherever you work) so you can pull them out whenever you find yourself struggling.

Most of us learn to “solve problems” as they arise... which sets us up for failure, because it’s nearly impossible to be creative *while* you’re struggling.

Decide *in advance* how you can course correct, then simply follow your own advice as needed!

## **2. Use mindfulness to spot automatic behaviors**

Your brain does a *lot* of things that are “above your clearance level.” We don’t stop and consider every coffee cup, every door handle, every step we take, every breath – we’ve got unconscious, automatic habits that take care of those things for us.

That’s great for breathing and door handles, and reaaaaally not great for creative work. Especially not when you, like all the rest of us, have had so many years of making the wrong habits permanent.

Mindfulness practice is the best way to spy on your brain so you can be sure it’s doing the right thing.

Unlike some types of meditation practices, there’s no religious or spiritual component to mindfulness. The goal is to turn off your autopilot, to become an observer of all those



“Top Secret” background processes.

Here’s how to get started:

1. Check out [all the proven benefits](#) to a mindfulness practice.
2. Give it a whirl with [these simple instructions](#).
3. Read & use [Wherever you go, there you are](#) by Jon-Kabat Zinn.

It’s hard, and totally worth it, for every aspect of your life.

### 3. Build new habits

I keep tossing around that word, *habit*.

**What’s a habit, exactly?** Why are they so critical to success? Why does perfect behavior not matter? How do you stop bad habits? How do you make new ones?

Here are the steps we’ve used to help countless students build new, better habits:

1. First, watch [these two videos](#) I made on the topic of habits for the old 30x500.
2. Then sign up for [Tiny Habits](#), the perfect way to start your habit adventure extra small & crispy.
3. Hungry for more? I highly recommend [The Power of Habit](#).

## **4. You've got more power than you think**

Especially when you've "failed" repeatedly, and struggled, and suffered, it can seem like That's Just Life. And yeah, there are certainly things you *can't* control. It's just that the list is a lot smaller than it seems.

When you apply these steps, you'll find that many of those "facts" are actually choices – choices that have been hidden from you by years of poor practice and your brain's clearance level.

You've got a lot more power than you think. Using these techniques will help you find it.

# How I used all these techniques to write & ship this book in 24 Hours

You made it through all 21 techniques. Welcome to the capstone!

As my business partner Alex said when we chatted, once I was well into the writing process,

"If this book already existed, we would have used this book to write this book. But it didn't, so we had to create it. To create it."

Yes, we're super meta. Luckily he stopped there, or he could have gone on forever.\*

This very book is the culmination of the techniques Alex and I have learned, discovered, or invented during our years and years of Just Fucking Shipping stuff – from books to conference talks, video courses to live workshops, software as a service to long form email classes, conferences to coworking spaces.

And these are the skills we have, in turn, taught our 30x500 students, helping so many of them ship their first product. Together, our students have grossed around \$3 million in product revenue so far. (If only we could get precise

numbers!)

**Everything I've ever read, tried, failed and succeeded with is embedded in these techniques.**

Alex nailed the funny thing about this book:

- I used the techniques in the book to write and JFS this book in 24 hours.
- Then I used the same techniques to finish it off, over the next 2 weeks.
- I'm using the same techniques to write this chapter *right now* (from material & work I prepped before, to tracking my progress!)

How? Best question ever. Let's answer it.

Here we go...!

## **The beginning, or The spirit of Just Fucking Ship**

I started the 24 Hour Product Challenge at 12:45 on Monday, December 2, and 12:45 pm.

Just 24 hours (and 15 minutes) later – at 1 pm on Tuesday – I listed this book for sale as a PDF.

What did that book look like?

1. It was 8,100 words long
2. It was an automated PDF export from Markdown, and

thus pretty awkward (weird hyphenation, justified text, page breaks where I did not want them)

3. The cover was practically nonexistent, just a logo I slapped together in Pages with a single font, no illustration
4. It had not been edited *at all*
5. I had been billing it as 19 techniques, not 21... and anything beyond Mise en place was missing (*although I wrote a primitive version of this chapter to round it out*)
6. There was no fancy sales process, no post-sales follow-up, no marketing emails to my list, nada... just a blog post with my journal and a few tweets, because I was *busy*

### **I sold 107 copies that very day!**

In 24 hours. Well, that's calendar hours. I produced and JFSed first version of JFS with just 14 hours of actual work; the rest was either sleep, break, or prior appointments I couldn't miss. Yes, I produced a book in 14 hours.

And I'm telling you, it wouldn't have been even remotely possible if I didn't follow my own 21 techniques with a fervor bordering on religion. (Details on which below.)

(*Protip: I can give you these interesting facts because I track my time with **Freckle**.*)

JFSing pays off. Handsomely, in many cases.

Now, the product was raw and incomplete. It's taken me 2 weeks to come to this point...

## The present, or The spirit of Just Fucking Finishing

Today – 2 weeks later, December 17 – I'm wrapping up the final round of editing. Right now I'm writing this update. Yes, that's a little weird.

Stats so far:

- Total work time for first version: 14 hours
- Total work time **to date**: 61 hours
- Total sales: 848 copies, for \$10,586 in gross revenue

This is the last chapter I'll be editing, then I'll re-export to PDF and do some more visual tweaking, then it'll be – by most definitions – done. At least, the *book* will be done.

There's still a lot left for me & Alex to do:

- create calls to action/promotions across our blog
- create an rolling launch sequence to new newsletter subscribers
- design and write a real sales page
- produce mobi and epub versions (a freebie we'll send you when it's done!)
- decide on our Kindle Store strategy

- execute that Kindle Store strategy
- do guest posts, blog posts, cheat sheets & other content marketing
- do a PDF page layout by hand in Pages or InDesign
- design stickers!
- work on the extras I have planned (secret extras!)
- create package pricing levels

Et cetera! This book isn't a flash in the pan, two weeks of great sales... it's going to be a cornerstone of our product business from now on. And that will take yet more work.

I always tell my friends & students, "To run a product business, you've got to learn to be comfortable at 80% of Done, forever." Done *forever* – no updates, no marketing, no nothing – is a fantasy.

But if you JFS regularly, you can *reap the rewards of progress* (aka help people & make money) almost every step of the way. Just like I did with this book.

Without further ado, the 21 techniques:

## How I used the 21 techniques

Here's why these techniques are in the book, and *in* the book (as in, how I used them):

**Always consider your guest.** I didn't do research during the 24 hours, but I *know* what you, our reader, struggle with.

You're a skilled, creative person... just like my friends and my students, who I've been teaching & coaching for years. I've read blogs by you (or people like you). I can anticipate & write about your pains, because I've been taking notes: what worked & what didn't, what fears & concerns people had, what excuses they made.

Also? I've *been* you. My personal experience is shining through.

**Set a deadline... and mean it.** Nathan Barry's 24-Hour Product Challenge was too fun to pass up. And it was a challenge – not an external requirement, but something I leapt at the chance to beat.

**Work backwards.** The **very** first thing I did in the very first minute of the challenge? I sat down to outline. I spent over an hour of my precious challenge-time outlining these sections. Before I wrote a single word, I knew what the finished book would include.

That's the only reason I was able to sit down and write 5,000 words a day.

**Break it down into pieces.** This book is made of sections, and inside sections are chapters; inside each chapter's outline were several points I wanted to make or include. Then there are the other components, like:

- those same components, but *edited*
- the logo
- the page layout



- the launch strategy, the launch content
- the long-term marketing strategy
- the sales page
- the Kindle/epub stuff...
- etc.

To JFS this book in 24 hours, I left all that other stuff behind completely. As I wrote at the time: "I'm focusing on the book itself."

I also viewed each chapter as truly separate: An hour before the 24-hour deadline was up, I *knew* I wasn't going to be able to "finish." There was no way I could write a little something for each of the remaining chapters. Instead of shipping a book that just... petered out... I wrote the conclusion first (*this conclusion!*) just before the time was up and shipped it that way.

Now, two weeks later, I'm wrapping up the editing. And working a couple angles on the marketing strategy.

**Get crispy.** This book isn't a novel; it's not got a complex outline, each chapter stands alone, so we don't have to go back and do substantive editing for continuity. This book isn't "A book about productivity." It's *Just Fucking Ship: 21 Principles for Getting Off Your Butt and Finishing What You Start*.

My outline doesn't say "A chapter about goals" – it says "Choose your difficulty setting", and inside that outline-chunk

there are the notes that I used to write the chapter with examples and phrases. The techniques are grounded in a specific, real example – a dinner party, and most chapters include specific examples from specific products, too.

Right now I'm giving you a real, and very specific, story about how I used these techniques.

Banish the sog-beast!

**Start small.** I could go on literally forever about the art of finishing & shipping things. This book is tiny. The chapters are small. There are no moving parts.

**Start on the atoms, not on the edges.** First off, the biggest atom I have is my knowledge of what people need, based on long experience & study. Then I started with an outline, and each chapter in the outline had tons of notes I could use to write the chapter, rather than writing the book linearly. An outline may not seem like an atom, but it is – you can finish it as a discrete part, and you then use it to build bigger things.

It *might* make sense to have a good sales promotion written before starting such a thing, but we waited.

And I wrote the following just before I shipped the partial book at 1:00 pm on December 2: "I'm writing *this* chapter before finishing all the 19 Principles because otherwise I might have to ship the book without a conclusion, when the deadline's up."

And it worked, too.

**Track your progress.** I'm using Trello to move chapters from

Outline to In Progress to To Edit. Alex is using it to track all the marketing tasks. We're both using **Freckle Time Tracking** to track the time we've put into this challenge; it's also awesome for seeing the rhythm of work and a work diary. (It's so easy to forget what you did the day before. Not a problem when you track it.)

For the first few days, I also updated the challenge blog post every few hours. (And it felt great!)

Alex set up a Zapier integration between Gumroad and Slack, so every time there was a sale, Slack went *ping*! We watched for sales milestones and celebrated that first week with a fancy dinner out with our better halves.

Hashtag progress.

**Shop the shelf.** We're using our existing blog theme, and a plugin for popover promotion, Trello to manage the outline and delegate work, Freckle to track time, Dropbox to share the files; I joined Nathan Barry's existing product challenge. We're using Gumroad to sell the book itself, and Ulysses to do an automated export from Markdown (writing) to PDF (for you to read). I used a built-in PDF style that Ulysses had (even though it wasn't good).

I also referred back to a couple blog posts I'd written years before – the writing itself wasn't good so I stripped out the ideas to reuse.

**Every version better.** The 24-hour version of this book had 8,100 words. This one has 22,100. The 24-hour version had a lot of missing chapters; this has none. The 24hv wasn't edited.

It also had really crappy automated page layout; this one has a tweaked layout with better typography and most issues resolved, however it's still an automated export. One of my future tasks will be to lay out the whole (complete, finished) book by hand, for real. Maybe with a few illustrations. (This current edition has zero illustrations!)

You already bought this book, and so you'll get those updates for free. We've had zero complaints, even about the roughest v1.

Later on, this book will probably be offered in a bigger, more expensive package with videos, case studies & interviews and exercises... that'll be fun!

**Learn from recipes.** I've been watching & learning from other writers, designers, & developers since forever. That's how I learned everything I know about business:

- The format of this book was heavily inspired by Seth Godin and 37signals. The topic inspired by our students and my experience, of course, but also by Getting Things Done, and Getting Real.
- Using a lower priced, DIY-style product as an entry point into a product funnel is a classic move. In fact, writing a no-nonsense self-help book is a recipe in and of itself. (Especially when used to sell bigger, and more expensive, courses. Like 30x500, perhaps?)
- We're borrowing a marketing idea from Josh Kaufman (Personal MBA fame) to get our future Kindle book buyers on our mailing list.

And on and on and on, and on...

**Choose your difficulty setting.** This book is a simple thing. The focus is on the content. I'm not even doing the layout by hand, something I'd normally do (*Update: I will be doing this, but in the relatively distant future.*) The layout isn't *the point* of the book. The content is all that's important.

It's also short, and simple, with no dependencies. And I would have been pleased with *half* the sales we've made so far.

This book's an ebook, I can send a free update any time I like. Mistakes happen – and they aren't a big deal. They're free to fix. Not so for a traditionally published paper book.

(Also: This summer, Alex and I decided against traditional publishing because the typical time frame is *2 years til it hits print*. No thank you.)

**Mise en place.** I prepped my research & outline in advance, and use Trello to keep me & Alex on the same page, and left notes to myself to remind me where I left off & what I was thinking. I also left the apps open to the place where I needed to get started (in Preview and Ulysses). I worked from a specific physical spot (at my dining table) and on a different computer so I was less tempted by all my favorite distractions, and I kept my noise canceling headphones handy.

**Niceties vs Necessaries.** A custom layout... a beautiful sales page... a perfected launch mechanism... email marketing... illustrations... wise quotes to put in the sidebar... hell,

sidebars of any kind... a clickable table of contents... an epub or mobi format... a Kindle strategy... these things would be great to have but I let them go in order to hit our deadline.

They'll happen. Later.

And yep, I'm getting repetitive, because all the techniques feed into each other.

**Cut without remorse.** See above! Ahhhh.

And as I wrote just before I shipped the very first version of this book:

*And I'm writing this chapter before the rest are done because it's important to have a conclusion, and I can always send out a free book update later this week.*

Which I did! And will be doing again, with this fully edited v2. It works!

**Mistakes happen.** As I wrote at the time of shipping v1:

*And so I won't feel bad about it. Not every single buyer of this book will be delighted. We'll try to make good for them, and if not, we'll gladly refund their money. I'm not worried about it. (I'm also not worried that our launch will be less than stellar. The point for me is to finish it!)*

We refunded one person – horrors! We also fielded quite a few emails pointing out typos and, in one case, a chapter that

trailed off because I thought I had finished it (and hadn't). Whoops! But it's an ebook, and I fixed it already, and those folks will get updates.

And we got over 100 email replies with folks telling us their favorite part of the book and how they're using it. Typos and missing chapters pass, but that kind of marvelous experience is forever.

**Feeling to fact.** This isn't something I have to struggle with because I've had so many years of experiences. Doesn't scare me a bit. Yay, practice!

This *is* one of the most powerful techniques, though. If your worries are stopping you, *don't skip this step*.

**Firm up your worst case scenario.** As I wrote for v1:

*The only feasible worst case: Everybody hates it, I have to refund their money. No loss. It's that easy.*

But, in reality, after close to 900 sales, we've refunded just one person. Repeat after me: *No. Big. Deal.*

That's why this particular technique is so great *and* so crucial. Talk yourself into shipping, so you can see for yourself that nothing bad will happen.

**Exploit the Pauli Principle.** Let's talk money for a minute, because the Pauli Principle is all about opportunity cost (and reward). As of our sales right now, hourly rate on this book is about \$150 (total, across 2 people, before fees).

That's actually pretty fucking awesome. But you know what

would have made me even *more* money? Working on the next version of 30x500, the productized, self-serve, buy-any-time version. We had planned initially to launch sales this December, and forecasted that it would bring in around \$100,000.

*However* – and this is a BIG however – that is going to be a huge amount of work. We'll be in balls to the wall work-mode for weeks before finishing anything, even with our JFS skills.

A product like JFS is an easy win. That's what convinced me to take Nathan's challenge. He wrote:

*I love creating new products... But lately I've been working on something that will take far more than 90 days and is much bigger than a book.*

Oh my yes. Shipping this so fast gave me loads of creative energy (even when I was physically worn out).

*Plus*, even though 30x500 The Product will be much more affordable (aka cheaper) than the live workshop, we still have a *big fat nothing* for our would-be customers between paying \$0 to read the blog and \$1,000 to take the class.

Now we have an awesome first step, something to offer almost everyone: Just Fucking Ship, for \$19.

So, in addition to 850 sales and \$10,500 JFS also gives us something...

- to steer new readers towards (that they might actually impulse buy)



- to prove to a wide variety of new customers that we can help them
- to include in bundles and contests
- to discount on holidays or other specials (it's foolish to discount a live workshop that sells out anyway)
- to talk & write about (many new people found us because of my 24 Hour Product journaling!)
- to demonstrate, once again, that we've got product skillz

Plus, *it'll actually help people ship things*. That's hugely awesome in and of itself. But it'll also *make new customers for us* for our bigger, premium offerings in the future.

Basically, it's a win-win, win-win-win situation.

We "sacrificed" (temporarily) the revenue we "might" have made by preselling the productized 30x500. For all of the above. Well worth it.

**Your next launch.** JFS is barely 2 weeks old and has already had 4 launches:

1. At the end of the 24-hour challenge, I put a buy button on my blog post and tweeted about it. A soft launch.
2. A few days later, I finally got around to emailing my list about it. Another soft launch, because my email was "about" the 24-Hour Challenge, not a sales pitch.
3. Then, we set a date to raise the prices, and tweeted (& more importantly emailed our list) just before the prices

went up. These 2 emails were direct sales pitches.

4. Right now, as I type, we're preparing to launch Give the Gift of Business, a holiday bundle which includes JFS.  
(From Dec 18th to Dec 31st only!)

That last one is all thanks to you, our readers. So many of you gave us great feedback on the book, *and* said you knew someone(s) you'd recommend read JFS.

So we thought... why not make it a present? Thus the 4th launch was born.

After the holidays, we'll be setting up a rolling launch to collect new visitors and old readers alike, send them an awesome email sequence about shipping, and then pitch the book at the end. Voila.

Then maybe some webinars or guest posts, or interviews...

I could go on forever. And we will.

**Create good habits.** I used all of the above techniques religiously because I use them a lot, every day, to keep myself in good, productive fashion. I'm not perfect; I slip into doing things too big, too long, too forward-facing sometimes. The good news is, all my practice of *doing it right* makes those mistakes just feel... subtly... wrong. That gut feeling tells me to wake up & look at what I'm doing.

It really works.

That's it, my friends.

Go forth and Just Fucking Ship.

# Appendix: The time & place for work

What makes you “feel” like you’re getting shit done? What makes you excited to do it?

When you’re working on a dinner party, you know where your work is done – the kitchen, the dining room. Simply being in the right place gives you an incentive to work, a reminder to work, and an intuitive sense of accomplishment... another way of tracking your progress.

**Create a time & a place to work, like your kitchen would be for a dinner party;** a retreat – even if it’s just yourself.

We’ve done physical retreats to exotic places to work on Freckle (like Arizona, and rural Austria, ha). The change of scenery helps us get in work mode.

But you can create that same experience for free, in your own home or office or neighborhood, just like I did for this book:

- I used the app Concentrate to block myself from using Twitter and other distracting apps;
- I used my home iMac, which is a fairly “clean” computer to start with (*for free, you could create a different user account just to focus*);
- I set up camp at my dining room table, with my favorite

chair;

- I put on noise-canceling headphones, played ocean waves;
- I made it a habit to set up my Freckle timers, and click start, pause, and log religiously;
- I lived in Trello and Ulysses, my two apps of choice for this work;
- I ordered in salads & sandwiches for lunch *and* dinner, and
- And most importantly, I told everyone what I was doing & not to bother me.

You might find you work best in a coffee shop or other place. If possible, sit in the same spot, listen to the same music/sounds, order and eat/drink the same things.

To your habit-happy subconscious, all these things will add up to *work mode is happening now*. And then *work mode happened*. And *I felt productive*.

## Useful things for your work environment

- A whiteboard, magnetic board, or similar is a great way to visually lay out the work you're going to do and keep it in sight – and also super for mise en place
- You want a kanban board to track your progress through your work. Either a real wall with sticky notes or index cards (delightful because you can tear them up), or

Trello for a web version

- My app, Freckle, is the best at making time tracking fast & painless *and* giving you nifty visualizations to help you see and feel your progress; the Mac menu bar timer is a lifesaving add-on
- Concentrate is a great little Mac app that will block sites or apps for a period of time so you can get down to business... protip: you could also create & log into a fresh user account without those apps installed.
- There are any number of writing tools/environments that people love: Hackpad, Ulysses, Byword, IA Writer, Omm Writer, Scrivener, etc. The key is to find the one that suits *you* and do it *quickly*. For me, I needed to have a book project not a collection of separate files, so it was down to either Ulysses or Scrivener. I've used Scrivener before and love it, but went with Ulysses this time because its PDF export was so much simpler to set up, and it supports Markdown out of the box. (I spent about 10 minutes on this decision, for reference)
- Background noise for focusing: Songza has a bunch of free playlists of different types of waves, crackling fireplace, quiet park, coffee shop, etc. My Noise is a personal, configurable noise generator with a ton of options.
- Bose QC25 noise canceling headphones are *the best*, but obviously at \$300+ a luxury and not a required tool. In-ear earbuds can offer isolation at a fraction of the price, but be careful with volume because it's easy to run them too loud and damage your hearing.
- Don't underestimate the power of a good keyboard and

mouse or trackpad. My favorite mouse is a Logitech MX1000 – which is pretty old by now, but it's the most comfortable thing. And I prefer the full-size Apple USB keyboards. What you prefer will vary, but your hard work deserves the right input devices. Monitors, too. If I had to write this book on my laptop's screen, I would have felt claustrophobic the entire time. Be sure the screen is situated so you aren't bending your neck. Be sure the chair you're sitting in is ergonomic for you. If you stand, use a gel pad.

# Appendix: Temper your feelings

We already talked about Feeling to fact, but in case you're in need of just a little extra support, you're not alone.

Guilt, anxiety, fear, even excessive excitement – these negative feelings (yes, negative) are the #1 predictor of failure we've seen. And over the years, we've had the chance to study, and help, hundreds of our students.

This chapter is broken into two parts:

- Part 1: Light anxiety & avoidance
- Part 2: Fear & rage

## Light anxiety & avoidance

You want to host a dinner party, but don't know where to start, so you don't. Ever.

You're worried that your dinner party won't be perfect, that somebody might not absolutely *love* what you make. So you don't host a dinner party. Ever.

You feel bad that you haven't hosted a dinner party, when you *should* have. So you... avoid thinking about it.

You know several recipes by heart, but your uncertainty about your abilities to execute a new recipe, and your anxiety that it might not come out *perfectly*, means you're only to eat grilled cheese... three times a day, for the rest of your life.

You're hosting a dinner party. You make a small mistake; the steak isn't perfect. You spend the rest of the evening unable to enjoy your friends' company, even though they say the steak is *delicious*.

You imagine your dinner party is going to be the talk of the town, the event of the season! It does turn out quite nice, but it's still... just a dinner party. You can't stop thinking about how you let yourself down. You stop hosting parties.

These are the emotional anti-patterns we have seen over & over in regular, everyday people who *can* succeed, but don't, because they won't try, or they won't try again.

### **Good news: You can easily get better**

Yes, easily. It may seem like a big deal, but trust us, it's just your ego fighting back. But your spoiled ego is not the boss of you. *You* are.

These emotional anti-patterns are disruptive, but they're not pathological. It's not fear, it's uncertainty. Your uncertainty isn't actually giving you panic attacks, you don't feel a physical rush of adrenaline.

*"You miss one hundred percent of the shots you don't take."*



– Wayne Gretzky (*cheesy yet deep and true*)

You're bedeviled by nothing but thought-patterns. Bad habits, in other words.

Nothing but an excuse for you to quietly sliiiiiiiide your attention away. So you aren't challenged. *Ever*.

Every one of the bad habits above can be conquered using the techniques in this book.

### **Working effectively is the best therapy**

Use these techniques, and over time, you'll get better.

Antsy about where to start? That's why you have a backwards plan. Worried you'll make a mistake? Of course you will, it's a law of physics – but you can learn, with this book, how to handle them gracefully. Lost in a fantasy world about The Perfect Result? Bring yourself back with crispiness, your plan, your components, your progress tracking. Focus on your guest. Focus on your work. Know what to cut, and cut ruthlessly.

Just Fucking Ship.

You'll gather your research and set it out for yourself, mise en place. Then you'll sit down and write a blog post. You'll feel a little bit twitchy, but you'll ship it anyway. Then you'll notice that *nothing bad happens*. Do it again, and again, and the anxiety of uncertainty will fade away.

You'll develop confidence, and you'll develop faith in yourself, too. You'll want to do more, next time. Better.

And eventually you'll know the pleasure of a *stranger buying a thing you made for them*. And you'll feel the joy of knowing it's because you worked hard, and smart, and stuck with it.

**Shipping is great therapy.**

## **Fear & rage**

What if your problem is... bigger?

We all have a friend who does well, but is miserable the entire time. "I'm going to fail!" she moans. Or "This is shit," he bitches about his own (rather good) work. *This will never work. It's not good enough. I'm an asshole for falling behind. Ugh, guilt guilt guilt angst angst angst.*

Maybe that friend is you.

You're hosting a dinner party. You've done all the things right – you're starting small, you've got a small audience, you've prepped your ingredients with *mise en place*, you're following a recipe.

You make a mistake.

You take the pan with the two juicy ribeye steaks, now slightly overcooked, and you *fling it through the window*. You scream "I'M DONE WITH THIS!" and you rush your houseguests out the door. In a rage, you sweep all your appliances off the counter and kick in your oven glass. Your stomach sinks; you feel like a piece of shit. *I'm a terrible person*. You crawl into bed... and never get up again.

You've sabotaged yourself completely. Again.

This is more serious than the scenarios we talked about earlier.

### **What if this was real life?**

If a friend of yours did this in real life, you'd be on the phone immediately, seeking psychological and medical intervention for them.

Maybe you act this way, metaphorically, silently and inside your own head... when it comes to your product.

What do you do about it?

### **If you're doing this to yourself, you can stop**

And you want to, not because it gets in the way of you achieving things, but because no one deserves to be treated the way you're treating yourself.

When your reaction to failure – or even the prospect of failure – is so outsized, the techniques in this book may help, but it's also time to get some extra assistance. I'm speaking from experience, so trust me.

My recommendation is mindfulness meditation, as described in the Create good habits chapter.

But when you're not just flailing, when you're *really* struggling, skip Jon Kabat-Zinn and go straight for this audio book & follow it:

**When Things Fall Apart** by Pema Chodron

Yes, the audiobook – not the written version. The audio

component is a huge part of this book's effectiveness.

The critical technique is to learn how to be kind to yourself. Truly kind. To treat yourself as you would treat your most beloved friend, if it was them who freaked out at a dinner party instead of you. You deserve to be treated with kindness and empathy by the person closest to you... you.

The best way to do that is to become friendly with your own thoughts. You can't run away and make friends at the same time.

Facing those feelings is scary as fuck, which is why Pema Chodron's audiobook is the best. She'll be right there with you.

# Talk to us

Thanks for reading! It was my pleasure to write this for you, and I can't wait to hear what great things you're doing.

We'd love to hear from you if you've got comments or questions.

Tell us what you're using JFS to just fucking ship!

Write us, any time:

[teachers@slash7.com](mailto:teachers@slash7.com)

Amy Hoy & Alex Hillman