

## Seth Godin on the Art of Noticing and Creating by Seth Godin

Transcript for Seth Godin on the Art of Noticing, and Then Creating

Krista Tippett, Host: We live in a world that is re-creating itself one life and one digital connection at a time. And Seth Godin is one of the most original and helpful voices I know on this landscape for which there are no maps. He was one of the early Internet entrepreneurs and remains a singular thought leader and innovator in what he describes as our post-industrial connection economy. Rather than merely tolerate change, he says, we are all called now to rise to it. We are invited and stretched in whatever we do to be artists — to create in ways that matter to other people. And Seth Godin even sees marketing in this light:

Mr. Godin: Marketing isn't advertising; marketing is the product we make, the service we offer, the life we live. And so the question as you go forward is, will you choose this ethical marketing that doesn't involve yelling at people, networking your way to the top, spamming people and lying. Right. But instead it involves weaving a story and weaving a tribe, and weaving a network that means something.

Ms. Tippett: I'm Krista Tippett. This is On Being, from APM, American Public Media.

Seth Godin has founded dozens of companies — most of which, he's quick to add, failed. But with his Internet company Yoyodyne, he created a new form of ethically motivated marketing that rejected the usual tactics of interrupting people with phone calls or pop-up ads. That company was acquired in the late 1990s by Yahoo, where he then spent a year as vice president of direct marketing. His daily blog — which I get by email — is on virtually every online platform. He's also written many books, all of which rise to the top of the Amazon best-seller list without reviews or book tours. Most recently, he's published *The Icarus Deception*. And Seth Godin's current company, Squidoo.com, is among the top-ranked sites in the U.S. It raises money for charity and pays royalties to its million-plus members.

Ms. Tippett: So you know, I want to start with where I usually start my interviews, whoever I'm talking to. And actually in all that I've seen you write across the years, I haven't heard you talk about this too much. And, you know, was there a spiritual background to your childhood?

Mr. Godin: Well, I grew up with two incredible parents and learned a lot about faith. There wasn't a lot of religion and there was a lot of faith. And that dichotomy I think is

really important, and it's informed a lot of the way I lived and what I've written about. And by faith I mean faith in community, faith in charity and in philanthropy, faith in innovation and what happens when people make a ruckus or do hard work, faith in education, faith in taking initiative. I mean I was a free-range kid. My parents, my dad put me on a boat with a semi-stranger to crew when I was 14. And he abandoned me in downtown Cleveland at 1:00 in the morning. And I found my way home. And the next morning ...

Ms. Tippett: On purpose?

Mr. Godin: Well, I don't think he abandoned me on purpose, but I found my way home on purpose.

Ms. Tippett: Mm-hmm.

Mr. Godin: I grew up in the this house where there was this understanding that if someone didn't have a place to go they stayed with you. And that if there was a way to help, you helped. And, you know, we weren't the most well-off people in town, but my parents understood that they had a position and a role in the community, and any chance they had to lead was one that they should take. And if they had a chance to support someone or connect with someone, they should.

Ms. Tippett: So, you know that story you just told about your upbringing too kind of leads me to an experiment I wanted to do with you. Which is — as you may know, I just recently interviewed Brené Brown, who's someone you love, you've drawn a lot of inspiration from, as have many people. And she makes a connection between struggle and hope — that in fact it's about the moments in our lives when we had to struggle and when we did something, when we got out of a jam and we didn't know how we could do that, that those are the moments we became who we are.

So that's a long-winded way of saying what I thought I might ask you. You know, people who know you think of you and not just as a successful person, but a phenomenally successful person. And I wonder if you would talk to me about the moments of struggle and adversity and failure in your life that helped make you who you are — that actually are part of the foundation of all that success.

Mr. Godin: Well, I've never been shy about talking about the professional failure, because I wouldn't trade any of it. After I luckily sold my first little book for not very much money, I then decided I might be able to do that for a living — and got 900 rejection letters in a row. And then for the next seven to 10 years, my company was basically on the verge of bankruptcy the whole time. There were, you know, really dramatic stuff like when the vice president of AOL threatened to have me arrested if I came to her office to apologize for something we had screwed up. Or having to fire our biggest client who was two-thirds of our business just because they were jerks. And we decided that we didn't want to work with jerks and become the kind of company that was good at working with jerks.

But what they all had in common, particularly in the early days, was this sense of, as Brené as talked about, being caught out as a fraud and having the world say, you know, we figured you out, and you don't deserve any success. And it's all over. And when you hear that — and so many of us are capable of hearing it just from the slightest negative response, just from the smallest slight — we then decide it's all over. Then the question is, what are you going to do with that feedback? And I think this again goes

back to my parents. Because what the habit I developed was that that's not "a no," that's a "no for now." That's not a "this will never work." That's a "this didn't work." But I learned something about what might work for next time. And so there was, you know, the cold fear, the deep emptiness in the pit of your stomach because there's 50 or 100 people who are counting on you to pay them. Or the fact that you've worked on a project for a year or two years or three years, and now it might just be over. And the question is, is that something that we flee from, or is that something that we use to tell us that we're alive?

Ms. Tippet: Something that I'm really intrigued by — that I feel you're adding to — is this sense or this knowledge that we all have that we are living in a moment of great flux. We are living in evolutionary times. I read as I was digging into you that Charles Darwin was a really formative figure for you.

Mr. Godin: Yeah. People impart a lot into the notion of evolution — some of which wasn't Darwin's work itself. But what is important here is not only do times change, but those times change, not just our stories about ourselves and our expectations, but they actually are changing our brain. So you know, when the Industrial Revolution came, there were 20 years when basically everyone in Manchester, England, was an alcoholic. Instead of having like coffee carts, they had gin carts that went up and down the streets. Because it was so hard to shift from being a farmer to sitting in a dark room for 12 hours every day doing what you were told. But we evolved, we culturally evolved to be able to handle a new world order. And so when we talk about evolution as a metaphorical thing where we have memetics and ideas laid on top of this idea of survival of the species and things changing over time, what fascinates me about it is that this bottom-up change in the world is everywhere all the time. So much more common than change that gets put down on us by a dictator or by someone who's putatively in charge.

Ms. Tippet: Right.

Mr. Godin: And yet we ignore this bottom-up thing when in fact it's the thing we are most likely to be able to touch and change.

(Sound bite of music)

Ms. Tippet: Also I think what you're pointing at in a lot of your work is that because of the way the world has changed subjectively, because we're living in a post-geography world. That's a phrase you use. Because we have what you call a connection economy, we — technology is actually empowering that bottom-up change, right, and kind of dismantling the hierarchical overbearing leader model that a lot of us actually still grew up with.

Mr. Godin: And at the same time that is what's empowering technology. So they're both feeding on each other. The Internet wasn't built by 30 people who are working for a boss. It was built by 300,000 people, many of whom have never met each other. And that this protocol and that technology work together even without a central organizing force. And that's happening to every industry. And it's happening even to the way our communities organize and the spiritual organizations that we get involved in.

Ms. Tippet: Mm-hmm. And you know, so then I want to come back around to the idea of art. Because one of the things you say is that as a result of this form of change and the

demands it places on us and the opportunities it presents to us — we, one of those is that we are all artists now. So talk to me about that connection.

Mr. Godin: So, you know, on the way into the studio today, I passed a 1934 Rolls Royce. And in those days, if you were really rich, you bought a fancy expensive car like that. So we went through this era where you would value something that was physical. But now the things we pay extra for are connection. Right? The things we pay extra for are what are other people using — what networks can we be part of — what conference can we go to — who can we be with? And the people we choose to be with, the products and services we choose to talk about are all interesting and unique and human and real, as opposed to industrial and cheap and polished and normal. And so as individuals what we have to see is a shift has gone on from the days of Henry Ford when one creative person had 50,000 people acting on their wishes. Right?

Ms. Tippet: Right.

Mr. Godin: That you designed the car and then a whole bunch of people followed your instructions. Now one person working by themselves can make an idea, a product, a service, something in the world. And that shift in leverage means that you're not going to make it as a worker bee — you're going to make it as someone who is figuring out what to do next. And more important finding the faith, and I think the word faith is appropriate here. To walk up to your market, your world, your tribe, your community and say, here I made this.

Ms. Tippet: And — and you do acknowledge this. You know, this kind of shift — within a matter of generations. I mean, you know, that is taking place in the middle of a lot of our working lives — where you started out with one idea and now, and that's completely broken. But this is very stressful for human beings. Right? I mean biologically stressful. I mean, you even put a finer point on that. What is it you say, that you know, that the things that you used to make us feel safe are in fact now risky. And I mean I just want to put that out there. That it's beautiful idea that that's what we all get to do now, is stand up and I say, I made this, here I am. And be an artist, rather than a cog. But it's in human terms very challenging, very, very exacting. And probably feels impossible to a lot of people.

Mr. Godin: Exactly, Krista. So the Industrial Revolution paid this magical dividend, which is by being part of organization and by doing what we were told, which is inherently safe, we could get rich. I discovered a couple weeks ago the story of Yuri Gagarin, the first guy in space. And the thing that's extraordinary about it is he grew up in a mud hut with no windows and no electricity. So in the course of one lifetime, in 30 years, someone goes from a mud hut with no electricity to orbiting the planet in a spaceship. And that for me is the promise of the industrial age. Which was we said to people whose parents or grandparents were poor — do this and we will make you rich. And it's safe and school will support you and society will support you. So that's what all of us have as our ancestral memory of what you're supposed to do. And suddenly, really suddenly, we replaced this with a new order, a new way of doing business, where we're saying to people, guess what those ideas we used to play with are more important than ever. And that coglike obedience that we taught you in second grade and fifth grade and 10th grade, that stuff we don't think is valuable anymore. And society is being really slow to realize that that shift is going on.

Ms. Tippet: You know, it's interesting to me, like I think one of the things you and I are circling around is that all of our disciplines have been siloed in ways that are just so

clearly wrong now. But again, we don't quite know how to, it's a very messy process of breaking down barriers. So when I'm reading you, I'm wondering if 100 years from now, people would read that in the 20th century, even into the 21st century, art was something that was done by specialized experts — that it was a fringe thing. Right? That it was something of eccentrics and you went to museums to look at it. I'm wondering if they would just think, how crazy that is. So when I say to you, what is art? Who are the artists around you? What do you think of? What comes to mind?

Mr. Godin: So I grew up at the Albright-Knox Art Museum in Buffalo, which is a really wonderful contemporary art museum. And contemporary art means it's stuff that Mike Wallace hates. It's the things that anybody could do. And I wish I had a better word. Because sometimes when people think of art, they think of van Gogh. But I'm saying that we can all agree that Beethoven was an artist and that Shakespeare was an artist. Or that Joseph Beuys, who worked in felt and lard, was an artist. And it's not that hard to extend it to, yeah well so was Steve Jobs. That when he did things, he was doing them with the right intent for the first time in a way that had an impact.

So then I can expand that to anybody whose put an iPhone app into the world that changes the way we interact with each other or the device. Or I can say, guess what when Scott started charity: water and created a different way to both raise money to help people in the underprivileged world have fresh water and actually deliver on that promise — that act was an act of art. Because if it hadn't worked, it was going to fail because his structure was wrong and it wasn't resonating. And we can also have art that's done by groups of people in a community where they count on each other to create something bigger than themselves.

So when I was in Peru, I visited this village of aboriginal people who had been there for a very long time — who had come up with a different way to dye fabric. And it was unique to their village, and they had figured out how to do it in a way that was worth seeking out. And that was worth noting that it was a better, risky or interesting way to do something with wool. So yeah, that's art too. And so it's easy to keep track of what art is by what it's not. Right? It's not following a manual, reading a dummy's book, looking for a map. It tends to be people who work with a compass instead. Who have an understanding of true north and are willing to solve a problem in an interesting way.

Ms. Tippet: And — and I feel like that connection between — it's like once you let this out of its box that connection between impact and beauty, design. I mean, so I'm just so aware of this kind of accumulation of interesting things like public-interest design now. Right? There are all these movements which are then letting art and design out of its box. And then absolutely showing it as a connector and a driver in all kinds of endeavors that we think of as more practical.

Mr. Godin: But we now need to add a big shift here — which is that if you're looking at our conversation through the industrialist's point of view, you're next question is, but where is the mass? How do I reach everybody with a product that isn't average?

Ms. Tippet: Right.

Mr. Godin: And so that shows that we're keeping score of the wrong thing. Ben Graham, the great stock investor, has a quote where he said, you know, at the beginning the market is a voting machine. So that the goal is to see how many people are going to

vote for you. How many people are going to raise their hand and say, I like that. But in the long run, the market is a weighing machine. It's a scale of how much impact you had. And what this age we're living in is doing, is it's dividing the mass market, which is basically dead now, into hundreds or thousands of micro-markets — little markets of interest. So you can't make a substantial impact on everyone anymore. It's almost impossible.

Ms. Tippet: Right.

Mr. Godin: But what you can do is go to the edges, and go to the few people who care deeply and make a big impact there.

Ms. Tippet: And I want to — I want to bring in the word tribes that you used, because that's another way, you're using a word that we associate with something primitive. Right? That we think, that we thought modernity was about outgrowing.

Mr. Godin: Right.

Ms. Tippet: You are actually really affirming that. It's not, you know, identity doesn't matter less it matters as much or more. But you're saying that now it's not just a matter of blood and lineage that's given to you. It's something we create and choose. We choose who and what we belong to. It's not just about survival. It's about connection and flourishing.

Mr. Godin: So, you know, in the desert or the jungle, the tribe was defined by geography alone. That you were in the tribe based on where you were born. And then if we fast-forward to, I don't know, Mark Twain. Mark Twain would show up in a city and a thousand people would come to hear him speak. And everyone who came was in his tribe. They were in the tribe of, you know, slightly satirical, slightly jaundiced people who were also intellectuals who could engage with him. And he had never met them before, but within minutes, they were part of a congruent group who understood each other. And so if we fast-forward to today — you can take someone who hangs out in the East Village or Manhattan who has 27 tattoos — they go to Amsterdam, they can find someone in Amsterdam who talks their language and acts like them, because they've chosen the same set of things that excite them, and that they believe in. And we divide tribes as small a group as we want. But what the Internet has done is meant that we don't have to get on a plane anymore to meet strangers who like us.

That — the Linux operating system, which is on a billion computers around the world, was written by a group of strangers who have never met, who are part of the same tribe. And so the challenge of our future is to say, are we going to connect and amplify positive tribes that want to make things better for all of us? Or are we going to degrade to warring tribes that are willing to bring other groups down just so they can get ahead?

Ms. Tippet: Let's talk about marketing. I would say again in popular imagination, you know, marketing would be the place we'd point at for something exploitative that actually panders to the lowest common denominator, or tries to make us all alike and in unthinking ways.

Mr. Godin: Yeah, this is very risky, because we just lost one-third of all the people who are listening. Because if ...

Ms. Tippet: Well, right.

Mr. Godin: ... because if people think that marketing and advertising are the same thing, they are correct in that it's not really something that's worth a lot of your time. But what I've been working my whole life and working life to do is help people redefine marketing as the work an organization or person does when they tell a story that resonates with us. And that marketing isn't advertising — marketing is the product we make, the service we offer, the life we live. And that no one ever knows the truth about anyone else. But what we notice about other people and what we notice about what organizations do — that's marketing. If it's noticed, it's marketing.

So the choice is, do we seek to push to the world an idea that doesn't hold up to scrutiny, that isn't true, that isn't valid, but we can trick people into buying from us — that's one sort of negative way to approach marketing. Or do we build an organization and build a life and build a career where if someone knew the truth they'd want to work with us. And that's marketing too. And so the question as you go forward is — will you choose this ethical marketing that doesn't involve yelling at people, networking your way to the top, spamming people and lying? Right? But instead, involves weaving a story and weaving a tribe and weaving a network that means something. Doing work that matters. Because now everyone has their own TV network. Everyone has their own radio station.

Ms. Tippet: That's right.

Mr. Godin: Everyone has their own printing press. So what are you going to put on it? What are you going to put out to the world? Because if we're moving beyond you work for me and you do what I say — to a world where I say, here, here's a microphone, speak up. Here, here's the connection to the Internet — touch who you want. We're going to notice what you do. And so whether or not you choose to be a marketer, you are one.

Ms. Tippet: I mean here's something from your — I get your blog, your daily blog. I get it as an email. And you know, here for example, is I think something that just epitomizes that the different way you're inviting people to come at this word, in terms of life and work. So it's something about four questions worth answering. OK. So I mean, I have started to really ponder these in terms of my own little enterprise — my own little public radio show.

Four questions worth answering. Who is your next customer? You mean that conceptually. Their outlook, hopes, dreams, needs and wants. What is the story he told about himself before he met you? How do you encounter him in a way that he trusts the story you want to tell him about what you have to offer? What changes are you trying to make in him, his life, his story? And then you wrote, start with this before you spend time on tactics, technology, scalability. I think that's really refreshing.

Mr. Godin: There used to be parking meters in New York City that took quarters. And what that meant was that quarters were worth more than 25 cents. And one day I was parking on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. And a guy comes up to me who from all physical appearances was, use your word, hobo, bum, homeless, needed help. But generally, even on the streets of New York, it's very difficult to make a living by panhandling. Because most people tell themselves the story that they're not going to interact with a stranger. They're not going to give that stranger money. And it's not a useful way to help someone.

Well, this gentleman came up to me and he said, "Excuse me, do you have a dollar for four quarters?" Which is precisely the opposite of the question that people always ask you. And I was taken aback. Because actually I needed four quarters and was happy to pay \$2 for four quarters in that moment. So I did the transaction with him. And then he said, "Excuse me, do you have a quarter?" And the brilliance of the question, of course, is yeah he knew I had a quarter. He had just given it to me. And that we had a transaction that had helped me, so now it was obvious I was going to give him a quarter. In fact, I gave him three, because I wanted to reciprocate.

And what's magical about this story is that he understood that the world view, the story of the typical person on the street of New York is not I wish I could find someone I could give a dollar to. Right? And so people who are making change, and the people you've interviewed through the years — that's what they have in common. That they don't stand up and say, here is a recitation of things that are true, therefore you must agree with me. What they have figured out how to do is understand the mindset of the person before they even met them. And then put a story into the world that resonates enough to start changing that mindset.

Ms. Tippett: It's very hopeful what you write. And even how you describe what succeeds, what can succeed. And I think maybe even better than that, what endures. You know, the winning strategy of giving customers a platform to be their best selves. Again, that's a really different concept from how we usually think about what we can be successful in offering, you know, in any sphere. And how do you know that, Seth? Do you know that? Is that true? Is that really true? I mean, it's like you want it to be true. How do you know that's true?

Mr. Godin: Well, the reason I know it's true is because all I do for a living is notice things. And there's one view of the world — call it the Walmart view — that says that what people want, what all people want is as much as stuff as possible for as cheap a price as possible. And if you look at the world through that lens — and there are plenty of people who do — you can come up with a strategy to achieve that. And that's Black Friday sales and that's self-storage units. And that's somebody who's happy to push you to buy something you don't need. Because the object of the game is for them to have more stuff. And that's a world based on scarcity. I don't have enough stuff, how do I get more stuff?

Ms. Tippett: Right.

Seth Godin: There's a different view and we see it in so many places, but it doesn't get a lot of press — which is the view not based on scarcity but based on abundance. That in an abundance economy we, the thing we don't have enough of is we don't have enough connection — we're lonely. And we don't have enough time. And if people can offer us connection and meaning and a place where we can be our best selves — yes, we will seek that out. No, it probably doesn't help you build a big profitable public company, but yes, it helps you make a better difference to the community that you've chosen to live in.

(Sound bite of music)

Ms. Tippett: As someone who's in the world of media where what is big, you know, what gets the really big numbers is entertainment. Um, and so I just, it's for me it's been important to hear you saying things like this. You know, to hear you saying things like, number one in a small market is way more interesting, more fruitful and fun

than being number three in a large market. And I mean I think of that in terms of who's listening and what are they getting out of it.

Mr. Godin: Yeah, compare The Beverly Hillbillies to Star Trek. You know, The Beverly Hillbillies, even in the heart of the industrial age, were a ratings success. They were at the top of the ratings, and they got canceled. And no one other than me right now ever talks about The Beverly Hillbillies. Whereas Star Trek got canceled for having low ratings. And not only did it change the face of entertainment, it literally changed the face of technology and the way we live in our world. I mean the iPhone is nothing but a Star Trek communicator.

Ms. Tippet: Yeah.

Mr. Godin: And — and — and so, the ...

Ms. Tippet: And I'm still missing a lot of those characters.

Mr. Godin: Exactly, yeah. And so, you know, for someone in your shoes, the magic is this: that you're back to the weighing machine versus the voting machine. You will never have better ratings than the Jersey Shore. But that's not what the purpose is. It's not what the point is. It's not why we do our work. What works is does it matter? And is it possible to make a living doing something that matters? And the answer is, yes. Is it possible to make the maximum amount of money? Probably not. But that's playing by a different set of rules.

That what the Internet is saying to us is you don't need a building, and you don't need an FCC license, and you don't need 10,000 employees. So when I strip those away and I get to the nub of what I can be and what I can do, it turns out it's not that expensive for me to put my art in the world. So I can make more mistakes. I can take bigger risks. And I can make a bigger impact. Not to a lot of people. Like I'm thrilled that almost everyone I meet has no idea who I am and what I do. Because I don't want lots of people showing up and saying, I read this, I read this, I read this. Can I have your autograph? That's not the point. The point is will someone come up to me and say, based on what I learned from you I taught 10 other people to do this, and we made something that mattered.

Ms. Tippet: Yeah.

Mr. Godin: And you don't — you can't accomplish that if you're trying for ratings on the scale of The Beverly Hillbillies.

Ms. Tippet: So is that true that you are not recognized? I mean, you're saying that personally? Do you ...

Mr. Godin: Yes.

Ms. Tippet: Yeah, right. So this is this funny phenomenon of, you know, you and — I don't know — somebody like Brené Brown, it's true as well. It's this phenomenon of amazing things that are just under the cultural radar. And yet the irony there is something you, for example, or Brené Brown with her how many millions of people have watched her TED Talks. It's the niche, maybe that would be called the niche. But these niches are huge, some of them — some of them — and they're powerful.

Mr. Godin: Yeah, I think it's — I need to interrupt you. Because you're falling into the same trap, which is there is not such thing as cultural radar anymore. There's cultural radars. Right?

Ms. Tippet: OK.

Mr. Godin: That the New York Times Bestseller List is stupid. And they should stop publishing it. Because it doesn't mean anything.

Ms. Tippet: OK. But there it is, right.

Mr. Godin: Because it's actually the collection of 100 best-seller lists all mashed together. Right. That if you look at the list of the most popular TED Talks, it's a silly list, because very few people have seen all of them. So what you're seeing is 20 best-seller lists all mashed together. And if we're going to say, I'm not a success unless I'm on that best-seller list or this best-seller list or I get that thing in advance, or I have these sorts of ratings — you're playing the game of the industrialist.

Ms. Tippet: Right.

Mr. Godin: Whereas, the other way to think about it is, how few people can I influence and still be able to do this tomorrow? Because if we can influence just enough people to keep getting the privilege to do it, then tomorrow there'll be even more people. Because we're doing something genuine that connects, as opposed to doing something fake that's entertainment.

Ms. Tippet: So how do you — you must have people come to you who say, well you know, let's just say this. There are a lot of great things that happen which don't get recognition, don't sell. I mean, you have this idea — and I share this — that everyone, you know, that we all have something, right, we have that are all worthy and valuable and that there's something like a talent or a passion or a calling. But the truth is that these things get drummed out of many of us in different ways. And also that your passion might not be your talent. And also that every idea is not a good idea. So how do you advise people to be discerning on this? And that's another word you use that's really important to me, discernment. And I don't think it's a word we use that much in connection with something like the Internet. But you know, how do you help people who think about where to start and how to be wise?

Mr. Godin: Well, let me weave together two people in my answer. The first one is Robert Irwin, who is a little-known conceptual artist from the 1960s and '70s. And he talked a lot about learning how to see. That art is the act of making something where you forget the name of what you're seeing. And what we see among everybody who is managing to do this kind of work is that they've noticed things. They have learned how to see the difference between good and bad.

That Clive Davis understood how to listen to a record and say, my kind of listener is going to like this kind of record. And the only way you get that discernment is by practicing. Is by saying, when I pick this am I right? When I put this in the world, did it resonate with the people I was trying to reach? And then, so then we get to the 10,000 hours and the whole notion that if you practiced noticing enough, you'll get good at it.

Ms. Tippett: And that means you're not good at the beginning necessarily, and you'll fail?

Mr. Godin: Right. The only people who are good at the beginning are lucky.

Ms. Tippett: That's good.

Mr. Godin: You can't claim that it's a skill that you can see and other people can't see. That you got lucky in that you started with a set of assumptions that happen to resonate with the marketplace. But you're not smarter than the rest of us — you just, someone had to start in the right place and you did. But the second part that's so critical here is the Oprah Winfrey problem, which is that every writer who wanted to make an impact 15 years ago dreamed that Oprah would pick them.

Ms. Tippett: Right.

Mr. Godin: And so in a media-saturated world, we want to get picked. So like you, every day people show up to me and say, pick me, put me on your blog. If you would just talk about me, then my art will reach everyone I want to reach. But if we distinguish that from Darwin, you know the first lizard that crawled out of the mud and started walking on legs didn't say to the media, please pick me so that more for walking lizards could come along. That's not the way it worked; it's bottom-up. So what I say to people is, I'm not in charge of what's good. I don't get to pick what's a purple cow, what's remarkable — anything. That the world is, the bottom is, everybody, I'm on the bottom too, everyone is. So tell 10 people — there are 10 people who trust you enough to listen. And if you tell your thing to 10 people — if you send your e-book to 10 people — if you do your sermon to 10 people or show your product to 10 people and none of them want to tell their friends, and none of them are changed — then you failed. That you didn't really understand what was good. But if some of them tell their friends, then they'll tell their friends, and that's how ideas spread. So it's this 10 at a time — 10 by 10 by 10. How do you put an idea in the world that resonates enough with people if they trust you enough to hear it. That then it can go to the next step and the next step.

Ms. Tippett: Let me ask you about this word discernment. And just in terms of you, how you use technology. Because I think and this and everything else, you know, you kind of march to the beat of your own drummer. Right? So you do, you've written over 4,000 blog posts. You feed your work to Twitter, but you're actually not really on Twitter. Right?

Mr. Godin: Right.

Ms. Tippett: I mean you haven't taken that leap. You're, you don't follow anyone. But your writing goes into this Twitter account. You write books that rise to the top of the Amazon best-seller lists without doing anything that the whole world thinks you have to do to sell a book. I mean, it's not just not getting picked by Oprah, but you don't do book tours. You don't do interviews. So how, you know, what have you learned as you've worked with this thing called technology these years? How have you learned how to figure out what to throw yourself at and what to resist?

Mr. Godin: Well, I'm glad you said the word resist. We've managed to make it a long time without bringing up Steve Pressfield and the resistance for the lizard brain and the desire to hide. That what every artists wrestles with all day long is that voice in the

back of their head that says, uh-oh, you've gone too far. Better not show this to anyone. So what I've tried to do is strip away the things in my life that would give me a place to hide. So I don't write the sequel. I didn't write the Permission Marketing Handbook or Purple Cow Part 2.

I don't have employees, so that way I don't have meetings. I don't spend time on Facebook and Twitter because that would be a huge suck of my time, and I could deny that I was wasting time, because everyone does it. And so the challenge for me with technology is this leveraging me in a way that makes me uncomfortable — that puts me in a spot where I have to dig deeper to do the work that I'll be proud of. If that's what it does, that's what I want.

Ms. Tippett: So that's a good, that if your answer is yes. OK. So your answer, if it's harder, what did you say? If it's challenging, if it puts you in ...

Mr. Godin: Right. If it puts me — if the leverage makes it harder for me to do that thing I'm defining as art, then I want to do it.

Ms. Tippett: OK.

Mr. Godin: Right. And so that, you know, the Kickstarter project I did — I did it because it was interesting, not because it was a financially important thing.

Ms. Tippett: To raise the money for The Icarus Deception? Is that ...

Mr. Godin: Right. But it wasn't to raise money; it was to raise a tribe, to get 4,500 people to say, we're not, we haven't read it yet, but we trust you, go write it. Now those are pretty high stakes. Right? But and it meant I didn't have any excuses left. I couldn't say, well my editor wouldn't let me do it, or my publisher wouldn't let me do it. Because they weren't a factor. It meant that these people trusted me and gave me a tool that could bring it straight to them. That raises the stakes.

Ms. Tippett: I mean, one of the points you make about this new world we inhabit and the need and also the opportunity for each of us to be artists is that it's precisely when you are doing something that no one has done before that you are not going to get the loudest applause. Right? That you will not get picked. And that then requires us to develop some different kinds of internal resources. Right? I mean, how do we internally have faith in what we care about?

Mr. Godin: Yeah. Exactly. And that's where the discernment comes. You know, so when I give a talk — at the end you'll say, are there any questions? And the only people who are raising their hand are raising their hand because they think they have a question the group wants to hear. They think that they have something to contribute. Now what's fascinating about it is five minutes after we're done, everyone has a question. Right?

Ms. Tippett: Right. Right. Right.

Mr. Godin: Because now it's safe to ask your question because you're not going to be judged on the question that you're going to ask. But the people who do ask a question have demonstrated to themselves that they have good enough judgment to be able to put something into the world that hasn't been said before. That's

what makes it a good question. And that practice is something that we should learn and we should teach our kids, and we should teach our colleagues how to do it.

So if you and I had been sitting around just after the Dark Ages and heard the story of Icarus — what we would have heard is this: that Daedalus said to his son two things — one, put these wings on but don't fly too close to the sun because it's too hot up there and the wax will melt. But more important, Son, do not fly too low, do not fly too close to the sea, because the mist and the water will weigh down the wings and you will surely perish. And for me the most important message that I've come to after thinking about this for so many years is, we are flying too low. We built this universe, this technology, these connections, this society, and all we can do with it is make junk. All we can do with it is put on stupid entertainments. I'm not buying it.

So I go back to all the things that my late mom taught me. And we can have more faith in community and charity and innovation and dignity and education. And you know, I gave this talk a couple weeks ago to some educators. And a woman in her 50s raised her hand she said, "Well, I work at a community college. And that we don't, we have a different problem. Our problem is we have to let in everybody. And let me tell you something, mister," she said, "those people can't make art." And I started to cry because here is someone who is trusted to elevate and to teach and to inspire. And she had become so beaten down that in a public setting she turned to me and she said, "Those people can't make art." And I just don't believe it.

Ms. Tippet: It's hard to move past that. So you know, a final thing I just want to name is something that's wonderful — that you say again and again, that we are all weird. And again, you're pointing at something that manifests itself in so many ways. But we don't necessarily say, it's kind of the demise of normal, which is such a relief. And I wonder maybe in that regard, or maybe in other ways. You know, you're also raising children in this time. So how does that — how does parenting — how do your kids who are growing up in this post-industrial, post-geography world — you know how do they continue to feed and inform your sense of what this means and what's at stake and what's possible?

Mr. Godin: You know, if you spend time with technically connected 15-year-olds, you're going to discover a bunch of things. First of all, many of them don't watch any television whatsoever. But they consume more video than ever before.

Ms. Tippet: That's true, yeah.

Mr. Godin: Um, and — and most of them are not concerned whatsoever about Dunbar's number and this notion that they can only have 150 friends and family, or else their brain melts. They have 1,000 people that they're connected with or 5,000 people. And they are living a life out loud. And some people are responding to that by saying, I don't care. I'll put up pictures of me drinking out of a funnel. And I will, you know, act out, because it's in the world — I'm just going to do it and that's fine.

And others — and I'm very lucky to live with two of them — are saying, wow, what a chance for me to contribute to this circle, and to organize to this circle. That here's a stage and I'm not going to put on a play, but I am going to organize something, whether it's, you know, helping to build something with Habitat for Humanity or putting a technical innovation into the world. And so as parents, we're often pushed to make this choice.

And the choice is — keep your kids out of the connection world and isolate them and make sure they're "safe." Or put your kids into the world and, you know, all hell will break loose. Those are the things that they talk about at the PTA meeting. And I don't think that's the choice. I think the choice is everyone is in the world now. Everyone is connected. You cannot keep your 12-year-old from hearing profanity.

Ms. Tippett: Yeah, right.

Mr. Godin: You know, get over it. But given that they're in the world, what trail are they going to leave? What mark are they leaving? Are they doing it just to get into college? Or are they doing it because they understand that their role as a contributor to society starts now when they're 10, not when they're 24. And that the trail they leave behind starts the minute someone snaps their picture.

And if we can teach children that there isn't this bright line between off duty and on duty, but that the life is life and you ought to live it like people are looking at you, because they are, then we trust them. And we trust them to be bigger than they could be because they choose to be bigger. And it's that teaching, I think, that is so difficult to do as a parent. Because what you really want to do is protect them and lock 'em up until it's time. But the bravest thing to do is have these free-range kids who are exploring the edges of their universe, but doing it in a way that they're proud of, not hiding from.