

## seven

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### keep it real . . . very real

#### authenticity

**W**e've talked about paying attention to your DNA, but while the concept of authenticity is closely related it's not the same. Your DNA dictates your passion—whatever it is you were born to do; being authentic, and being perceived as such by your audience, relies on your ability to ensure that every decision you make when it comes your business is rooted in being true to yourself.

For example, I would love to change the opening of my show. It starts off the same almost every time. "HELLO EVERYBODY AND WELCOME TO WINE LIBRARY TV. I AM YOUR HOST GARY VAY-NER-CHUK AND THIS, MY FRIENDS, IS THE THUNDER SHOW AKA THE INTERNET'S MOST PASSION-ATE WINE PROGRAM." It's not exactly what some wine lovers are looking for in a wine expert, and I lose about 12 percent of my viewers right off the bat because I yell and scream like a maniac. For a businessman like me, that number is intolerable. I desper-

ately want to change the opening of my show to something a little calmer, more refined, something that won't scare people away. But I can't, because that yelling, screaming, superexcited guy is who I am. If I tried to tone things down and make myself appealing to that missing 12 percent, I can guarantee that everything I've built until now would start slipping away, because now every time I'd get in front of that Flip Cam I'd be putting on an act. I'm not putting on a performance when I do the show or my blog posts—I'm just being me.

### invest in the important stuff

One of the silliest questions I get is, "What kind of mic do you use?" To that I reply, why are you even worrying about that? Your content has nothing to do with the mic, the camera, the lighting, or the set. The day I filmed my first Thunder Show I sent the stock boy out to buy a \$400 video camera from Best Buy (now I use a fancy Sony that cost a few thousand bucks, but most of my recent shows I tape on a \$150 Flip Cam and they look fine). Watch the show, what do you see? It's me, sometimes an awesome guest ranging from my dad to Wayne Gretzky to Jim Cramer, some bottles of wine, and a Jets spit bucket. I only invest effort and thought into what I care about and what I need to create great content.

My business blog, [Garyvaynerchuk.com](http://Garyvaynerchuk.com), is even less dressed up. A lot of times I'm filming from my office, which is usually a mess. I could clean it up to look more professional and polished, but it seems wrong to do that just because the Flip Cam

is running. There's nothing scripted and nothing staged about my blogs, and I always, always do only one take. No redos, no tweaks, nothing. People walk in and out of the office, I wave to folks passing in the hall—whatever happens during filming is what my audience will see. I've filmed posts from balconies, hotel rooms, the street, even my editor's office—anywhere an idea strikes me. Sometimes the sound quality sucks. Sometimes the light is bad. As long as I get my point across and feel like I delivered the message in an authentic way, I don't care.

Once upon a time the most popular celebrities were boxed up in such slick, sleek packages it was almost impossible to get a feel for their real personalities. Every move was choreographed, even their love lives, and even when they weren't on the red carpet they were red-carpet ready. Those days are long gone. The celebrities of today, the ones who are making it huge by connecting with their fans, whether on the screen or online, are all about keeping it real and being themselves. No matter how big or small you want to go, your authenticity will be at the root of your appeal and is what will keep people coming to your site and spread the word about your personal brand, service, or whatever you are offering.

If you want to dominate the social media game, all of your effort has to come from the heart; and it can't come from the heart in the passionate, irrational, wholehearted way it needs to if you're trying to be anyone but yourself. Authenticity is what will make it possible for you to put in the kind of hustle necessary to crush it.

## hustle

I've said over and over that if you live your passion and work the social networking tools to the max, opportunities to monetize will present themselves. I've also said that in order to crush it you have to be sure your content is the best in its category. You can still make plenty of good money if you're fourth best in a category, or ninth best, but if you really want to dominate the competition and make big bucks, you've got to be the best. Do that, be that, and no one will be able to touch you.

With one exception. Someone with less passion and talent and poorer content can totally beat you if they're willing to work longer and harder than you are. Hustle is it. Without it, you should just pack up your toys and go home.

Now, I'm betting that most people who pick up this book consider themselves hard workers. Many are probably just sick of the killer hours and inflexible schedules and demanding bosses often found in the corporate world and think entrepreneurship will somehow be less taxing. I hate to disappoint, but if you're looking for an easier time here, you're barking up the wrong tree. There might be a little more flexibility to your day should you be at liberty to devote yourself full-time to building your personal brand, but otherwise, assuming you're doing this right, you'll be bleeding out of your eyeballs at your computer. You might have thought your old boss was bad, but if you want your business to go anywhere, your new boss had better be a slave driver.

Too many people don't want to swallow the pill of working every day, every chance they get. If you're making money

through social media, you don't get to work for three hours and then play Nintendo for the rest of the evening. That's lip service to hard work. No one makes a million dollars with minimal effort unless they win the lottery.

The cool thing about hustle, though, is that it's one more thing that equalizes the playing field. Fifteen years ago you could have had a rock-solid idea of your DNA and your passion, but there was a billion to one chance of you actually crushing it in business—the platforms and channels were just too narrow and guarded by some pretty tight gatekeepers. Now we can take advantage of the explosion of tremendous, free digital platforms on the Internet, which are also making the gatekeepers more and more irrelevant. And now it's no longer a special interest story if you make it big without family connections or money or an education, because everyone can do it. The only differentiator in the game is your passion and your hustle. Don't ever look at someone else who has more capital or cred than you and think you shouldn't bother to compete. You may only have a million-dollar business, and your biggest competitor may have a fifty-million-dollar business, but if you can outwork him or her, you will win over time.

Anything insane has a price. If you're serious about building your personal brand, there will be no time for Wii. There will be no time for Scrabble or book club or poker or hockey. There will be time for meals, and catching up with your significant other, and playing with the kids, and otherwise you will be in front of your computer until 3:00 A.M. every night. If you're unemployed or retired and have all day to work, maybe you knock off at midnight instead. Expect this to be all consuming.

The thing is, if you're living your passion, you're going to want to be consumed by your work. There's no room for relaxation in the flop-on-the-couch-with-popcorn-and-watch-TV kind of way, but you won't need it. You're not going to be stressed or tired. You're going to be relaxed and invigorated. The passion and love for what you do will enable you to work the hours necessary to succeed. You'll lose track of the time, go to bed reluctantly, and wake up in the morning excited to do it all over again. You'll be living and breathing your content, learning everything you can about your subject, about your tools, about your competition, and talking nonstop with other people interested in the same thing you are.

As hard as you're going to push yourself, don't plan on seeing results right away.

I'd say that this leads us to the number one issue that trips up a lot of otherwise savvy entrepreneurs trying to build their brand online.

### patience

Ninety percent of the people I hear from are in complaint mode, usually to the tune of, "I'm working hard and I'm crushing it and nothing's happening. What gives?" So I ask, how long have you been at this? And they'll usually answer something like, "Six weeks." Six weeks? You don't build businesses in six weeks, or two months, or six months. If you contact me within a year of starting your business to complain that you haven't made the money you thought you would, you're not listening. I said that you could make a ton of money being happy; I didn't say you could do it overnight.

People listen to me talk about what it takes to monetize their personal brand and sometimes I think they filter out the parts they don't want to hear. They think, *I've got the passion, I can do hustle like nobody else. Patience? Leave that for the other guys—I'm gonna turbocharge this sucker.* But patience is the secret sauce. Once you put up your site, you don't want to start and stop, backtrack and second-guess. It'll make you look insecure and foolish. If you're patient, you'll be more likely to plan and prepare and make sure everything is in place before making the big moves that are going to monetize your brand to the fullest.

Everyone makes a big deal over the fact that it only took me eighteen months from the time I launched Winelibrarytv.com to getting booked on the Conan O'Brien show. I started taping episodes in 2006, back before most people were watching online videos. I'm sure if I started the blog today, now that more people have iPhones and are watching online videos, it would take me even less time to get on everyone's radar. Yet as fast as the results seem to have happened, I can assure you that the whole process took a hell of a long time.

You'll recall that I was only sixteen when I started working the floor at Shopper's Discount Liquors selling wine to customers, which meant that I still couldn't drink the stuff. I knew, though, that appreciating wine, and therefore being able to sell it and discuss it confidently, meant developing a great palate. I read all the tasting notes in *Wine Spectator* and started to learn to identify flavor profiles of things that I could easily find at ShopRite, like pear, papaya, cherries, chocolate, and blackberries. I didn't stop there, though. I sought out more exotic fare, like cassis and black raspberry preserve and star fruit (recently I

discovered goji berries . . . good stuff). But there was more. Critics noted hints of cigar, and dirt, and even sweaty sock in wine. I knew they were guessing—there was no way they'd sucked on a sweaty sock—and I thought, *Well, if I'm going to say something tastes like sweaty socks, shouldn't I know what it tastes like?* So I gave myself an education. By the time I was twenty-one, I had an incredibly developed palate, even though I hadn't drunk much wine at all.

When I started developing the idea for building Wine Library TV, and later Garyvaynerchuk.com, I knew that I would have to use the same kind of patience and methodology to learn the social media business as I did to learning the wine business.

It was patience that helped me grow Wine Library, too. I was twenty-two years old and running a ten-million-dollar business. I did it with good old-fashioned hustle—every customer who walked in got monetized to the fullest. If they walked in for one bottle, they usually walked out with three. And I was being paid \$27,000 a year. Most young people who take a business from four to ten million feel they deserve a watch and a car and a cool apartment as rewards for their savviness and hard work. Get over that. You come last. Before you invest in yourself, you have to invest in your long-term future. That means your profits should funnel right back into your research, your content, and your staff should you have any. The sooner you start cashing in, the shorter window you have in which to cement your success. So hold off as long as you can.

This is why, as ambitious and thirsty as I was for megasuccess as a business developer, I didn't make a peep anywhere the first year and a half that I was airing the show. I didn't try to make

one biz dev deal. I probably could have had some success had I jumped the gun, but by remaining patient and making sure I knew exactly what I was doing, I was able to avoid taking any steps backward once the speaking engagements, consulting opportunities, and advertisers started showing up.

How did someone like me, who is so obviously not a patient guy, cool my heels for so long? Because I was 100 percent happy. I loved what I was doing. I knew down to my core that my business was going to explode, but even if I had fallen flat on my face, I would have had no regrets because I was doing exactly what I wanted to do, the way I wanted to do it.

Now do you get why it's so, so important for you to center your business on your passion? If you enter a niche because you're following the dollars, you won't keep it up. It's too much work, and you will get tired and frustrated and you will eventually fold. You have to think about building your brand in terms of a marathon, not a sprint. It will take longer to see results, but in seven or nine or fifteen years you won't crack, you'll still love what you're doing.

What exactly are you going to be doing that's going to be so time and labor intensive? You'll be studying your topic, researching your platforms, drafting your blog posts, doing whatever it takes to become the foremost expert and personal brand in your field. But most of all, you will be creating a community.

