1. Ignore everybody.
The more original your idea is, the less good advice other people will be able to give you. When I first started with the biz card format, people thought I was nuts. Why wasn’t I trying to do something more easy for markets to digest i.e. cutey-pie greeting cards or whatever?

2. The idea doesn’t have to be big. It just has to change the world.
The two are not the same thing.
Your idea doesn’t have to be big. It just has to be yours alone. The more the idea is yours alone, the more freedom you have to do something really amazing.
The more amazing, the more people will click with your idea. The more people click with your idea, the more it will change the world.

3. Put the hours in.
Doing anything worthwhile takes forever. 90% of what separates successful people and failed people is time, effort and stamina.

4. If your biz plan depends on you suddenly being “discovered” by some big shot, your plan will probably fail.
Nobody suddenly discovers anything. Things are made slowly and in pain.

5. You are responsible for your own experience.
Nobody can tell you if what you’re doing is good, meaningful or worthwhile. The more compelling the path, the more lonely it is.

6. Everyone is born creative; everyone is given a box of crayons in kindergarten.
Then when you hit puberty they take the crayons away and replace them with books on algebra etc. Being suddenly hit years later with the creative bug is just a wee voice telling you, “I’d like my crayons back, please. “

7. Keep your day job.
I’m not just saying that for the usual reason i.e. because I think your idea will fail. I’m saying it because the creative person basically has two kinds of jobs: One is the sexy, creative kind. Second is the kind that pays the bills. Sometimes the assignment covers both bases, but not often.

8. Companies that squelch creativity can no longer compete with companies that champion creativity.
Nor can you bully a subordinate into becoming a genius. If you’re creative, if you can think independently, if you can arti-cu-late pas­sion, if you can ove-ride the fear of being wrong, then your com­pany needs you now more than it ever did. And now your com­pany can no lon­ger afford to pre­tend that isn’t the case.

9. Everybody has their own private Mount Everest they were put on this earth to climb.
You may never reach the summit; for that you will be forgiven. But if you don’t make at least one serious attempt to get above the snow­line, years later you will find yourself lying on your deathbed, and all you will feel is emptiness.

10. The more talented somebody is, the less they need the props.
Meeting a person who wrote a masterpiece on the back of a deli menu would not surprise me. Meeting a person who wrote a masterpiece with a silver Cartier fountain pen on an antique writing table in an airy SoHo loft would SERIOUSLY surprise me.

11. Don’t try to stand out from the crowd; avoid crowds altogether.
Your plan for getting your work out there has to be as original as the actual work, perhaps even more so. The work has to create a totally new market. There’s no point trying to do the same thing as 250,000 other young hopefuls, waiting for a miracle. All existing business models are wrong. Find a new one.

12. If you accept the pain, it cannot hurt you.
The pain of making the necessary sacrifices always hurts more than you think it’s going to, I know. It sucks. That being said, doing something seriously creative is one of the most amazing experiences one can have, in this or any other lifetime. If you can pull it off, it’s worth it. Even if you don’t end up pulling it off, you’ll learn many incredible, magical, valuable things. It’s NOT doing it when you know you full well you HAD the opportunity – that hurts FAR more than any failure.

13. Never compare your inside with somebody else’s outside.
The more you practice your craft, the less you confuse worldly rewards with spiritual rewards, and vice versa. Even if your path never makes any money or furthers your career, that’s still worth a TON.

14. Dying young is overrated.
I’ve seen so many young people take the “Gotta do the drugs and booze thing to make me a better artist” route over the years. A choice that was neither effective, healthy, smart, nor original ended happily.

15. The most important thing a creative person can learn professionally is where to draw the red line that separates what you are willing to do, and what you are not.
Art suffers the moment other people start paying for it. The more you need the money, the more people will tell you what to do. The less control you will have. The more bullshit you will have to swallow. The less joy it will bring. Know this and plan accordingly.

16. The world is changing.
Some people are hip to it, others are not. If you want to be able to afford groceries in 5 years, I’d recommend listening closely to the former and avoiding the latter. Just my two cents.

17. Merit can be bought. Passion can’t.
The only people who can change the world are people who want to. And not everybody does.

18. Avoid the Watercooler Gang.
They’re a well-meaning bunch, but they get in the way eventually.

19. Sing in your own voice.
Picasso was a terrible colorist. Turner couldn’t paint human beings worth a damn. Saul Steinberg’s formal drafting skills were appalling. TS Eliot had a full-time day job. Henry Miller was a wildly uneven writer. Bob Dylan can’t sing or play guitar.

20. The choice of media is irrelevant.
Every media’s greatest strength is also its greatest weakness. Every form of media is a set of fundamental compromises; one is not “higher” than the other. A painting doesn’t do much; it just sits there on a wall. That’s the best and worst thing about it. Film combines sound, photography, music, and acting. That’s the best and worst thing about it. Prose just uses words arranged in linear form to get its point across. That’s the best and worst thing about it etc.

21. Selling out is harder than it looks.
Diluting your product to make it more “commercial” will just make people like it less. Many years ago, barely out of college, I started schlepping around the ad agencies, looking for my first job.

22. Nobody cares. Do it for yourself.
Everybody is too busy with their own lives to give a damn about your book, painting, screenplay etc., especially if you haven’t sold it yet. And the ones that aren’t, you don’t want in your life anyway.

23. Worrying about “Commercial vs. Artistic” is a complete waste of time.
You can argue about “the shameful state of American Letters” till the cows come home. They were kvetching about it in 1950, they’ll be kvetching about it in 2050. It’s a path well-trodden, and not a place where one is going to come up with many new, earth-shattering insights.

24. Don’t worry about finding inspiration. It comes eventually.
Inspiration precedes the desire to create, not the other way around.

25. You have to find your own schtick.
A Picasso always looks like Picasso painted it. Hemingway always sounds like Hemingway. A Beethoven Symphony always sounds like a Beethoven’s Symphony. Part of being a master is learning how to sing in nobody else’s voice but your own.

26. Write from the heart.
There is no silver bullet. There is only the love God gave you.

27. The best way to get approval is not to need it.
This is equally true in art and business. And love. And sex. And just about everything else worth having.

28. Power is never given. Power is taken.
People who are “ready” give off a different vibe than people who aren’t. Animals can smell fear; maybe that’s it.

29. Whatever choice you make, The Devil gets his due eventually.
Selling out to Hollywood comes with a price. So does not selling out. Either way, you pay in full, and yes, it invariably hurts like hell.

30. The hardest part of being creative is getting used to it.
If you have the creative urge, it isn’t going to go away. But sometimes it takes a while before you accept the fact.