Daniel Hall Presents

Episode 137

How to Use Habits to Build a Successful Self-Publishing Business

With Steve Scott

Hello! Welcome to the RealFastResults.com podcast! You're definitely going to want to tune into this episode. You are bound to learn a lot. Steve Scott is today's special guest. He is a *Wall Street Journal* bestselling author with over 80 books in his catalogue. He also blogs about habit development on his site, DevelopGoodHabits.com. Plus, he creates videos for his YouTube channel, which you can check out by visiting SteveScottShow.com. Just to provide you with a little more information, Steve says that when he isn't working, he likes to read, exercise, travel, and spend time with his family. Please welcome Steve to the show...

Promise: How to Use Habits to Build a Successful Self-Publishing Business

My promise is that I am going to tell you how to use, basically, habits to help build a successful self-publishing business. I don't think that I've done anything extraordinary. **I simply follow a habit every single day, and I've been following that, pretty much, for the past six years.** I think a lot of times, as writers, we tend to put our heads in the clouds, like, "I have this great idea. I can't wait to feel inspired to write so that I'll sit down and crank out 1,000 words." That might work for a day or so, but I firmly believe that you need some sort of process.

There's a very famous quote from W. Somerset Maugham in which he said, "I only write when inspiration strikes. Fortunately, it every morning at nine o'clock sharp." The point being that you have

to schedule this into your day. What's magical is that even when you aren't in the mood to write, if you follow the habit and commit yourself to doing it, and I like to do it first thing in the morning, which we'll get into…

If you commit yourself into doing things first thing in the morning, and you work at even if you aren't in the mood, the words will start to flow eventually. You'll get into the rhythm, even if it's a rough 10 or 20 minutes starting out. To be honest, there are many times when I'm not in the mood to write, and it will be a crappy writing session, but I'll at least put the words down and get it done.

Scott's Process

For full disclosure, as much as I talk about habits, I've taken a slight break from writing every single day. I'm following the same mindset, but I'm focusing on YouTube now. So, I'm currently getting up every single morning, creating scripts, and doing YouTube videos. Just ignore the fact that I haven't done this for a couple of months, but this was my process when I was publishing a number of books every single year.

At the time, I would have three books in the pipeline. There was the, kind of, "in the back of my mind type of book," or, "That's the one I'm thinking about…" So, whenever I was running, or walking, or just out and about, I have a lot of thoughts that come into my head about that particular book. **I would open up my apps, write down my ideas, and just build up the idea that I wanted to talk about in my head.** I was thinking about this book, and then there was the book I was writing at the time. For that, I was following a word count kind of mindset.

I would have an Excel document that I would use to track my word count, and where I was, like the actual location. **That may sound weird, but for me, I find that I write better in certain locations than others.** So, if I see that I have been jamming out and have achieved a really good word count at a particular place, then I'll try to spend more time there. **With an Excel spreadsheet, you can have it total numbers up and give you an average.** So, I will also add the blocks of time, and I do everything in pomodoro blocks of 25 minutes apiece. I might see that the book had a time investment of 100 blocks of time, or 200 blocks of time, and I could look back over the history to see how much effort it took to create that specific book.

I would have a brain dump, and then I would put it all on note cards. Then, I'd write the first draft, the second draft, and then send it to the editor. As soon as I'm done with one draft, the next day I would go right back into the next draft, and I would follow that process until the book was done. That would be the second book, and then the third book that I would have was always sent to the editor. It takes them a couple of months to get through the edits, and the formatting, and all of that.

I guess the bottom line is that I always try to have a book in the pipeline. Now that I'm trying to take a little bit of a break from writing, instead of writing books, I'm just working on individual scripts every single morning. It's the same process, but I'm just writing scripts at this point.

A Variation of the Pomodoro Technique

Once again, things have changed a little bit for me and the way my process works lately, but people's personal methods of being productive can often shift from time to time, and of course, depending on what they are working on. So, sometimes I write a process down, or teach it, and find myself two years later saying, "Oh, I don't really do that anymore." However, the technique that I got started with was The Pomodoro Technique. **This is a classic, and very famous, strategy where you work within a very concentrated and focused block of energy for 25 minutes.** Basically, your head is down, you aren't checking your Facebook, and you aren't looking at your phone or anything like that. If you have a break in your concentration, then it doesn't quite count as a pomodoro.

So, you do 25 minutes on and five minutes off. I like to get up and walk around, just to take some steps and clear my head a little bit. Then, you sit down and do another 25 minutes**. You do this four times, and then you take a 30 minute break.** This is a pretty regimented way of structuring your time, and I found, after a while, that I didn't like the rigidity of that model. **I follow the same technique, but now I break my life into 10 different types of activities, and I use an app called [aTimeLogger](atimelogger.com) (atimelogger.com).** This is an app that you can put on any iOS device, and there may be an Android version, but the point is that you can create buckets for your life. So, I have a writing bucket, a social media bucket, a conversations bucket, which is what I'm using right now.

Whenever I do an activity, I just run the timer, and then at the end of the week, the month, or the day, I know exactly where I'm spending my time. It's the same concept as before, and anytime I work on my business, I'm literally running a timer in the background. This absolutely drives my wife insane because whenever she's trying to talk to me, I'll stop it, I'll look at her, and I'll start it again. It just ticks her off to no end, but that's just how I structure my life.

It's a variation of pomodoro. I just like doing it for all aspects of my business, not just writing. That being said, when I do write, I still try to keep to 25 minutes, even though it's not a classic pomodoro. The bottom line is that you should do whatever works for you. It doesn't really matter what people tell you. I hate a lot of the rigidity of certain productivity systems.

Why Do You Keep Track of So Much?

I keep track of some things just to be able to look back and be able to better adjust what works best for me. I know I'm going to sound like Thanos here, but really, if I see that there's an imbalance in my life, I try to make adjustments. So, if I'm not spending enough time writing, or coming up with scripts, or creating videos, I have to snap myself back and get back into alignment with those things.

What Do You Do if You are Having a Hard Time Getting Word on a Page?

That has changed also. I just shut it down if it's really not happening. **I do stick to a bare minimum of 30 minutes.** If it gets to the point where I just can't think of anything, I just start outlining what I would like to say next time I start to write. So, if it's just a real struggle, and I just can't figure out what to say, then I'll almost take, like, mongrel types of notes, where I will jot down just a couple of thoughts here and there. I just do a more in-depth outline.

That's the process I use now, whereas in the past, I would just try "gutting" through it. I just found, at a certain point, that the words were just junk, and doing that didn't help me at all. I try to help the future version of me by making things easier for him.

Does it Sometimes Help to Begin with a Low Threshold?

Yes. There are a number of books and strategies like *Tiny Habits*, *Atomic Habits*, *Mini Habits*, and variations of those that support the idea that you want to make that initial barrier to resistance as low as possible. I do this with a lot of my other habits. For instance, I might set a goal to walk 5,000 steps a day instead of 10,000 because I know just by walking around my house and living day-to-day life, I get at least 3,000 steps.

I'll do the same thing with my writing, except my initial goal may be to write just one paragraph or one sentence because I'm like, "Okay, I can do that," and nine times out of ten, I end up having a lot more to say. It's just the resistance of opening up your laptop or your computer, and then opening up your document and writing that one sentence, is almost the hardest part of the process. It's just getting started.

How Much Time Do You Spend on Each of the Three Books You Have Been Creating?

Really, for the one that's in the pipeline, I just find that I'll come back with a bunch of ideas from my walk. So, I'll just quickly open up whatever document I have for it. These days, I'm keeping things in Google Docs more often. But, when I come back, I'll just quickly write stuff down. That's not really a writing block. It's more of an "idea garden" type of situation.

For each day, I'll just pick whatever project I'm going to focus on for that day. I don't try to juggle all three in the same day. If it happens that I get a book back from an editor, for example, I'll decide to open up that document, and I'll spend as many hours, or as many days, as I need to in order to finish my editing. I consider anything that I get back from an editor to be the #1 project that I have going. The #2 project is the one that I'm actively writing, and the #3 project is in the "idea garden".

I do create, I guess, a hierarchy in my head. I never actually established that formally, but it's just whatever needs to get published, or, "whatever needs to be shipped as soon as possible," which is something like what Seth Godin is known for saying. That's the one that should be focused on. I guess the point is that I try not to ever be in a position where I have nothing to do, and I want to make sure that I'm maintaining that habit. That's because I have found that if I take too much time off, it's harder to get back into the swing of things.

I always have something going. The actual habit, if you really want to get nerdy, it used to be "write 30 minutes a day" as a reminder. Now, it's "Write 30 minutes a day or work on scripts**". **So, it's 30**

minutes of some type of writing, and that's what I've resigned myself to. I'm not writing books, but I'm doing some writing.

Do You Have Any Habits That Help You to Come Up with New Ideas?

Absolutely. I have a Google Spreadsheet that lists every single idea I have for a book, a video, or any piece of content. I have one for my blog, I have one for my YouTube channel, and I have one for my books. Whenever I come up with an idea, I put it in one of those files. If I'm adding to an existing idea that I haven't even decided to work on, I'll just add it as an entry in the appropriate document.

I've moved over to Google's technology because I can access it from my phone, and as long as I have the login to my account, I can access it from any device versus just my computer or laptop. It might be in the cloud, or it might not, depending on if it's synced or not. **I just like having it accessible, but the point is that I have a continuous document that I'm always adding to for any piece of content I'm working on.**

To get a little more technical, I use an app called [Todoist](#), and that pretty much runs my life at this point. If I just come up with a quick thought, especially when I'm on a run and can't fumble with my phone because I am running, I'll just do a voice command to Todoist, and it will end up as an entry. At the end of the day, I can check it off after adding it to whatever document it needs to go into. I continuously have Todoist open whenever I have my phone on me. I'm always putting stuff into it.

[Todoist](#) is basically a "to do list" app. It's like Wunderlist or any of the other checklist apps. I just like the way that you can add items. You could schedule something every three weeks, for instance, or you can schedule a reminder every year for a certain task. I'm at the point where I have to get a haircut every three weeks, or I have to shave every three or four days. It just shows up as a constant reminder, and I no longer have to even focus on what habits I have. I just open up my list and check them off for the day.

It sounds so automated and cold, but it helps me to run my life, so I just don't have to think about anything anymore. I'm trying to train my wife to just put stuff down in the app, and that's a work in progress. I think it has a lot to do with decision fatigue, which just means that if you try to make too many decisions in your day, you'll end up being a hot mess at the end of it. So, I like to have one app that I can open up and just check things off as I find time for it.

Best Productivity Tips

I actually want to share two, but we've already, kind of, touched upon the first one. **The first is to just set aside time every single day to work on your book.** What time you set aside is really up to you. I don't pay attention to it when people say that you have to write for two hours a day to be productive. It should just be whatever you have time for. If it's 15 minutes, then it's 15 minutes. The point is that you want to set aside that time and schedule it into your day.

One thing that I have found personally helpful, for me, is that you want to break whatever book project, or writing project that you have into small, little chunks. Within my [Todoist](#) app, I have a template, and every time I start a new book, I upload this spreadsheet. This is a list of about 70 actions that I have to take, and it's just, like, paint by number. Just do Step #1, which would be, "what is the idea of your book?" I check that off, and I move to Step #2, which is, "What are the 8-10 main topics?" The next step might be a brain dump, and I'll check that off.

So, I just go through the process, and I find that you don't end up succumbing to "blank page syndrome" if you follow a process or create a good outline. Then, you can just go through the outline, and you can create a rough draft from the outline. It's very systematic and formulaic if you allow it to be. So, I would say just create a process for everything you have, and then just follow along with that.0

Why Do You Use Checklists?

[The Checklist Manifesto](#) by Atul Gawande is one of my favorite books, and it talks about how pilots and doctors decrease the amount of bad incidents that might occur. I guess, the way they describe it in the book is that a lot of times pilots and doctors will think, "No, no, I've got this. I've done this a million times," but they will sometimes miss something small because they aren't exactly following a checklist, but once they switch over to one, they can run through each item and make sure everything is taken care of.

When you can follow a checklist like this and check everything off, you know that whatever you are trying to do is going to be a successful endeavor. I guess I created a variation out of reading [The Checklist Manifesto](#), and so I don't leave it up to guesswork. I just follow the process that I have written down.

Do You Have an Example I Can Follow?

Yes. If you go to [Authority.Pub](#), there's a product that we created a couple of years ago. It has been awhile since I have taken a look at that document, but I did actually turn my checklist into a free PDF that you can download. Just look over on the left side of the homepage, and there's an opt-in form for it. You will be asked to buy the product being sold, but you don't necessarily have to. The checklist is available for free.

If you don't want to enter an email, and you'd rather do this on your own, just think of all the different things that you do to bring a book to market, and then try to organize each task into a logical flow. That's what I did. I just listed down every small micro-step that I needed to take, and then I just reorganized them into a workable process.

The way you can go about getting this into your [Todoist](#) app is by taking the steps from the PDF and adding them to a spreadsheet. I got a notepad file, and I created an entry on each line of the notepad file, and you can turn that into a CSV file. With Todoist, you can import templates, and what you upload will just automatically populate inside of a project. So, whatever the idea is for your book, you can

create projects and to-do lists. You just title it, import the template, and 46 items will show up. You can check each task of your list as you complete them, and if you wanted to, you could even create deadlines for each and every task.

Final Tips

I guess that I just want to reemphasize what I just said. Don't get discouraged. Writing a book can seem daunting, but if you'll just pick at it little by little every single day, for 15-20 minutes a day… Don't be afraid. **Just take action on a daily basis to work at it. I built a whole self-publishing business off of 30-60 minutes a day.** I really don't work that many grueling hours. It's just that I follow a process for every single book. So, that would be my parting piece of advice. Just work at it continuously, and if you can set aside a bit of time every day, you can get a lot of books done. Of course, it helps to systematize as much as you can too.

Connecting with Steve

I guess the one project I'm working on is the aforementioned YouTube channel. So, if you'll just go to SteveScottShow.com, that redirects to my YouTube channel. It's one of the areas where I'm constantly answering questions about the videos I create, and I'm going to start creating a lot more videos about self-publishing. So, feel free to leave a comment there, and I look forward to interacting with you.

Resources

SteveScottShow.com

DevelopGoodHabits.com

Tiny Habits

Atomic Habits

Mini Habits

The Checklist Manifesto

aTimeLogger

Todoist

Authority.Pub

Real Fast Results Community

If you are diggin' on this stuff and really love what we're doing here at Real Fast Results, would you please do me a favor? Head on over to iTunes, and make sure that you subscribe to this show, download it, and rate & review it. That would be an awesome thing.

Of course, we also want to know your results. Please share those results with us at http://www.realfastresults.com/results.

As always, go make results happen!