Mini Projects

An Unconventional Approach to Exploring New Activities

I F YOU ARE LIKE me, you probably have many ideas roaming around in your mind. And if this is the case, you probably also have some projects going on right now. Or maybe you *want* to have some projects going for you.

Life is full of interesting things and it would be a pity if you did not commit yourself to some medium-term and long-term goals. Interestingly, it seems that the older a person gets, the more projects they have going on; some people are into model making, others like drawing, and others pursue other unusual projects.

Some may see these projects as peculiar or weird, but I believe that the people who pursue them are quite enthusiastic about them. The truth is this: no matter what project you pursue, if you like it and it's legal, you have my OK.

To put it bluntly, I think every person should pursue some side projects. And if you are just starting with a side project, I think implementing it in the way of the HabitSystem is a great idea. Every project requires nurturing at the beginning because it will be fragile during the early stages. Only when it becomes a full-fledged hobby can you consider it a habit.

We often think that hobbies just come to us and that we like them naturally. This is only true to some extent. Most of our hobbies are formed when we are malleable children. Our parents, like it or not, signed us up for sports teams or put us into music lessons. At the beginning, we didn't like it most of the time. Only when practice led

to us becoming better, did we slowly start to like what our parents forced on us.

We do not recognize that, at a later age, we are free to start whatever we want. It's just a matter of choice and dedication. Most people are so entrenched in a limiting mindset that they fail to see all the great opportunities in front of them. When they see somebody who has a great hobby, they think to themselves *Oh my god, I envy this person so much. He obviously has a calling and it all comes so naturally to him. Why is he so good at X? I will never be able to have such a great hobby.* This mindset is toxic and will inevitably lead to failure.

The underlying problem is this. Our society has made you think that your hobbies should come to you *naturally*. They say it's destiny or a calling. I call bullshit on that. Yes, sometimes you just happen to find something you like, and it becomes a hobby; you get good at it and like doing it. I admit that this happens and when it does, fine. However, why not be more assertive when choosing what you want to be your hobby? Why not try different things from a vast array of different domains and *then* decide what it is that you want to pursue? Why not take responsibility for it?

Simply by being assertive and open, you can find a new hobby for yourself. It actually is quite simple. I will make you an interesting proposal. Are you ready?

First, you will create a list of up to ten things that you've always wanted to try: painting, photography, calligraphy, copywriting, hunting, climbing, playing golf, swimming, programming, architecture, or any other activities that interest you. These are just some suggestions. I believe it's best to develop some personal ideas that *you* came up with. Great, so you have all those things on the list? Now, what to do about them?

Let me introduce you to *HobbyMaker 2000 XL*. For the lack of a better name, this is the name I'll give to the concept I'm about to explain. Let me start with a question:

If you start from scratch (or with very little knowledge and skill), how much do you think can you learn on a new topic in 10 hours?

Think about it!

Take *photography*. As you live in a technology-rich world, you probably have at least a hundred, if not a thousand, pictures. But do you actually know anything about photography, focal length, aperture, shutter speed, the Golden Ratio, editing pictures, framing, or RAW vs. JPG?

Maybe some of these ring a bell, and if you are into photography, you probably know a lot about these terms. But if you are not, how much do you think you can you learn about them in 10 hours? How much can you actually improve your photography skill in 10 hours if you practice *deliberately*? Not just hitting the trigger, but thinking and learning about how to frame the shoot and so on.

Ten hours is *a lot* of time in one block. But I'm not talking about 10 hours in one long marathon stretch. What I'm talking about here is practicing for 20 minutes every day for 30 days.

Imagine you practice photography for 20 hours stretched over one month. In that time, you could read a book on photography (maximum of five hours) and learn about the history of it and all about important people and inventors in the industry. You'd certainly learn about the basic terms I just mentioned previously. Then you could watch five hours of free tutorials on YouTube, and you'd still have 10 hours to actually go out and take photos and apply the knowledge you just gained. Trial and error and learning. In 20 hours—over the course of just one month—you will have

learned the basic skills of photography. All it requires is a computer and a camera. You can borrow or rent one, but if you happen to actually want to learn photography, chances are you have already purchased one (and have never really used it consistently or to its full potential).

There it is. You have effectively and efficiently used 20 hours of your time to learn something (completely) new. You are now by no means a professional. You are not even an amateur. But with just 20 hours of practice, you are probably already better than 80% of other people.

Here's the thing: the human brain learns *wicked* fast. But because our society has become anti-learning, we often forget about this amazing capability. We tend to think that learning ends when we're out of college or high school. In fact, that is the time when learning actually *starts*. Once out of college, real life begins. Now *you* can choose—you have to choose—what you want to learn in your life. It is 100% your responsibility. You can waste your time or use it wisely. My proposal is to do the latter.

Let's get back to our list. Armed with your list of up to 10 activities, take some time and prioritize. Which ones do you want to start first? Make a list of your top three. In the next step, start your new project just like any regular Growth Habit. Think about how you can start your highest prioritized activity. Obviously, it depends on the activity when determining how to start. If you are in a desert and want to start surfing, your best bet is to go to a location where surfing is possible. And remember: do not plan *too much*. The gist is to learn by doing.

Now you have to decide on how much time you want to invest. By this I mean how much time you want to spend in your first *run*. I think that 10 or 20 hours is a good idea. You can learn the basics of

most activities in 10–20 hours. Often, after investing 20 hours you will be able to decide whether you're truly into that activity or not. After 20 hours of photography, most people can decide whether it's something they can imagine doing more of or not.

Of course, some activities will require more time to get into them. But here's the deal: imagine you try three different activities. Given you decide to invest 20 hours per activity, this will require 20 minutes of doing/learning that activity per day, and in half of a year, you'll have a basic understanding of three different activities.

You may now argue that half a year is a long time, but it's actually quite short, considering that you may find a new hobby *for a lifetime*. And believe me: with three activities, you will find something that you like. Voilá! Just like that you've found yourself a new hobby.

As soon as you make the decision that you want to go further with one of the tried activities, you can begin to pursue them more in depth, invest more time, and learn even more. This way, you turn 20 hours of deliberate practice into an infinite project: *a lifetime hobby*.

Mini projects fit the general approach of the HabitSystem perfectly and can thus be implemented just like your regular Growth Habits. The only difference may be that you also keep track of time and that you may decide that the chosen activity is not the right choice.

What is this all good for? Why force yourself to try something you may end up not liking? If you ask this question, you reveal your limited mindset. You're still stuck in an event-focused mindset and results-focused thinking. The truth is that you will learn *a lot* in this half year. You will sharpen your mental abilities and you will

begin to see the world with different eyes. In fact, a lot will have changed.

First, you have deliberately tried something new. You have taken control of your life. Second, you have broadened your knowledge and bettered yourself. Dozens of hours of practice—no matter the field—will make you a more capable and smarter person. Even if you have just learned the basic terminology of photography, understood the rules of chess, applied the syntax of HTML, figured out the different architectural orders, or slightly improved your golf swing —you have improved.

This is what I call *life-long learning*. If all of this sounds impressive, it's only because the bar is set so damn low nowadays. You can learn anything, and you should try many different things because life is too short to end up with too many unanswered *what ifs*.