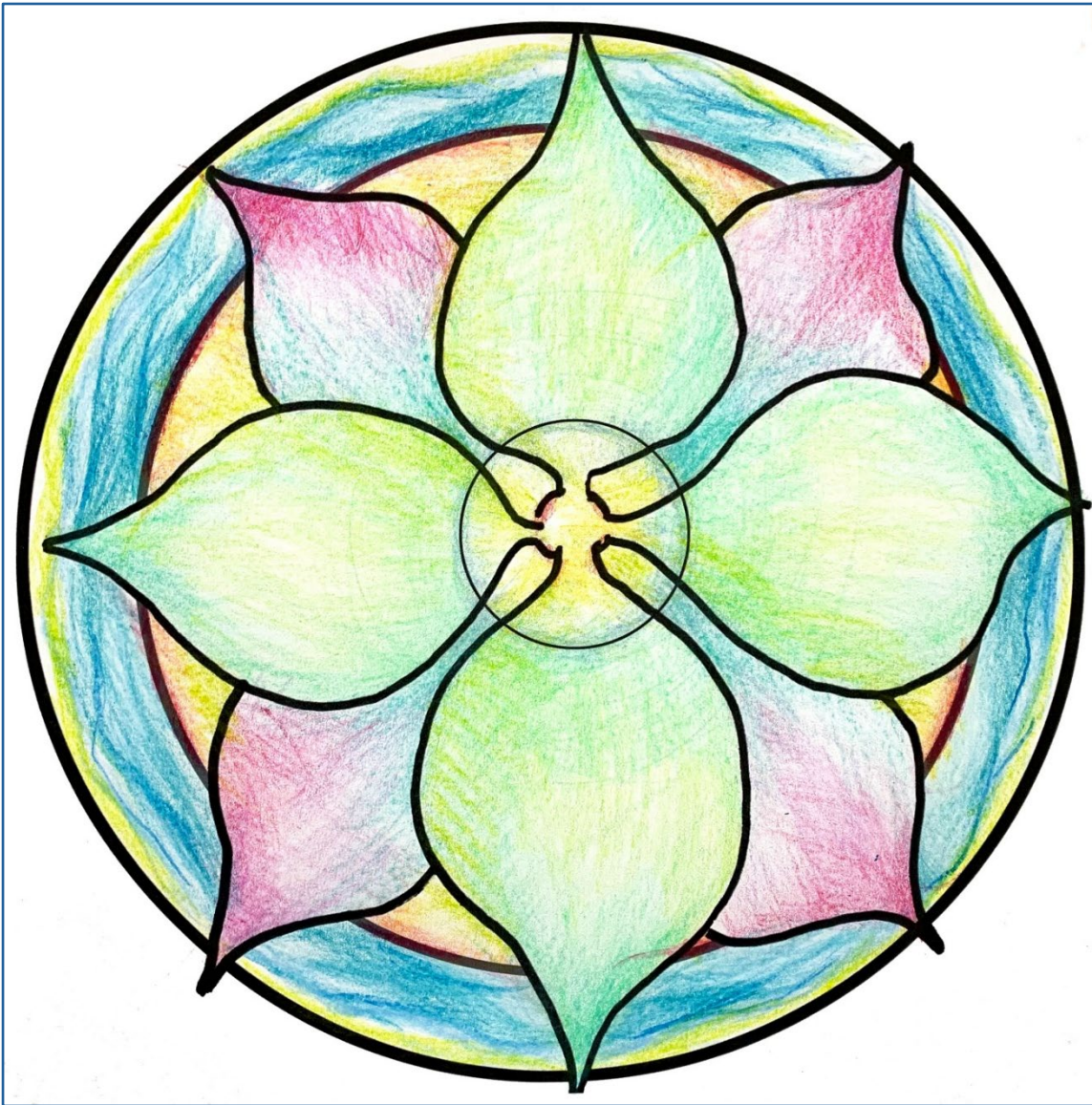


The Art of Change™

Being an Artist of Life

Ken Hubbell



The Artist of Life: Thriving in Uncertain Times

Change is the essential nature of life, confronting us in ourselves, organizations, communities, and the natural world around us. Whether slow and gentle or sudden and disruptive, life's changes demand our response. The question is: how will we make sense of these changing moments and respond with creativity and purpose?

As Rick Rubin notes in *The Creative Act*: "Regardless of whether we're formally making art, we are all living as artists. We perceive, filter, and collect data, then curate an experience for ourselves and others based on this information set."

This is the essence of being an **artist of life**—a concept pioneered by Zen master D.T. Suzuki. In times of complexity and uncertainty, this approach becomes not just appealing but necessary.

Especially now, in a transformative era of artificial intelligence and agents, we are experiencing upheaval at multiple levels. It feels like we are facing a conceptual emergency. The International Futures Forum puts it this way: "Where paradox, ambiguity and complexity characterize the landscape, where new frames and new language are needed to outgrow old mindsets... only genuine innovation has any chance of success."

This moment in time calls for artists of life capable of solving tough problems through ingenuity and sparking inspiration. In this series, we will explore ten practices that can help you thrive as an artist of life in uncertain times.

What if you approached each day as a canvas and your actions as mindful brushstrokes? How might your life transform if you saw yourself not just as a passive responder to change, but as its creative interpreter?

Join me in exploring the art of change—and discovering how to make your one wild and precious life a unique work of art. As Donella Meadows reminded us “the future can’t be predicted, but it can be envisioned and brought lovingly into being.” Let’s do it together!

Finding Your Inner Artist

Change is possibility.... We cannot control it, but perhaps we can learn to ride it, like a surfer on a wave or a bird on a thermal; to use its power to take us where we want to go. This enables us to **live with uncertainty yet act with confidence.**

— Dewitt Jones, *National Geographic* photographer, from *Focus Your Vision*

Releasing Control: The First Step to Artistic Living

We all have an inner artist waiting to emerge—not necessarily one who paints or sculpts, but an artist of life itself. As D.T. Suzuki wisely observed:

"We cannot all be expected to be scientists, but we are so constituted by nature that we can all be artists—not indeed, artists of special kinds, such as painters, sculptors, musicians, poets, etc., but artists of life."

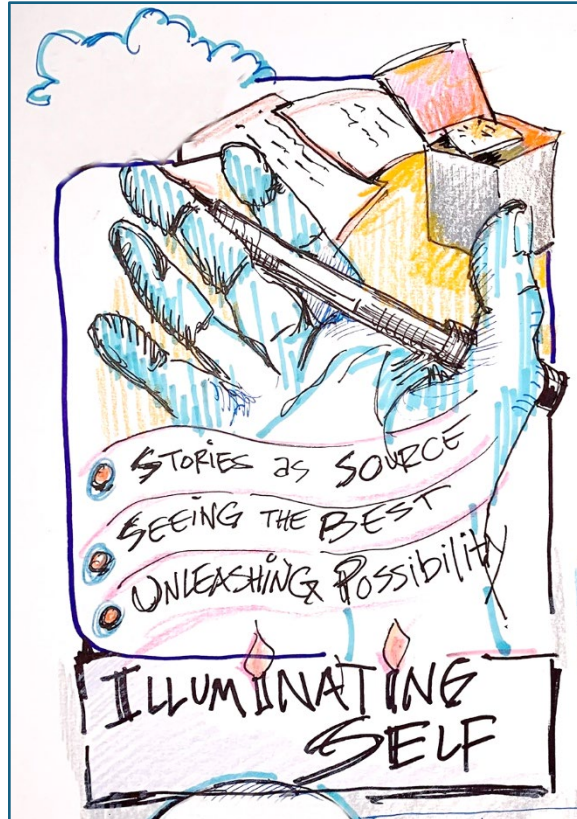
The first step to accessing this inner artist? **Letting go of control.**

Our instinct when facing uncertainty is to grasp tighter, to plan more rigorously, to eliminate variables. Yet the true artist of life understands that this tendency stifles creativity and blinds us to emerging possibilities.

"Life isn't about finding anything; life is about creating yourself." (Bob Dylan)

Try approaching life as "practice," a continuous experiment where you intentionally look for the overlooked and expect to be surprised. Make new connections between seemingly unrelated things. Notice the wild ideas that surface during ordinary moments.

This doesn't mean abandoning responsibility. Rather, it means loosening our grip on predetermined outcomes and remaining open to what life presents. The materials for your artistry aren't in some distant studio, they are with you right now:

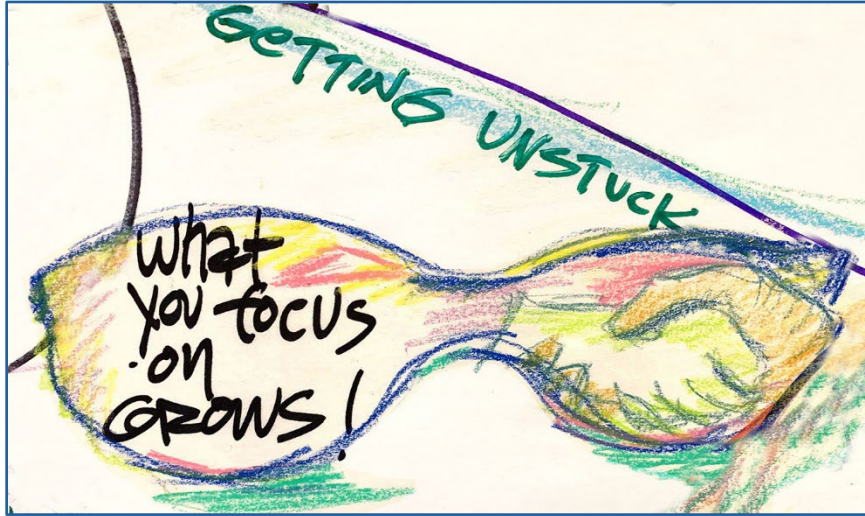


"An artist of life has no need of going out of himself," Suzuki continues. "All the material, all the implements, all the technical skills that are ordinarily required are with him from the time of birth."

Today, challenge yourself to release one thing you've been trying to control. Notice what happens when you create space for surprise. As Jeff Warren reminds us, "There is no part of your life you can't make more awesome" through attentiveness and appreciation.

What new creation might emerge when you finally trust the process?

The Art of Seeing Differently



Fresh Eyes: How Perception Changes Everything

When was the last time you truly saw something as if for the first time? Not just looked at it, but really saw it.

The artist of life cultivates fresh perception—what artist-educator Betty Edwards calls "direct perception... a different kind of seeing." This isn't just poetic language; it's a practical skill that transforms how we engage with challenges and opportunities alike.

Consider this: Artists often turn their reference photos upside down to break the brain's habit of categorizing and labeling. Similarly, we can disrupt our routine ways of seeing the world:

"Drawing is the time-bound activity of seeing," Edwards notes. "It stills the brain's noise and gives us a window to a process as independent as the autonomic nervous system."

You don't need to be a traditional artist to practice this. Try these simple perception-shifting exercises recommended by Edwards:

1. Take a familiar route in reverse
2. Describe a problem you are facing using only colors and shapes
3. Write with your non-dominant hand for five minutes
4. Look at everyday objects from unusual angles

Artist-theorist Max Bill believed that "art was the medium that would make thought visible." When we shift our perception, we often discover that the solution was hiding in plain sight—we just couldn't see it yet.

The next time you feel stuck, remember: The issue may not be the reality you are facing, but the lens through which you're viewing it. Change the lens, and you might just change everything.

What might you notice today if you approach it with beginner's eyes?

The Power of Beginner's Mind



Married to Amazement: Cultivating Wonder in Daily Life

"When it's over, I want to say: all my life / I was a bride married to amazement. / I was the bridegroom, taking the world into my arms."

These lines from Mary Oliver's poem "When Death Comes" capture the essence of what Zen practitioners call "beginner's mind"—approaching life with the fresh curiosity of someone experiencing everything for the first time.

The trouble is, we often sacrifice amazement on the altar of expertise. As Zenkei Blanche Hartman puts it:

"We all want to be the one who knows. But if we decide we 'know' something, we are not open to other possibilities anymore... We lose something very vital in our life when it's more important to us to be one who knows than it is to be awake to what's happening."

This isn't just philosophical musing—it's practical wisdom for innovation and problem-solving. The "expert" sees only what they expect to see. The beginner notices possibilities the expert has filtered out.

Zen master Yunmen Wenyan famously stated, "Every day is a good day." This isn't blind optimism but rather an invitation to approach each day with fresh eyes, without the baggage of yesterday's conclusions.

Challenge yourself: Where have you become the "expert" who no longer questions assumptions? What might change if you approached that area with beginner's mind?

Try this simple practice: For one day, preface your thoughts with "I wonder..." instead of "I know..." Notice how this subtle shift opens new possibilities and rekindles your natural amazement at the world.

What might become possible when you trade expertise for amazement?

Quieting the Mind



Building Inner Architecture: From Noise to Clarity

In our hyper-connected world, the mind rarely experiences silence. We fill every moment with input—news feeds, notifications, podcasts, music—leaving little space for original thought to emerge.

"Yutori is the conscious act of slowing down to allow us to savor the world around us. The refusal to rush."

Yet the artist of life understands that creation requires space. As Khenpo Rinpoche reminds us:

"For lasting joy, it is not enough to simply calm your mind; you must also choose to be an architect and work with your mind in such a way that you build a world worth living in."

This isn't about escaping reality but about creating the inner conditions for clarity and insight. When we quiet the discursive mind—the endless commentary, judgment, and chatter—we create room for something new to emerge.

Try this simple practice: Set aside 10 minutes with no input. No music, no reading, no scrolling. Just sit with a pen and paper. Notice what arises in the silence. What thoughts, images, or insights appear when you create space for them? Another way to experience this open space is to drive outside of the metro with no radio or music—surfacing submerged questions or solutions.

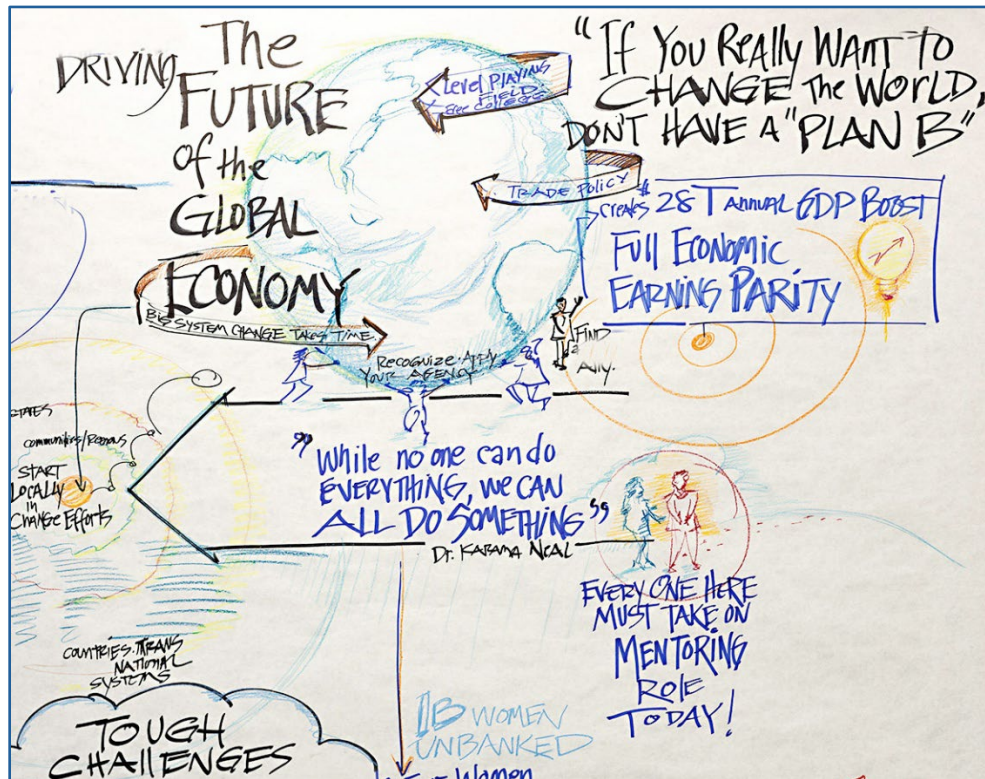
Like the practice of living intentionally, short bursts of meditation also require practice, “because it takes time and training to rewire and change old habits.” (Tricycle.org)

Kevin Cashman noted that “Anyone who is authentically self-expressing and creating value is leading... Leadership is principally about achieving one thing—consciously making a difference from within.”

This inner architecture, the quality of your attention and the clarity of your mind— isn't just personal development. It's the foundation for everything you create and everyone you influence.

What world are you building in the architecture of your mind? And how might that inner world shape the outer one you share with others?

The Compassionate Warrior



Standing Firm with an Open Heart

Artists of life aren't passive observers—they're engaged participants who take meaningful action. Margaret Wheatley calls such people "spiritual warriors," describing them as "those who are brave" whose "skills that give them power are compassion and insight."

This is warriorship of a different kind. Not aggressive or dominating, but steadfast and clear. The compassionate warrior stands firm for what matters while maintaining an open heart.

"Equanimity is a teaching not only of poise, but of grace, a deep knowing that life will not stand still for any of us, and that to rely upon stability is a recipe for agitation and anxiety." (Christina Feldman, from Tricycle.org)

"Ours is not the task of fixing the entire world all at once," Wheatley reminds us, "but of stretching out to mend the part of the world that is within our reach. Any small, calm thing that one soul can do to help another soul, to assist some portion of this poor suffering world, will help immensely."

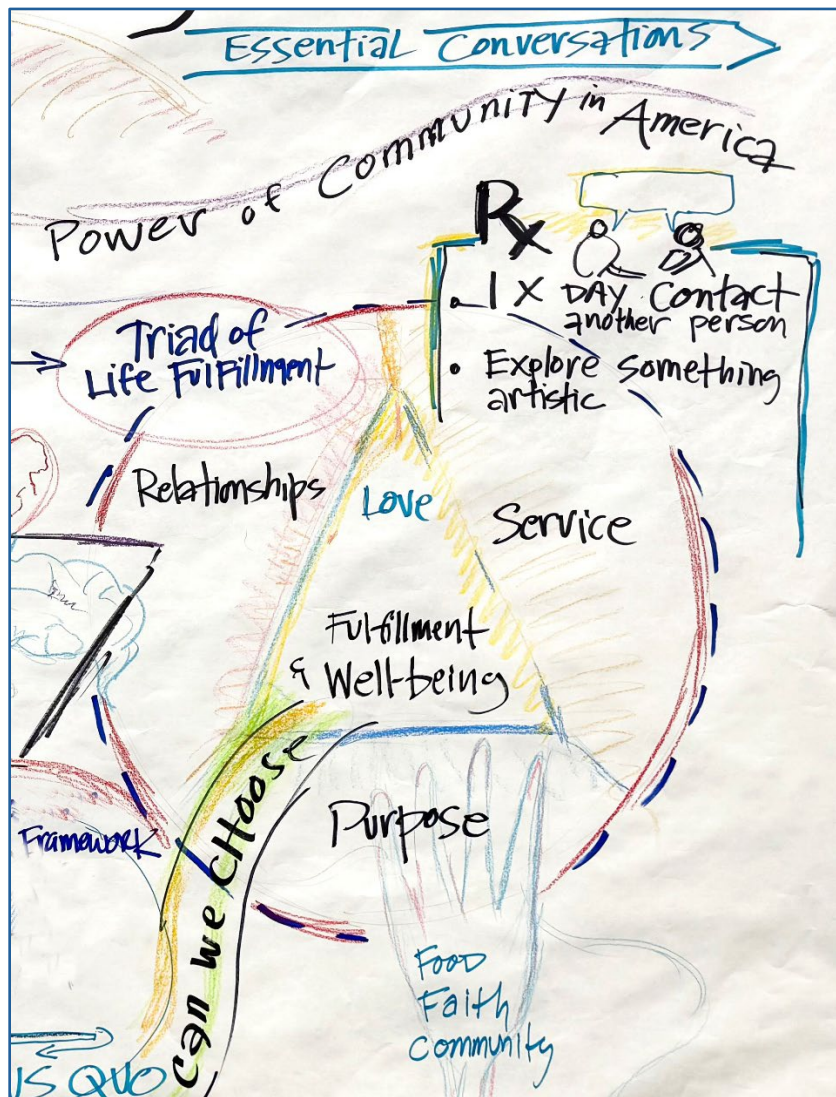
As we become more steadfast in our pursuit of excellence, we inevitably face obstacles: criticism, failure, fear, doubt. Rather than avoiding these challenges, the compassionate warrior recognizes them as teachers that help refine our path and clarify our purpose.

Consider: What values or principles are you willing to stand for, even when it's uncomfortable? Where might you need to bring more compassion to your firmness—or more firmness to your compassion?

The artist of life understands that true strength isn't rigid but resilient, capable of standing ground while remaining open to growth and connection.

What small, calm action can you take today to mend the part of the world within your reach?

The Art of Focus



Essential Leaves: Choosing What Truly Matters

In a forest, the Buddha once picked up a handful of leaves and asked his disciples whether they were many or few compared to all the leaves in the forest. When they answered "few," he explained:

"What I have seen and know is like the leaves on all the trees in this forest. And yet, what I teach is like this handful of leaves that you see before you. Why is this? Because what I teach is useful to walk the way to peace of heart."

In a world drowning in information and options, the ability to focus on what truly matters isn't just helpful—it's essential. The artist of life doesn't try to do everything, know everything, or be everything. Instead, they make conscious choices about where to direct their limited energy and attention.

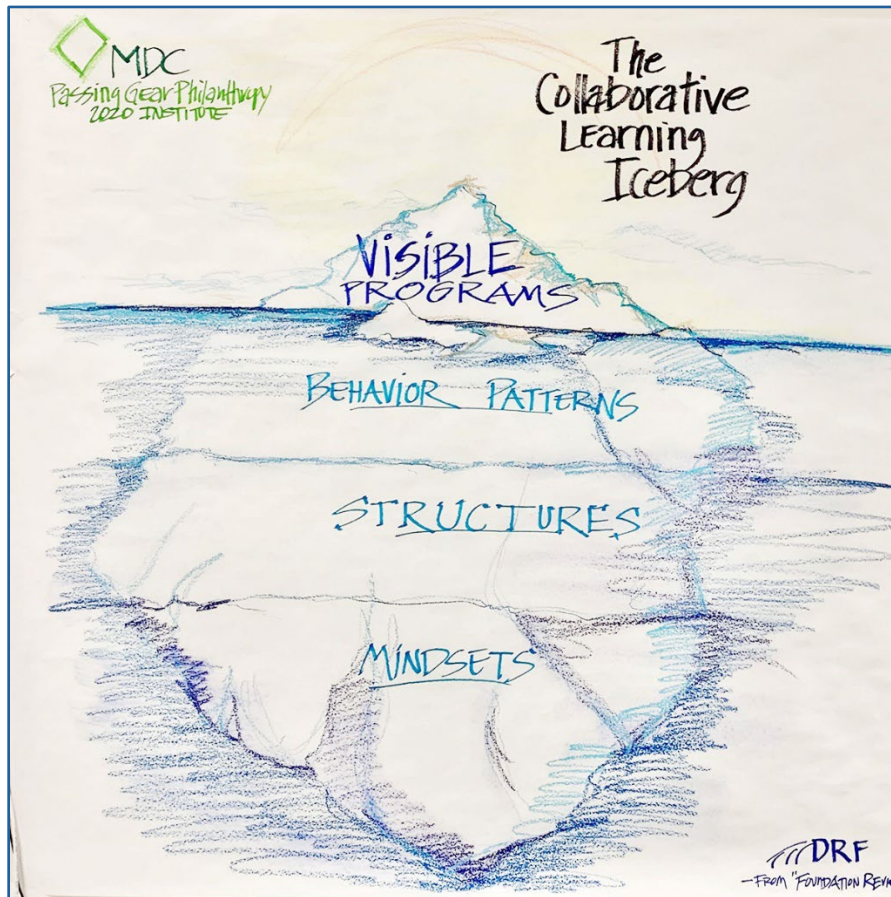
Rick Rubin captures this beautifully: "Art is choosing to do something skillfully, caring about the details, bringing all of yourself to make the finest work you can."

This quality of attention transforms ordinary actions into art. Whether you're preparing a meal, leading a meeting, drafting an email, or having a conversation—bringing your full presence and care elevates the mundane into the meaningful.

Try this practice: For one week, at the start of each day, identify your "handful of leaves" -- the few truly essential things that deserve your best energy and attention. At day's end, reflect on the quality of attention you brought to these priorities.

What would change if you approached fewer things with greater presence, rather than many things with divided attention?

The Art of Re-perceiving



Breaking Free from Mental Recipes

We all develop mental shortcuts—frameworks that help us navigate life efficiently. Pierre Wack, noted scenario architect, called these "Recipes"—professional knowledge that, over time, becomes habitualized and institutionalized.

While these shortcuts serve us in stable times, they become limitations when circumstances change. The artist of life practices the gentle art of re-perceiving—challenging assumptions and seeing situations with fresh eyes.

"To change the mindset," research shows, "you really need to speak to the right part of the brain—to the emotional part—and not just the analytical-oriented part." This is why stories and visual imagery often unlock new thinking more effectively than logical arguments alone.

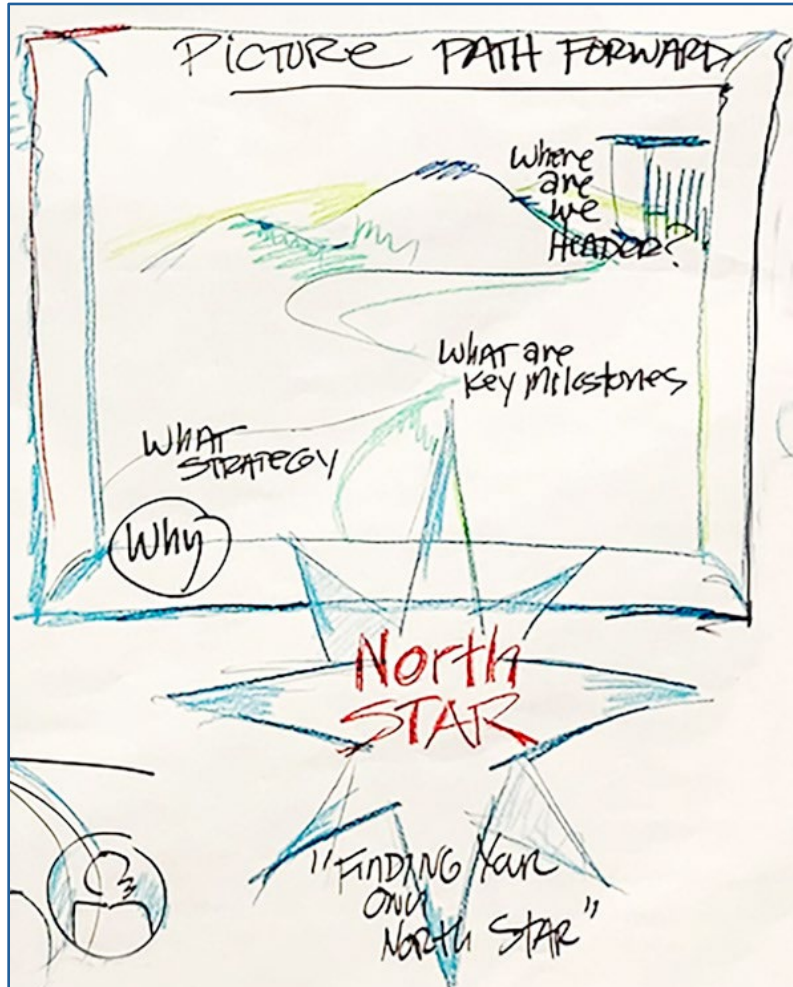
Try these practices for re-perceiving:

1. **Question your frames:** "What assumptions am I making that I don't even realize I'm making?"
2. **Adopt alternative perspectives:** "How would someone from a completely different background see this situation?"
3. **Use metaphor:** "If this challenge were a landscape, what kind of terrain would it be? A mountain? A river? A desert?"
4. **Flip the problem:** "What if what I see as an obstacle is actually an opportunity?"

Clear seeing can also emerge through non-traditional states of thinking—moments of quiet reflection, meditation, or immersion in nature. As Pierre Wack discovered, reaching states of insight often comes from "learning to see and know outside oneself" through practices that "enable the individual to listen more closely to the inner voice."

What mental "recipes" might be limiting your perception? And what new perspectives might emerge if you let them go?

Reaching Beyond Limits



"Meeting the future when it arrived, and not before." (Tricycle.org)

Trusting the Dots Will Connect

"Life can only be understood backwards, but it must be lived forwards," philosopher Soren Kierkegaard observed. This paradox lies at the heart of creative living; we must act without complete certainty about outcomes.

The artist of life doesn't wait for perfect clarity before moving forward. Instead, they trust the process of emergence, knowing that each step reveals the next.

As Steve Jobs famously said: "You have to trust the dots will somehow connect in your future. You have to trust in something—your gut, destiny, life, karma, whatever. This approach has never let me down, and it has made all the difference in my life."

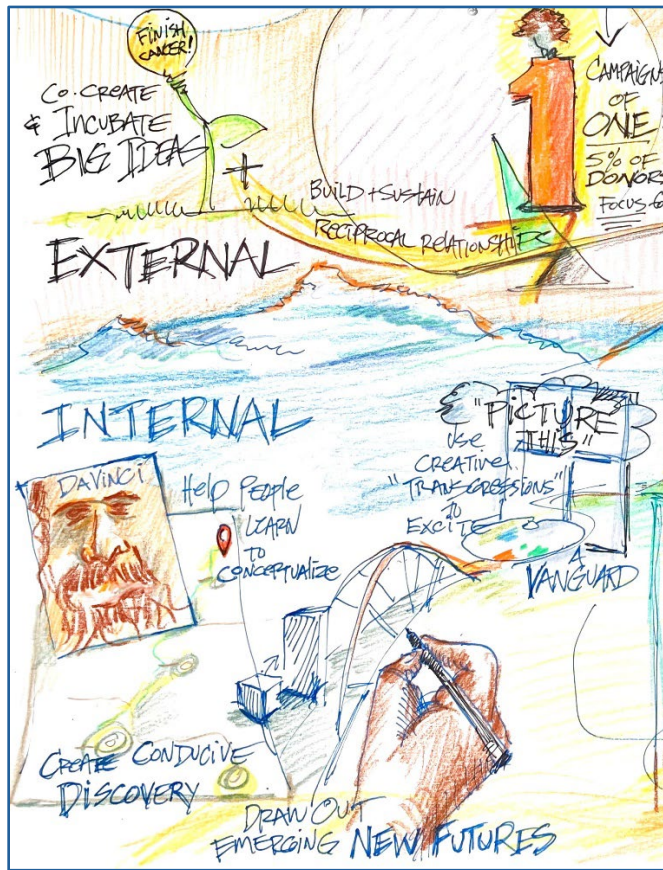
This isn't blind optimism but a practiced trust in the creative process. Ken McLeod puts it this way: "Each of the shifts that I describe—turning to the spiritual, the spiritual becoming a way in life, that way dispelling confusion, and confusion arising as wisdom—comes about because, at each stage we reached out to what was beyond what we currently know."

Irish poet David Whyte captures this beautifully in his poem "Working Together":

"So may we, in this life
trust
to those elements
we have yet to see
or imagine,
and look for the true
shape of our own self,
by forming it well
to the great
intangibles about us."

Where in your life are you hesitating, waiting for perfect clarity? What might open up if you took one step forward in trust, reaching beyond what you currently know?

From Idea to Reality



The Path of Creative Manifestation

"Art is a transformation of daily experience," writes Shaun McNiff. But how do we move from inspiration to manifestation—from ideas to reality?

The artist of life understands that creativity follows patterns. Betty Edwards describes these stages as:

- First insight
- Saturation
- Incubation
- Illumination (the Ah-Ha!)
- Verification

Similarly, Otto Scharmer offers a process to help innovators "abandon the dominant mode of downloading that causes us to continually reproduce patterns of the past":

1. Suspending your current habits
2. Seeing with fresh eyes
3. Sensing what is happening in the field
4. Letting go of judgment, criticism, and fear
5. Letting new ideas come, trusting the process
6. Building a vision connected to inspiration
7. Prototyping and "listening with an honest ear"
8. Performing the new innovation

The key insight? **Creation is not a single moment but a journey—one that requires both inspiration and discipline, both receptivity and action.**

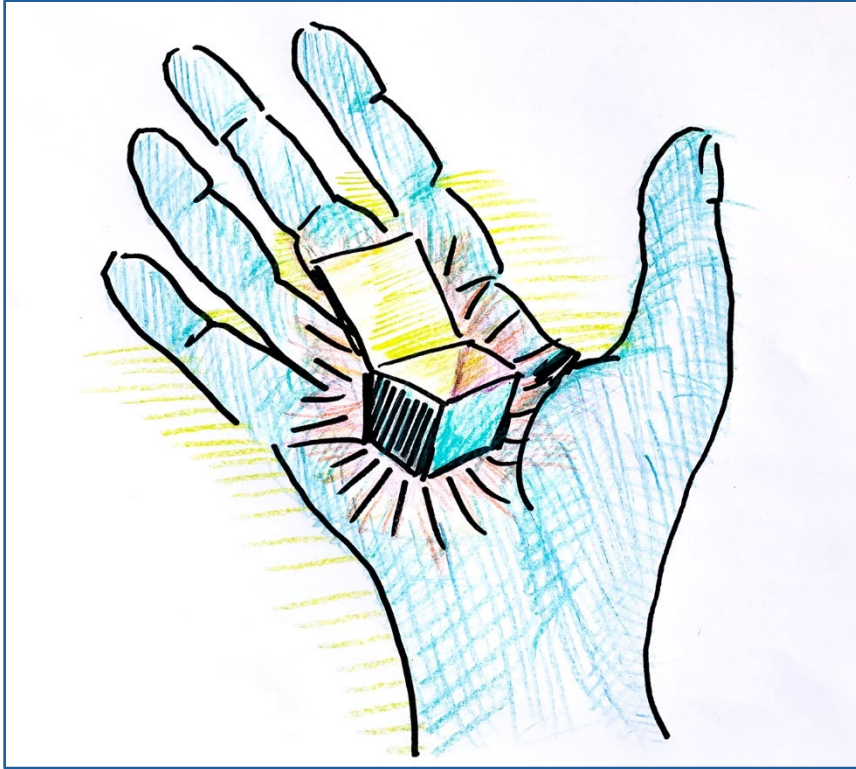
As children's author Kobi Yamada writes in *What to Do with an Idea*: "I like being with my idea. It made me feel more alive, like I could do anything. It encouraged me to think BIG...and then, to think bigger. It shared its secrets with me. It showed me how to walk on my hands. 'Because,' it said, 'it is good to have the ability to see things differently.'"

What idea has been waiting for you to bring it into reality? What first step could you take today to begin its journey from inspiration to manifestation?

Each blog post in this series has explored one facet of being an artist of life. Together, they form a practice—a way of being that transforms how we perceive challenges, create possibilities, and engage with the ever-changing canvas of our lives.

As Mary Oliver asked in her most famous line: "Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?"

The art of change invites us to answer not just with words, but with how we live each day—bringing awareness, creativity, and purpose to every brushstroke of our existence.



Let's talk together about where you want to go next.

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Powerful Strategists and Storytellers

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