

Fearless

CREATIVE LIFE,
CREATIVE WORK, AND
THE TEN LAWS OF
CULTURENOMICS

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Persistence

Chapter 20

Minus the *Mediocre*

Like chiseling a marble block to reveal a statue, removing the mediocre allows your best work to shine through. Delete it.

Mediocrity dilutes excellence.

Keeping weak elements in your work lowers the overall quality, making it harder for your strongest ideas to stand out. Walter Isaacson, in his book *Steve Jobs*, describes how Jobs prioritized simplicity by cutting unnecessary features, leading to iconic product designs.

Subtraction isn't destruction; it's refinement.

Editing feels like the opposite of creating.

Taking away what doesn't serve the work is just as important as adding new ideas. Twyla Tharp, in *The Creative Habit*, emphasizes editing as a crucial part of any artistic practice. The more precise you become about what stays and what goes, the stronger your work becomes. Eliminating mediocrity creates focus. When you strip away what's not working, you free up mental and creative energy to concentrate on what truly matters. The cut, severe as it may seem at first, means that you feel that what you will make is better than what you have right now; it requires that you have faith in yourself as a *creative being*.

Which you are.

Then you sharpen what remains until it has undeniable impact.

Coco Chanel revolutionized fashion by rejecting the overdecorated, restrictive styles of her era. Her designs focused on simplicity, elegance, and functionality—eliminating anything unnecessary. This less-is-more philosophy made her work timeless. By removing the mediocre, Chanel didn't just redefine fashion; she created an enduring standard of excellence. "Simplicity is the keynote to all true elegance," she said.

How do I recognize what's mediocre?

Start by identifying what isn't working. Review your work and pinpoint the elements that feel weak, unnecessary, or out of place. Ask yourself, "Does this serve the overall vision?" At times, you might keep something that you know you'll cut or replace—like a dummy lyric—because it lets you move forward to see the whole. Later, you can go back and cut some more.

The process of cutting isn't about criticizing your work; it's about respecting it. It's about believing in its potential so deeply that you're willing to strip away anything that detracts from it. When you let go of the mediocre, you make space for brilliance to rise. Nothing is ever truly lost; what you eliminate falls back into your creative well, a resource for your future. Editing isn't a loss—it's a gain.

So how do you begin? Start by identifying the weakest parts of your work. Be honest with yourself: Which elements feel out of place? Which ideas aren't fully realized? Which parts, if removed, would make the whole stronger? Then, let them go. Trust that the space they leave behind will fill with something better.

And here's the secret: The more you practice this, the easier it becomes. Over time, you'll develop a sharper sense of what belongs and what doesn't. You'll start to see your work with greater clarity, and you'll find yourself drawn less to adding and more to refining. This isn't just a creative habit; it's a creative mindset.



Thank you for downloading a free chapter from my new book, "Fearless Persistence."

I am especially glad you chose to download Chapter 20, "Minus the Mediocre," because it speaks to one of the most important parts of any creative or meaningful life.

I hope this chapter gives you both insight and encouragement as you navigate your own bold choices. I would love to stay connected and continue the conversation with you.

You can join me on social media, where I share ideas, stories, and practical tools from the book and beyond. I look forward to hearing what "Minus the Mediocre" sparks for you.