



Find the Fire

Ignite Your Inspiration and Make Work Exciting Again

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Remember when you were eager to go to work? When the prospect of learning new things and making things happen got you out of bed in the morning?

That kind of inspiration is difficult to sustain, as evidenced by the overwhelming majority who drag through their days. What happened to make so many people so tired of their jobs?

Find the Fire locates the culprits, and they're not just subpar working environments or uninspiring bosses. In the majority of cases, what drags people down are self-defeating beliefs and thought processes. From fear and disconnectedness to loss of control and feelings of insignificance, nine recurring "Anti-Muses" sap our energy and optimism.

By taking control of the situation and self-administering antidotes, *Find the Fire* shows how to counter the forces that drain inspiration and create conditions where it thrives.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- How to overcome the common fears of failure, change and criticism, adopt an open mind, seek out new experiences and embolden yourself to take more risks.
- To build upon progress and create momentum, unleash creativity and produce work you're proud of, and reclaim a sense of control and power.
- How you can bolster your inner strength, persevere through challenges, lift your self-confidence and earn respect.
- How to dispel the feeling that nothing really matters and make an impact with your work.



by Scott Mautz

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THE COMPLETE SUMMARY: FIND THE FIRE

by Scott Mautz

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PART I: THE ANTI-MUSE

The Forces that Drain Our Inspiration

With motivation, we take hold of an idea and run with it. With inspiration, an idea takes hold of us. The message here is don't wait around for your leaders. Research shows that over 70 percent of us have lost that feeling of inspiration. Don't wait around for your leaders to inspire you and keep you inspired. It's time to take the matter into your own hands. While inspiration can be elusive, it can, in fact, be *codified and coaxed*. You don't have to helplessly wait around for it to happen to you — you can create the conditions where inspiration is much more likely to occur. Find the fire.

The First Spark

The first spark is struck in one of three ways: You choose to view your job in a new light; you decide, in your heart of hearts, that it's time to move on and find new work, but you first commit to understanding the triggers and warning signs of what keeps and drains your inspiration over time so that you can inform your search; and if you're lucky enough to be in a place where you feel inspired in your job, you then choose to elevate your awareness of why that's the case and how to keep it so.

The Anatomy of Inspiration

Leading research on inspiration reveals three defining characteristics. Our inspiration can be *evoked*, can come

from *within*, and either of these can *compel us to act*. Being compelled to act is, of course, the most critical. It's what we decide to do with the inspiration that matters. The problem with being inspired *by* is that by definition, it's *passive*, so the core elements of inspiration are inherently *passive, elusive or repressed*. The point is that this is hardly fodder for believing that sustained self-inspiration is right around the corner.

The Anti-Muses

In Greek mythology, Zeus and Mnemosyne had nine daughters: nine Muses who each presided over different factions of art and science. According to legend, these daughters serve as the spirit or source that inspires an artist. What if there were powerful forces laboring to actually *kill* our inspiration? There are.

- **Fear:** Inspiration is doomed in the face of three fears in particular: the fear of failure, the fear of change and the fear of criticism.
- **Settling and Boredom:** This Anti-Muse exists, more than any other, by our own choice. Rejecting this force is about choosing to shift to a more open mindset and seek out new experiences.
- **Inundation:** This Anti-Muse is the mortal enemy of our ability to make progress work.
- **Loss of Control:** Research shows that when we feel we have control over what happens in our lives and can favorably influence outcomes, even in times of duress, we're much more likely to look within ourselves for inspiration.



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- *Dwindling Self-Belief:* Without a revitalization of our personal presence, we unwittingly shut ourselves out from passion and possibility until eventually the siren song of inspiration is doomed to fall on deaf ears.
- *Disconnectedness:* Research shows that we become uninspired when we become disconnected from those we are surrounded by each day at work. These human connections are deep wells of energy from which inspiration can take form.
- *Dearth of Creating:* Countless studies and raw common sense will tell you that creativity blossoms when the artist, musician, employee, etc. becomes inspired. The link between inspiration and creativity is irrefutable — the former spurs the latter.
- *Insignificance:* This materializes as a feeling that what we're spending our precious time on isn't making a difference on anything that matters to us, and that we don't really matter or simply don't measure up to others.
- *Lack of Evocation:* The longer you passively wait for inspiration to appear, the stronger its cumulative negative effect. More specifically, when inspiration isn't evoked, your belief that it will ever show up rapidly wanes. ●

PART II: THE ANTIDOTE

Fear (Relinquished)

Fear disrupts the preparedness of our mind for being inspired, blocks action, dissuades discovery and growth and engages our brain in the wrong conversation. Fear distorts reality. The good news here is you don't need to go so far as to put a face to your fear. You just need to face it down — and stop letting fear limit you. When we press past our fears and venture forth “unprotected,” we discover. We see opportunities, not opposition.

Fear of Failure

Imagine a funnel, wide at the top then narrowing to its thin spout at the bottom. We start out at the top of that funnel with big, wide-open thinking and a huge scope of possibility. As we grow more fearful of failure, the width of the funnel contracts until we find ourselves in a vastly constricted worldview — the narrow spout at the bottom. When we can employ the proper Frame of Mind, Frame

of Reference and Frame of Action, we can reverse the inspiration-killing constriction caused by our fear of failure.

Frame of Mind. There are only three ways to actually fail: when we quit, don't improve or never try. Failure is an event, not a person. Never overgeneralize that these one-time events are harbingers of future, widespread failure. You need to believe that when you fail, it was for a reason. *You* don't suffer when you fail, your *ego* does. Your fear of failure shouldn't scare you; it's trying to tell you something's worth it. Failure is a key part of your portfolio. There is no truly successful person who doesn't have failure as part of their life portfolio.

Frame of Reference. As we spiral down the fear funnel, our point of reference narrows. We reverse this downward spiral when we anchor our frame of reference to something that provides a helpful, broadening perspective.

We are constantly comparing ourselves to others, but we're not even making fair comparisons. We tend to compare our own blooper reel to everyone else's highlight reels. There is one comparison that is worthy: When we find that even massively successful people have failed along the way, and more than recovered, it's reassuring and inspiring.

Stop and remember the potential rewards in the risk/reward equation that you calculated before proceeding. Draw from the thought of achieving those rewards to give you bursts of vitality as you press forward. Stay focused on the process. Break down your ultimate goal into individual steps or tasks to keep your mind focused, and avoid obsessing over whether or not failure is imminent.

Frame of Action. Practice getting it wrong. One of people's greatest fears is public speaking; when someone is required to practice it, they will eventually become good at it and lose their fear altogether. You simply need to get comfortable with being uncomfortable.

While visualizing success is an important step toward overcoming a fear of failure, you must also take action. Build on small steps of progress and knowledge gained along the way, slowly but surely reducing the radius of the unknown. Expand your knowledge and level of clarity on what it really takes to succeed. Beat fear of the unknown by knowing more. Expand your knowledge and level of clarity on what it really takes to succeed. Our subconscious self reminds us all day long of our anxieties. The key here is to not let anxieties behind your fear of failure subtly spam your mind.

Fear of Change

Our brains are wired to value longevity. Change threatens our sense of stability and robs us of our sense of

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control. Turn resistance into resolution. Believe that you have competence for change. Insist to your doubting self that you have the competence to succeed on the other side of change. Think of change like a software upgrade. Change can yield You 2.0 — a better version of yourself.

Find an anchor. We hate change so much because it makes us feel like we've become untethered. You can abate your fear by remembering what the change *won't* change about you or the world around you. Bring order to the unruly change, and get clear on the case for change to help strengthen the case for change. Get yourself involved in the change, and focus on what you *can* control.

Fear of Criticism

Critics believe the creators of the art really want feedback. They see themselves as reporters, boosters and skeptics, all *to create better art*.

Know that anything worth doing attracts admiration *and* criticism, but don't let that stop you. Avoiding criticism is what makes you weaker, not the criticism itself. Seek improvement, not approval. If you can't control the sting, keep it from swelling. You can rise above any words.

Decide who gets to criticize you. Not all criticizers are created equal, and some shouldn't even get a seat at the table. Let your elders inspire you. With fewer years ahead of them, reception of criticism is both fleeting and filed accordingly. Get the skeletons out of the closet. Share things you know you aren't good at and want to improve upon. Recall when criticism helped an outcome, and stay focused on the conclusion, not the criticism. ●

Settling and Boredom (Rejected)

Studies show that *up to 40 percent* of time spent at work is wasted, unproductive time — a product of a lulled and bored workplace. You have the power to get yourself unstuck. Leading researchers on inspiration have pinpointed “openness to experiences” as the single factor that most correlates with facilitating feelings of inspiration.

How to Embolden Yourself to Take More Risks

As we take risks and try new things, we expand our horizons and get exposed to more. Our fear of the unknown diminishes as a result, and we're more likely to try yet more new things.

Defining the rules of engagement in risk-taking up front and giving it some structure can greatly defuse inhibitions. If you're a manager of others, provide this framing.

If you're an employee, ask for it. Start with a request to do some experimentation. Celebrate and share the results if the risk pans out, and if it doesn't, be downright enthusiastic about what's been learned.

To help stimulate an environment more conducive to risk-taking, form risk pools. The process of taking risks thus becomes less scary through shared experience and will ultimately produce more of the desired risk-taking behavior. Research indicates that we consistently overestimate the consequences of taking a risk while we discount the cost of status quo.

When we reconnect with the people who benefit from the products or services we administer, it gives us newfound inspiration to take risks on their behalf. Reconnecting with the end user can also uncover unmet or previously unarticulated needs that will require risk-taking to fulfill, thus providing further inspiration.

Think of risk-taking as a skill that must be built, no different from visioning or strategic thinking. Big expectations for results will naturally encourage risk-taking. Plan to succeed. Don't let your doubts and worries become self-perpetuating. The inspiration to take risks often comes from the birth of exciting new ideas.

How to Get Learning and Growing Again

No one overtly chooses to stop learning and growing; it just kind of happens. Here are some powerful prompts to get you gung ho on learning and growth again:

- Seek conscious growth (becoming who you are) versus growth for its own sake.
- Dread obsolescence.
- Let your values vault you forward.
- Work *on* your life versus *in* your life.

To get growing going, discern between good and great, then go after the latter. Can you truly say that you really understand how your boss would define what great looks like? Many of us guess or simply don't ask.

Introduce new stimuli. If a stroll in the park or a little travel can produce cognitive benefits, imagine what introducing a portfolio of new stimuli could do.

How to Make Your Own Opportunities

As it turns out, problems, frustrations and adversity are a gold mine of opportunity. A constant effort of looking for ways to one-up how well things are done today can lead to tremendous opportunity. While looking to one-up current practices, you can two-up what you ask

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for. Periodically ask for stretch opportunities, assignments, resources and support that are so aggressive they require your boss's boss to approve.

Keep your eyes open for opportunities. Adopt the mindset of always adding value in your interactions with others. The more you expand your network of people you meet and serve, the more opportunities that will come your way. ●

Inundation (Relieved)

You know the deal. We're inundated and exhausted. This reality stifles progress, our sense of mastery and our feelings of preparedness. What you may not be aware of, though, is how detrimental all of this is specifically to our ability to attract inspiration. We can become overwhelmed for many reasons. Likewise, many things can cause us to feel a lack of progress, mastery or preparedness. The most common contributions to all these aspects of inundation are that we aren't good at making choices or setting priorities.

How to Make Choices and Set Priorities

Promise yourself you'll only work on what matters most, what will make the biggest impact on your core objectives. Be honest about the weight of the work you're about to take on — stop and ask yourself, how much work will it really take?

Write down the kinds of things you want to avoid or that you tend to get sucked into. Research is clear on the power of writing down your goals. The thing you should be taking on more of is the truly important; take on less of the distractingly urgent. A more fluid mindset is better, as it gives you permission to take on important new work but still forces accountability to counterbalance the total portfolio of work.

How to Stop Procrastinating and Get S#@! Done

Don't get sucked into these three misconceptions:

- *"I work better under pressure."* Research simply doesn't support this assertion.
- *"My willpower will kick in."* Researchers found that personal restraint levels were continually overestimated, leading to poor choices.
- *"My self-imposed deadlines will keep me on track."* Group studies have shown that the one that did best on task completion rate was the one working with a

series of interim deadlines. Research indicates setting such deadlines externally, such as with a boss or with friends, is the most effective way to encourage adherence to a deadline.

Ditch the distractions. Our brain will attempt to simulate big, hairy, productive work (after first avoiding it) by focusing instead on smaller, mindless tasks, thus giving the illusion that real work is being done. We remember uncompleted tasks better than we do completed tasks because uncompleted tasks nag at us. If we manage to start a task, we're much more likely to remember it and be driven to finish it.

How to Stop Being a Perfectionist

The only love procrastination gets is from the perfectionist, who employs it as a go-to tactic to delay starting that which they cannot completely dominate at that moment. Tell yourself done is done.

Perfectionists are often unaware of the impact this corrosive behavior has on others. They're assuming that everyone else is harshly judging them, so to do so as well is just the way of the world. Appreciating all you've done, versus obsessing over what you haven't, can set you free. And when you see in others all that they've become, rather than just seeing what they still need to be, your relationships with those people will blossom.

The majority of the time, the odds are pretty good that no one is holding you to the same standard that you're holding yourself to. Perfectionism can be fed by catastrophizing, or massively overestimating the negative impact of miscues or imperfections.

Don't let the opportunity to experience a sense of inspiration be drowned out by feelings of being overwhelmed. ●

Loss of Control (Reverted)

How You Give Away Your Power

Whether or not we realize it, we take actions that directly give away our power. You sacrifice the power of bringing the authentic you to the table to please others and gain approval. How do you shift the emphasis from pleasing to empowering?

How you feel about yourself should flow dominantly from your own self-appreciation and self-acceptance. Stop trying to be everything for everybody. Remember that politicians never get 100 percent of the vote, and neither will you.

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Feeling and acting like a victim when we're wronged is the next way we give away our power. It's easy to fall into victimhood and not realize it, so create a number of self-alerts to catch it early on. Those trapped in a victim mentality often have a core group of "rescuers" they turn to for sympathy. Redirect your first-responder unit by asking them not to feed your downtrodden behavior. Own your part of the story. Do right by not honing in on how you were wronged. Instead, think of all the ways you've been blessed in your life.

The last debilitating way in which we give away our power is when our inner monologue turns on us. The same damning belief, the same root cause, in one form or another, keeps surfacing over and over and over again: *"I'm not good enough."*

How You Can Take Back a Sense of Power

Step back and figure out what you want, setting a path and setting concrete goals that matter. Expand your mind by holding the commitment to learn new things sacred. Be intentional, and take a pause to check in with yourself. Don't try to do it all alone; draw power from others who are willing to give it to you. You take back some control when you control how you react to feedback. Grow stronger and more in control through changes. Being proactive puts power back in your hands.

How You Emit Power

People are drawn to your efforts to be a force for good. Counterintuitively enough, when you're willing to show your weakness, it's a sign of strength. A loss of control and the uninspiring feelings that go with it can go into overdrive in times of crisis.

Here are five crisis control lessons that come from some of America's worst crises. Start with the 5 C's: calm, candor, communication, concern and courage (lessons from 9/11 and the anthrax attacks of 2001). Get clear on reality (a lesson from the Cuban Missile Crisis). Create a unity of effort (a lesson from Hurricane Katrina). Set a North Star, and waypoints to get there (another lesson from Hurricane Katrina). Be visible up the chain and on the front line (a lesson from the BP oil spill). ●

Dwindling Self-Belief (Revitalized)

When our inner strength dwindles, we can feel adrift and alone in what becomes a seemingly massive ocean.

Self-Confidence

Maximum self-confidence matters. And yet the levels of self-confidence in the workplace are shockingly low. Self-confidence problems are often triggered by our perception of what others' conduct says about us. Remember that no one defines you but yourself. Our internal dialogue can either help or hurt us — don't let yours spiral downward.

Know that in the absence of confidence, courage takes over. There are always drops; it's how you pick up. Playing it safe all the time and not venturing out to try new things can give you the most temporary and false kind of confidence — one born out of simply avoiding failure. Don't lower others' expectations of you by doing it for them.

Perseverance

There are several powerful truths to be keenly aware of as you face daunting challenges. Know that persevering builds your skill set for the future. Developing mental toughness is a science-backed key to success.

Know just how debilitating worrying is. Perseverance can be massively aided by perspective. When falling short, don't abandon ship. Personify your perseverance. Believe that you're right where you need to be.

Remember the difference between perseverance and persistence. We can persist in doing things that might not even be good for us.

Create a support network. Enroll people you care about in what you're trying to accomplish. Remember, you need self-discipline and self-compassion.

Being Present in the Moment

A wandering mind is not a happy mind. Accept that multitasking is a myth. Make it a point to notice when your attention is drifting. It's so easy to zone out when you're tired. Go get a drink of water and clear your head.

Don't just passively take in information during a meeting. Notice what's in front of you — the people, the passions, the emotions, the energy and the intention of the information being transmitted.

When you're feeling self-confident, that you can persevere, that you're fully present and that you've earned the respect you deserve, your self-belief soars. It is then that you're most ready to receive the overtures of inspiration all around you. ●

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Disconnectedness (Reversed)

Making the choice to reestablish connections with those who count can be inspiring. When we do truly connect with our work compatriots, research clearly indicates that it can indeed make us more passionate about and inspired by our work.

Picture a sturdy, thick length of chain. Now imagine that each link in the chain represents the ideal behaviors for facilitating a strong sense of camaraderie within a group. You can instigate such behaviors and, in doing so, fully reconnect with and be inspired by your coworkers and your relationship with them.

To do so, it's helpful to consider three parts of the chain: the center link, the supporting links and the weak links. Camaraderie and connection with thy fellow worker starts with three centerpiece elements: (1) shared purpose, (2) trust and truth and (3) mutual respect.

There are many supporting links in the chain of camaraderie; the more links forged, the greater your chances of inviting inspiration back into your workdays. Create purposeful bonding experiences, shared experiences of substance, shared identity experiences, shared crucible moments and shared appreciation-enhancing experiences. Spread positive gossip. Invite their gifts in, and openly and subtly have their backs. Visibly backing one another up is one of the best ways to move camaraderie forward.

Cultivate Healthy Debate

Separate the person from the point. Encourage animated, not heated, debate. Enroll early; it's harder for people to objectively listen to input when they're too far down the road on something. Ask that opinions be grounded, not unfounded. To help you keep an open mind, which is absolutely essential to healthy debate, remember General George Patton, who said, "If everyone is thinking alike, then somebody isn't thinking."

Commend, not condemn, the opposing point of view. Those who stand up and speak their mind should stand out and be on your mind. Remember their brave behavior and reward it. Criticism must always contain a new idea or suggestion for strengthening the original idea. ●

Dearth of Creating (Reconstituted)

When we create, we become inspired, and when we're inspired, we create. It produces a powerful, virtuous cycle.

Creativity can be reignited (and inspiration invited back in) by leveraging the right *Stimulus*, by employing the right *Techniques*, by altering your *Environment*, and by adopting the right *Mindset* — *STEM*.

Stimulus

Creativity is contingent upon experiencing life. Seek out the assignments that others don't want. It's a good challenge, but more importantly, there's less pressure, the bar is lower and there is more breathing room to be creative. Go hunt for specific challenges to solve that interest you. Your inherent desire to solve those challenges will get your creative juices flowing. Find a pressing problem/opportunity or an intensely desired goal.

Technique

Saying that no idea is a bad idea is wrong — there are plenty of bad ideas. The key is to identify them as such early on, kill them and iterate on the ideas with the most potential. Our best creativity can often come from that last effort, the one where you let your hair down and improvise on the fly.

Go on the hunt for relatively small things that you can make better. Borrow and be influenced. It's a loan that will pay interest. Creativity blossoms when we open our senses and look past what's in front of us. Disney "Imagineers" look at a painting, then answer these questions: What does it smell like in this picture? What do you see to the left of the picture? The right? What's the air temperature in this picture? The exercise helps train the brain to think creatively by "looking past the edges" and by using all of one's senses.

The second you start to put structure on innovation is when you lose innovation. Turn off your self-monitoring brain. Research supports the fact that creative people are able to block the instinct to judge their output when they're in the middle of being creative.

Environment

Carve out the right space and time. If at all possible, the space should be removed from day-to-day distractions — in a location where you can drown out all the other noise that clogs the brain on a typical workday.

Form creative coalitions. Surround yourself with supporters. Surround yourself with people who are positive minded and receptive to your creative overtures. Rekindling anything is hard enough, so you want to add sparks, not a wet blanket.

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Mindset

Don't *talk* about building it, *build* it. It's also about do, don't ask. Just build it. Test. Learn. Iterate. Ask questions. One of the surest ways to spark creativity is to simply ask questions. That includes asking "What if?" before asking "How?" Be willing to do the hard work of creativity and innovation, and keep going when most others don't. ●

Insignificance (Reformulated)

Imbuing your work with greater significance and meaning energizes you and attracts more such energy in the form of inspiration. Achieving an inspired state nets higher levels of meaning, which yields still more energy and inspiration. Ask yourself what you're uniquely suited to lead or what unique contribution you could make. One of the ways to do more work of significance is to lead changes that make an impact on a workplace's systems or the way work gets done. You don't have to take on the entire way your organization is organized. Just organize an effort to work on a system, *any* system, that begs for improvement instead of accepting the current system at face value.

Help Solve a Circumstance

Think of the last time you were in a real pickle and someone went out of their way to help you out. You don't forget that. Fill an unmet need or do a deed that needs doing. Keep asking yourself, "what glaring need remains unmet?" "What deed needs doing?" and the opportunity for more significance will present itself to you as well.

Help move someone forward, and become an expert that others turn to. You can build your own platform of significance, too. Sharpen your expertise on a topic of passion and share it so well that others seek you out for the value you provide. It would be a fitting legacy. A worthy purpose. An inspiring mission possible. You should be intentional about identifying and articulating your legacy and purpose, too. Make a real difference in the lives of others by striving to inspire someone. ●

Lack of Evocation (Rediscovered)

Research indicates that three conditions must be present for an outside force to evoke inspiration in us: it's disruptive (forces you to think about things differently), it's

relevant (to core human motives) and it's attainable (feels like it can be accomplished).

The Three Behaviors of Evocation

Influencing the mood and mix. You can elevate the mood of your environment by being positive, enthusiastic and optimistic, which will greatly increase the likelihood that you'll receive the same in return. Positive environments and mindsets make it more likely you'll be inspired by something.

Studying the routine and the remarkable. Study things routine in nature so you can be inspired by something, but inspiration can be uncovered in things we take for granted.

How to morph your manager into a source of inspiration. Realize this, too, shall pass. Know that no single situation, or person, defines you. Don't back down to a bad boss. And you can't shirk your responsibility for improving the relationship. Once you've categorized your boss as horrid, evil, *etc.*, you're more likely to dismiss their better points and unfairly categorize all of their messy points.

When you understand the why behind the behavior of a difficult boss, what to do about it becomes much more self-evident. Research shows that the most important factor for enabling bosses to ultimately inspire you is whether or not you've developed an emotional connection with them. Bring the attitude you want reciprocated, and learn how to give your boss feedback. You deserve a little external help in your endeavors to rekindle inspiration.

So there you have it — all the tools to reignite your own personal mission of becoming inspired at work once again. You'll soon arrive at Destination Inspiration. Let's make it a permanent stop, shall we? ●

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