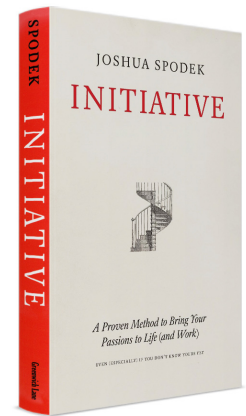


# Initiative

A Proven Method to Bring Your Passions  
to Life (and Work)

by **Joshua Spodek**



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## THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

In *Initiative*, author Joshua Spodek explains how entrepreneurship has gone wrong, becoming more akin to a dog show. Spodek describes this Dog Show Entrepreneurship as a high-tech, fast-growth, investor-backed, founders-in-their-20s, companies emerging from a Silicon Valley–like environment fueled by Shark Tank, media, and venture capitalists leading the way. The problem is that this approach feeds on myths about entrepreneurship that hurts entrepreneurs along the way—and worst of all, stripping away their desire and initiative for change.

Spodek presents Method Initiative as the cure for the lack of initiative running rampant in our culture. Method Initiative replaces Dog Show Entrepreneurship with initiative and creativity, academic conformity with practice of the basic skills, and the myths of entrepreneurship with building relationships and partners who share a vision for solving the same problem.

## IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- What is wrong with entrepreneurship today.
- The common myths that hold people back from taking initiative.
- How practice and initiative are the keys to entrepreneurship through building relationships and refining your ideas and strategies.
- Ten exercises you can work through to start your own problem-based project.

## Introduction

There is a problem among employees that run into problems in their work. Many want to go start a new company rather than taking initiative to start their own project that interests them and solves a common problem. Employees fall short of having the social and emotional skills to build relationships and act accordingly. Employees lack the experience, skill, and the belief to see and act on opportunities—to take initiative.

### The Problem

The basic problem is that our culture has turned initiative and entrepreneurship into a dog show. Dog Show Entrepreneurship is a high-tech, fast-growth, investor-backed, founders-in-their-20s, companies emerging from a Silicon Valley-like environment. Shark Tank, the media, and venture capitalists lead the way in this direction. Unfortunately, with examination, this type of entrepreneurship cares more about money than the entrepreneur. Joshua's dream company burst because of the tech bubble and post-9/11 regulations. He was replaced as CEO. This most discouraging even was one of the greatest learning experiences in his life.

### The Dog Show and Culture

People with the skills, experience, and beliefs to solve such problems, however unwanted, see these crises as an opportunity to help. Our society, sadly, is developing fewer such initiators. Changing the beliefs and goals of a system or culture can change it. So, there is hope.

### The Solution, Part 1: Initiative

The heart of this approach is initiative. Instead of working for your bosses, work with them. Take initiative, connect with people, and solve people's problems so well that they reward you for it.

Passion will increase throughout your life as you learn to sense your interests and emotions, as well as those of people around you. You will find and create more meaning, value, importance, and purpose in your relationships and in what you do. You will take responsibility for improving your situation and hold yourself accountable.

### Our Misguided Educational System

Successful initiators and entrepreneurs continue to arise without school. Many specifically leave school to greater success than those who finished. Our most educated are often the least skilled and feel the most trapped and helpless.

Universities' interests conflict with those of students who want to succeed through practical initiative and responsibility. They are academic institutions. Academic means distinct from practice. The academic information schools teach is nice, but the behavior they teach is compliance—not social and emotional development that enable you to create meaning, value, importance, purpose, and passion in yourself and others.

### The Solution, Part 2: Method Initiative

Method initiative is about practice — much like laying piano. You start with the basics and advance. You become fluent in the language of your craft. Learning the piano and Method Initiative are both active, social, emotional, expressive, and performance-based (ASEEP).

I call what this book teaches Method Initiative, with a specific application being Method Entrepreneurship, which I've taught in person and online to hundreds of people, embodied in the exercises in Part Two. The exercises are our equivalent of piano scales and basic training.

### The Myths

Your biggest hurdles aren't external. Most people's biggest challenges are internal, usually beliefs justifying why they haven't acted. So many people believe and perpetuate the same beliefs that they become myths. Here are the top myths:

- **The Myth of the Great Idea:** People feel they need a great idea first. Most began not with surety and confidence but with people iterating and persisting with a glimpse of an idea.
- **The Myth of the Great Résumé:** People think they need to build their résumé first. The best way to build initiative is by taking initiative.
- **The Myth of the Born Entrepreneur:** Everyone learns with practice. Start where you are and with what you have.
- **The Myth of the Great Elevator Pitch:** Don't sacrifice development for a short pitch. Build relationships, practice communicating your ideas often, and reform and recast your vision as you go.
- **The Myth of Needing Resources:** Few social problems get solved by one person alone. Solutions come from teams, with different members contributing. Work to find the people who have the resources to help you.
- **The Myth of Needing a Passion:** What works in

finding passions is acting on what you have access to. Action leads to passion.

- The Myth of Too Many Passions (aka Fear of Missing Out, aka Fear of Regret): Act on an interest you sense has potential, develop skills, and apply them to your next one.
- The Sources of the Myths: What Method Initiative Overcomes: These myths feed on our need to protect ourselves and come from ignorance, vulnerability, fear of judgment, and insecurity. Your values and acting on them can reveal great discrepancies between values and behavior.

## Principles

The seven principles make sense even on your first read, but doing the exercises will imbue them with their full meaning and value. That growing meaning will tell you that you're developing the skills, experiences, and beliefs of effectively taking initiative.

1. Personality matters less than skills you can learn.
2. The idea of a lifetime comes once a month.
3. Better than a great idea is an okay idea plus market feedback, flexibility, and iterations.
4. Start where you are with what you have.
5. Pitch and they'll judge. Ask advice and they'll help.
6. The problem leads to the solution.
7. Almost nothing inspires like helping others so much that they reward you for it.

## Initiative, Action, and Passion

Life passions inspire us, giving us boundless energy. What works to focus us is what I call the Initiative-Action-Passion cycle. The last, beautiful, liberating main ingredient to Method Initiative is exhausting interests. Switching projects is like switching to another staircase that goes higher. Passion leads you to take more initiative, which leads you to act more, which increases your passion.

## Method Initiative: The Exercises

Method Initiative is a comprehensive progression of exercises that leads you to master the social and emotional skills, experiences, and beliefs of taking initiative to help others so they reward you for it. In the process you will create a supportive community, including valuable people in your field.

Plan to 1) do one exercise, 2) reflect on it and write your reflections, and 3) do the next exercise. Repeat until the last exercise, or, if you exhaust an interest, restart and repeat the cycle with a new one. I recommend reflecting on the seven principles after each exercise. They will take on new meaning and importance with practice.

## You and a Problem You Care About

### Exercise 1: Personal Essay

Reflect on what brought you to this book. Direct your focus to a field you're interested in. 500 to 1,000 words is recommended. Name three people closer to your field of interest, three people with high status or value in your field, three relevant role models. These three can be people who are living or historical.

### Exercise 2: 5 Unsolved Problems

Exercise 2 is to think in the context of the field you wrote about in your personal essay and come up with five unsolved problems in that field. For each problem, write a potential solution.

### Exercise 3: 5 Close Contacts

Start developing your skills, experiences, and beliefs to attract people by sharing with them what you're working on and leading them to help you. List five people close to you likely to support you and unlikely to judge you. Family, friends, and colleagues can all work. Tell each about the projects from your last exercise. Ask each for a piece of advice on each. Write an improved version of the projects based on that advice.

## Creating Community

### Exercise 4: 10 Friends and Family Members

List ten friends and family members likely to support you and unlikely to judge you. Tell each your project and get three pieces of advice from each. Close each conversation by asking: i) "Is there anything to add that I didn't think to bring up?" ii) "Is there anyone you can think of you could put me in touch with who could help me with this?" The goals are to gather a list of the advice you got for your project and to write an improved version of the project based on that advice.

### Exercise 5: 5 People Who Feel the Problem

Find and talk to five people in the community you want to

serve who feel the problem you want to solve. Write each person's problem in his or her words. Five quotes, one from each person you spoke with, that states the problem in their terms from their perspective.

### Exercise 6: 10 People Closer to Your Field

Repeat exercise 4 ("10 Friends and Family Members") with ten people closer to your project's field. Tell each about your project so far and get five pieces of advice from each.

## Refining Your Solution

### Exercise 7: Create a Visual Model

Step 1: List the people and groups that your organization will interact with, along with what they will give and receive through your project's operation.

Step 2: Create a visual representation of your organization's operating model.

### Exercise 8: Details, Sustainability, and Financials

Your goal is to learn the operational details and assumptions as only financials reveal. Create a simple spreadsheet with 24 months of Revenues and Costs. Calculate the numbers.

Adjust the numbers until the project doesn't lose money.

## Creating Professional Relationships with Valuable People

### Exercise 9: Second Personal Essay

Write a personal essay about yourself in relation to:

The seven principles, your field of interest, the problem you want to solve, the people who feel the problem, your solution and goals, taking initiative in general, and your motivation and inspiration and purpose.

### Exercise 10: Valuable People

List ten people with value to your project whom you can reach. Tell each about the project so far and get five pieces of advice from each. Through this step, you may find that you have influential, resourceful people who are willing not only to help you but perhaps even employ you or fund your project.

## Conclusion

The way Method Initiative brings people together at work to cooperate and collaborate on passions becomes a new approach to the rest of life. It replaces isolation and alienation with support and understanding. Living by Method principles, Method Living, makes life about people—empathy, compassion, service, action, listening, understanding, making others feel understood, and so on. Once you start Method Living, there's no going back.

Beyond people using this book to learn and practice Method Initiative for themselves, teachers and parents should use it to teach the next generation to look forward to change with confidence and enthusiasm.



Joshua Spodek is a TEDX speaker, professor at NYU, host of the award-winning Leadership and the Environment podcast, a columnist for Inc. magazine, and author of the #1 bestselling book *Leadership Step by Step*. He holds five Ivy League degrees, including a PhD in astrophysics and an MBA from Columbia, where he studied under a Nobel laureate and helped build an X-ray observational satellite with the European Space Agency and NASA. Josh left academia to found a venture based on his invention that showed animated images to subway riders between stations.

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