

## THE BIG IDEAS

### Purpose

That's where it all starts.

### Let's Define Yours

Some helpful questions.

### Make Something

YOU are excited to use.

### Are You Ready to Serve?

Is the real question.

### Character

= Your most valuable asset.

### Start

Before you're ready.



## Make Your Mark

The Creative's Guide to Building a Business with Impact (The 99U Book Series)

BY JOCELYN K. GLEI WITH 99U · AMAZON PUBLISHING © 2014 · 260 PAGES

“As the book came together, I noticed certain themes bubbling up again and again that epitomized the core values of this new guard of creative entrepreneurs. And, refreshingly, they aren't about money or profit—despite the billion-dollar examples mentioned above—but rather about making an impact. I observed a renewed commitment to craftsmanship and the desire to create truly beautiful product experiences, a powerful focus on the importance of both giving and serving (your customers and your team) and a fierce dedication to building businesses that will change the world for the better.

Whether you're about to launch a new company or are considering how to retool an existing business, my hope is that this collection will offer you fresh thinking, practical advice, and the moxie to get out there and make something that matters.”

~ Jocelyn K. Gleib from *Make Your Mark*

This is the third installment in 99U's book series on the “missing curriculum” for creative leaders.

I enjoyed the first two—[Manage Your Day-to-Day](#) + [Maximize Your Potential](#) (check out those Notes)—so I decided to go for the hat trick and here we are. :)

Whereas the first book was about, as the title suggests, managing your days and getting stuff done while the second book was about actualizing your personal potential, this book is about how to build a business with impact.

Like the other two, it's a collection of short essays by great leaders + creators + writers. The content is organized in four domains: 1) Defining your purpose + 2) Building your product + 3) Serving your customers + 4) Leading your team.

The book is a quick, inspiring read. If you're a creative individual looking to build a business driven by purpose while creating deep impact and generating nice profits, I think you'll dig it. (Get a copy [here](#).)

As always, I'm excited to explore a handful of my favorite Big Ideas so let's jump straight in!

### IT ALL STARTS WITH PURPOSE

“The first thing to understand about building an incredible business is that it's not about you. Well, it's not ONLY about you. Rather, it's about finding the perfect alignment between your specific talents and expertise and what the world needs.

That's why the best businesses aren't profit-driven or even product-driven; they're purpose-driven. They strive to solve real problems, meet pressing needs, and change the world in ways big and small. They make a commitment to constantly learning and iterating and evolving to become better at executing their missions. They focus on creating value and let everything else follow. ...

*“The potential of creativity—and your ability to sustain yourself and serve others through creativity—is more about business than it is ideas.”*

~ Scott Branson

*"Decide what you stand for.  
And then stand for it all the  
time."*

~ Clayton Christensen

Because, at the end of the day, it's not about building up your ego or nailing the next massive IPO; it's about making something that matters."

Purpose.

It's at the heart of a great life and a great business.

As [Jocelyn](#) beautifully articulates, "It's about finding the perfect alignment between your specific talents and expertise and what the world needs."

That's a near-perfect echo of [Tom Rath](#)'s wisdom from [Are You Fully Charged?](#) (see Notes) where he tells us: "You create meaning when your strengths and interests meet the needs of the world. Knowing your talents and passions is critical, but that is only half of this supply-and-demand equation. What may be even more important is understanding what the world needs from you and how you can productively apply your strengths and interests. ...

*One of the rightful critiques of all the 'follow your passion' advice is that it presumes that you are the center of the world, and pursuing your own joy is the objective of life. Those who make a profound difference, in contrast, begin by asking what they can give. Starting with this question allows you to direct your talents toward what matters most for others."*

Focusing on purpose is also the first principle of the [Conscious Capitalism](#) movement.

In [their book](#), John Mackey and Raj Sisodia tell us that conscious businesses are PURPOSE-DRIVEN. They stand for more than just simply making money. And, in a magical twist of awesome, businesses driven by purpose make a LOT more money than those who are not.

I'll create a Note on their book in which we unpack the other attributes of a conscious biz, which include a multiple stakeholder orientation, conscious leadership and conscious culture.

For now: What's the purpose of YOUR business?

... Let's explore some more thoughts on how to discover our personal purpose.

## DEFINING YOUR PERSONAL PURPOSE

"What's interesting is that this method, which works so well for finding a compass heading for a company, also works for individuals. To define your personal purpose, start with these questions:

- How will the world be better off thanks to you having been on this earth?
- What are your unique gifts and superpowers?
- Who have you been when you're at your best?
- Who must you fearlessly become?

At the intersection of these four questions lies your personal purpose."

Those are some good questions posed in the essay by Keith Yamashita.

If you're currently trying to figure out your purpose, it's \*ESSENTIAL\* that you take the time to deliberately work on these types of questions.

Of course, you (almost certainly) won't find the answer in a single journaling session BUT if you keep at it, things will come into more and more clarity as you spiral up in your self-awareness and start making distinctions.

Paraphrasing the Buddha, your work at this stage of the game is to discover your work. (Then, to give yourself to it with all your heart!)

*"So you have to clarify: Who is your actual target? What are you actually trying to accomplish in the world? Everything else should flow from that."*  
~ Tim O'Reilly

If you're on the other side of having clarity on your purpose, #highfives and nice work!

And...

As we know, the great life is one hero's journey after another. We're always penetrating concentric circles of deeper and deeper purpose. So, you may also enjoy diving deeper here.

Journal time!

How will the world be better off thanks to you having been on this earth? \_\_\_\_\_

What are your unique gifts and superpowers? \_\_\_\_\_

Who have you been when you're at your best? \_\_\_\_\_

Who must you fearlessly become? \_\_\_\_\_

## MAKE SOMETHING AWESOME YOU'RE EXCITED TO USE

"Product is a clinical term for a passionate endeavor. As Steve Jobs, the 'product guy' par excellence, put it: 'Every good product I've ever seen is because a group of people cared deeply about making something wonderful that they and their friends wanted. They wanted to use it themselves.'

Captured in that statement are the twin ideals that guide all great product development: an unstoppable enthusiasm for bringing something great into the world and a relentless focus on usability."

One of the first (and best) business books I ever read was *Rules for Revolutionaries* by Guy Kawasaki. I read it as the 25-year-old CEO of a company that just raised \$5m and was going from 2 employees to 45 in <9 months. (I need to re-read and feature it in the Biz series of Notes I need to do!)

Guy was the Chief Evangelist of Apple back in the day. ALL about the product. One of my favorite Big Ideas from the book was the fact that you need to EAT YOUR OWN DOG FOOD.

You need to, as Jobs so brilliantly said, create something YOU are giddy to use.

One of the little data points that became salient for me as we made our big biz shift at the end of 2014 from running an Academy with 250+ professors to focusing exclusively on my work was the fact that I had only taken *one* of our hundreds of classes. (!)

Yet, every morning, I'd start the day by reading one of my old PhilosophersNotes.

I was eating one dog food and serving another. Not a good idea. :)

Now, one of my main drivers in creating new Notes is that \*I\* want to re-read them (again and again) in the years ahead. As I passionately read a book, I'm on the hunt for fresh Ideas that can change \*my\* life. Then I'm excited to type them out and capture them in a way that the future me (and hopefully a bunch of other awesome people) will enjoy for years to come.

The first person I share a bunch of new Notes with is my right-hand genius, Evan. He and I met because he was a fan of PhilosophersNotes years ago and he always (!) enthusiastically replies to a new Note with an uber-awesome email quoting a bunch of Ideas that fired him up. (I get all misty typing that for a number of reasons.)

*"It always seems impossible until it's done."*  
~ Nelson Mandela

We're giddy to build something we enjoy that we hope others enjoy. If you believe Steve Jobs's wisdom, that's a much wiser course.

So... How about *you*?

Are you passionately building something YOU and your friends want to use?

## ARE YOU READY TO SERVE?

*"Put the customer first.  
Invent. And be patient."  
~ Jeff Bezos*

"Yet, no matter how fast-paced our world has become, some things never change. Like the fact that building relationships takes time. Trust and loyalty are not given; they are earned—little by little, tweet by tweet, delightful experience by delightful experience.

Which brings us to the real question, which is not 'Will they come?' but rather 'Are you ready to serve?'"

That's from the preface to the section on *Serving Your Customers - How to craft your customer service process for adoption, engagement, and delight*.

—> *Are you ready to serve?*

At the end of the day, that's (by far) the most important question we can ask ourselves.

When I worked with my coach [Steve Chandler](#) (check out all our Notes on his goodness), he introduced me to two concepts that changed my life: profound service and astonishing.

He wrote a book called [Wealth Warrior](#) in which he makes the very simple (yet powerful) point that the only true way to create impact and sustainable wealth is via profound service. PROFOUND service. <— I love that.

And, the only way to really serve profoundly is to move beyond the idea of customer "satisfaction" to ASTONISHMENT.

Can you be so consistently generously awesome that you get people to say, "Wow!?!"

*That's* the standard we're after.

Quick q: How can you add a little more wow sauce to your biz?!

P.S. Let's also remember that relationships take time to build. We need to be patient and play the long game. As Seth Godin advises, our "marketing" should do one thing: build more trust.

Profound service followed by more profound service. Followed by more profound service. With a dash of astonishing wow sauce then more profound service. Day in and day out. Week in and week out. Month in and month out. Year in and year out. That's a nice purpose.

## CHARACTER = YOUR MOST VALUABLE ASSET

*"Every great business needs  
someone standing at the helm,  
guiding the ship. So if you  
truly want to make an impact,  
it's time to get your sea  
legs."  
~ Jocelyn K. Gleib*

"Given the current environment, I think that people are being forced to change. A few decades ago, when things were more stable, we could all just sort of stay in our little roles. But now the pace of change is so rapid, and things are confusing. So we have to just try stuff. And fail. And recover, and try again. If there's one skill that a leader needs, it's the attitude espoused by the late, great Nelson Mandela, 'Do not judge me by my successes; judge me by how many times I fell down and got back up again.' Creatives know that attitude so well—and manage ambiguity better than anyone else. And combined with the ability to execute, to really get things done, they're in a position to lead."

That's from a Q&A with John Maeda who is design partner at Kleiner Perkins Caufield & Byers—one of the world's leading venture funds.

This wisdom on perseverance as a key virtue in entrepreneurial success from a venture guy reminds me of the same wisdom from another venture guy.

Here's how [Robert Greene](#) describes Y Combinator's Paul Graham's approach in [Mastery](#) (see Notes): "They coached their apprentices in all of the principles they had learned along the way—the benefit in looking for new applications of existing technology and needs that are not being met; the importance of maintaining the closest possible relationship with customers; the need to keep ideas as simple and realistic as possible; the value of creating a superior product and of winning through craftsmanship, as opposed to fixating on making money.

*As their apprentices learned, they learned as well. Oddly enough, they discovered that what really makes successful entrepreneurs is not the nature of the idea, or the university they went to, but their actual character—their willingness to adapt their idea and take advantage of possibilities they had not first imagined. This is precisely the trait—the fluidity of mind—that Graham had identified in himself and in other inventors. The other essential character trait was supreme tenacity."*

A willingness to experiment. An ability to tolerate ambiguity. Execute and get stuff done. Character. Fluidity of mind. Supreme tenacity.

These are the qualities within us that make our businesses great. Our character is, quite simply (and by far), our business's greatest asset. Let's cultivate it every day.

P.S. Spotlight on Mandela's gem: "Do not judge me by my successes; judge me by how many times I fell down and got back up again."

## START BEFORE YOU'RE READY

*"Life shrinks or expands in proportion to one's courage."*

~ Anais Nin

"We're never ready. Important stuff, innovations that matter, they always need a bit more time, because the market isn't quite ready for the leap we need to take. The market isn't ready, and neither are we. The first person who used Instagram—what exactly did he do with it? Of course the app was launched prematurely, because it didn't work unless you had other people to send pictures to. And the car was marketed before we had roads to drive on and gas stations to fill up with.

Alexander Graham Bell launched the telephone long before people knew how to use it or realized that they wanted one. His original plan was for people to answer by saying, 'Ahoy,' because there wasn't a socially acceptable way for the upper classes to initiate a conversation without being introduced first. Fortunately, his friend Thomas Edison coined the now overused term *hello*. ...

Here's the thing: Every idea that matters hits the market too soon. While you're busy practicing and preparing you're also hiding from the market, keeping your worthy and world-changing idea from the rest of us.

If you wait until you are ready, it almost certainly too late."

That's Seth Godin wrapping up the book with a fiery call to action. Reminds me of [Steven Pressfield](#) and [Patricia Ryan Madson](#).

Here's how Pressfield puts it in [Do the Work](#) (see Notes):

*"Don't prepare. Begin.*

*Remember, our enemy is not lack of preparation; it's not the difficulty of the project or the state of the marketplace or the emptiness of our bank account.*

*The enemy is Resistance. The enemy is our chattering brain, which, if we give it so much as a nanosecond, will start producing excuses, alibis, transparent self-justifications, and a million reasons why we can't/ shouldn't/won't do what we know we need to do.*

*Start before you're ready."*

*"The more one does, the more  
one can do."  
~ Amelia Earhart*

And, here's how [Patricia Ryan Madson](#)—one of the world's leading Improv teachers—puts it in [Improv Wisdom](#) (see Notes): *"Why waste another moment? Today is an ideal day to begin. I'm sure that you aren't waiting to come up with a perfect plan or memorize all your lines before you start. You know better now. Just jump on the stage of life and try/see. Then you will have earned your membership in our secret society of improvisers. I wish you good fortune and great adventures as you skip, jump, and stumble along this way. Step on stage. Take a bow. Have a good time. Improvise!"*

While we're on a roll, [Peter Sims](#) comes to mind as well. In [Little Bets](#) (see Notes), he talks a lot about Pixar and tells us: *"As John Lasseter expresses his perfectionism, we don't actually finish our films, we release them."*

Remember: We're never fully ready.

Yet, it's (pretty much always) time to jump in and have fun!

Let's do that as we optimize, actualize and make our mark building a life + a business that makes a difference!

B

**Brian Johnson,**  
*Chief Philosopher*

P.S. Ahoy, matey!

P.P.S. Let's do this! :)

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## About the Author of "Make Your Mark"

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As editor-in-chief and director, Jocelyn K. Glei leads the 99U in its mission to provide the "missing curriculum" on making ideas happen. She oversees the 99u.com website--which has won two Webby Awards for Best Cultural Blog--and leads the curation and execution of the popular 99U Conference.

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99U is on a mission to provide the "missing curriculum" that every creative person and team needs to make ideas happen. 99U is part of Behance, a team devoted to empowering and connecting the creative world. [www.99u.com](http://www.99u.com)

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Brian Johnson loves helping people optimize their lives as he studies, embodies and teaches the fundamentals of optimal living—integrating ancient wisdom + modern science + common sense + virtue + mastery + fun. Learn more and optimize your life at [brianjohnson.me](http://brianjohnson.me).