

Getting Your Important Work Done

Michael Nobbs



Essays to encourage, inspire and reassure

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The Essays:

- [The Importance of Choices](#)
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- [The importance of putting energy back into the Energy Bank \(part two\)](#)
- [Wabi-sabi: the beauty of imperfection \(or how to reject the tyranny of perfection in order to get your Important Work Done\)](#)

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- Don't do today, what you could put off until tomorrow
- Forget about seizing the day, enjoy it instead (a gentler translation of carpe diem)
- Remember to celebrate your achievements
- Take some time to look back at all you've achieved
- Why it's okay (even essential) to stop completely
- Deciding to schedule a catch-up day into my week
- In praise of working on one thing at a time
- Stop trying to catch-up, work from where you are
- Learning to be compassionate with ourselves to get our Important Work done
- Why we need to avoid the "jam tomorrow" tendency if we want to keep getting our Important Work done
- Reaching and accepting limits
- Learning to stop (especially when we most think we can't)

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- [Giving ourselves what we need helps get our Important Work done](#)
- [Do a little something to raise your spirits \(and help get your Important Work done!\)](#)
- [Taking a holiday to make sure we stay on track with our Important Work](#)

A final word (or two):

[Clarifying what Important Work is](#)
[Further reading](#)

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About the Author

Michael Nobbs is a full-time artist, blogger and tea drinker (not necessarily in that order). He [writes](#), [tweets](#) and [podcasts](#) about drawing and trying to keep things simple.

In the late 1990s he was diagnosed with [ME/CFS](#) and, over the last decade, has learnt a lot about sustaining a creative career with limited energy.

He considers his Important Work to involve drawing and showing others that it is possible to live a sustainably creative life despite living with limited energy.

Once a week he draws a digital postcard called [A Sustainable Life](#).



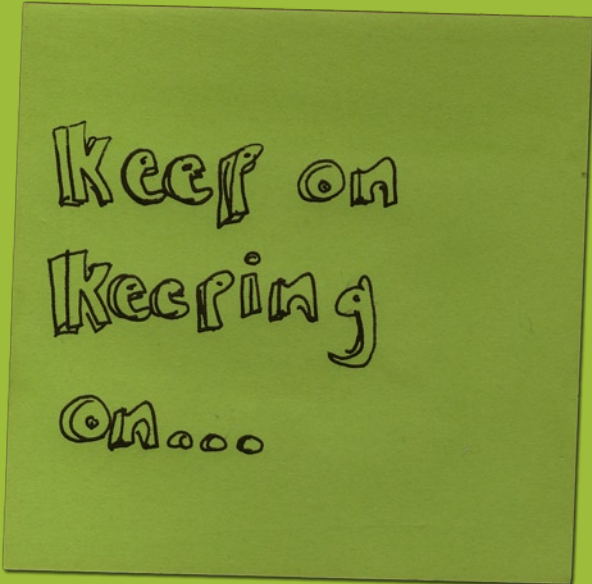
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Foreword

If you read my blog [Sustainably Creative](#) regularly, you'll know that I'm someone who has limited energy, but also someone who strives to maintain a creative career despite these limitations. I'm a firm believer in adopting the "little and often" approach to work and in distilling what I do down to the bare essentials (my truly Important Work) and just getting on with that as and when I can.

Little and Often

At different times I've written quite a lot on my blog, [Sustainably Creative](#), about taking this approach to creative endeavours; my [Twenty Minutes a Day Challenge](#), encourages everyone, but particularly those with limited energy and time, to set aside just twenty minutes a day to work on a creative project. It's amazing what can be achieved in just twenty minutes a day (I produced my recent [free ebook](#) this way) and how the achievement can



Keep on
Keeping
On...

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build confidence and even be energising in itself. Other posts have looked at the importance of [focus](#) and [being kind to ourselves](#) if we're low on energy but still want to get stuff done, as well as why it's a very good idea to [concentrate on just one thing at a time](#) when we're working within energy and time restraints.

Introducing the idea of *Important Work*

These posts have proved popular and I've had a lot of people contact me asking for more information about how I maintain my own career despite my limits, and looking for inspiration and encouragement to help them forge ahead with their own.

In an attempt to offer more information I began to publish a fortnightly newsletter called Getting Your Important Work Done. Those essays have now be collected together into one volume which I hope will prove a useful insight into the whole idea of Important Work and also provide some encouragement,

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inspiration and reassurance to people who struggle with maintaining a creative career whilst dealing with limited energy and/or time constraints.

Using this book

If you're new to the concept of Important Work, it's worth making a start by reading the five introductory essays at the start of this book first (and in order). After that just dig into the book and pick the essays that interest you.

If you are like me and are approaching your Important Work with severely restricted energy then the two essays introducing the concept of [The Energy Bank](#) might be of particular help.

The book ends with some [further reading](#) suggestions.

Introduction



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So, what is *Your* Important Work?

First things first, what is Important Work and what is your Important Work?

The essential core

Put simply Important Work is the essential core of what you do, the one thing that you would do were it impossible for you to do anything else. Once you've worked out what that means for you then it makes life so much easier, you can make decisions about what to use your time and energy working on by quickly asking "does this fit in with my Important Work?" and if it doesn't you can decide not to do it.

Maybe you already have a clear idea of what Your Important Work is. I think I'm still fine-tuning my idea of mine, but at present I'd say it was "writing and drawing about my life to encourage others



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to find ways of being sustainably creative.” If you’re still not clear about what Your Important Work is then why not try answering these questions from the blog post, [Distill your ambitions down to their essential core](#):

1. If there was only one thing you could work on now what would it be?
2. If there was only one direction you could take you work in for the next five years where would you go?
3. If you could only work in one field or on one project for the rest of your life what would it be (this answer may be very different depending on how long you picture your life being!)?

Do your answers reveal any sort of pattern? Is there something emerging that feels like it might be Your Important Work? If so, can you write a short sentence that clearly explains what you see as Your Important Work? If not, don’t worry, keep pondering the above questions, eventually something will emerge.

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Your Important Work: What it's not

A long time ago I read an article about time management, called [The Pickle Jar](#). Now, I'm not a big fan of time management theories and systems; it seems to me that they usually involve spending more time working on the system than actually doing stuff, but there is one bit of this article that continues to hit the spot for me.

The Pickle Jar

You may well know the theory of The Pickle Jar, but briefly the jar is a metaphor for our working day (or our life for that matter). We can fill it with rocks (really important stuff), pebbles (less important stuff) or sand (other stuff). Now if we were to put the sand and pebbles in first it would be really hard to fit any rocks in, but if we put one or two rocks in first then the other stuff can fit in the cracks.



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I'm a big fan of rocks, really big rocks (and always putting them in the jar first). The rocks are Your Important Work and the only way to get it done (especially if you have limited time and energy) is to pop those in the pickle jar of life first. Don't put a drop of sand or a sprinkling of pebbles in that jar until you're tackled a rock.

That's much easier said than done of course and some sand and pebbles can feel very urgent and important, but are they really? If you do tackle the rocks first you'll often be surprised just how much of sand and pebbles does fit in around the edges, or ceases to matter.

Some sand and pebbles (what Your Important Work isn't):

- Checking email
- Visiting Facebook
- Checking Twitter

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- Aimless TV watching
- Aimless web surfing
- Endless Research
- Planning
- Writing long to-do lists
- Worrying about how to do something
- Going to meetings
- Cleaning/Sorting/Rearranging our desks or workspaces
- (in short any unproductive busyness!)

Carve out (just a little) work time

Now, I quite accept that some of the above may count as downtime and I'm all for rest and relaxation (I shall be taking a nap just as soon as I finish writing this), but if you want to get Your Important Work done then carve out work time (even just 20 minutes a day) and focus on working on a rock in that time.

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Your Important Work: A space of your own

In her classic treatise, *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf famously argues that any woman who wishes to write fiction must first have secured both an independent income and a room of her own.

A corner to call our own

Whilst an independent income would be very nice (!), it is the second part of Virginia Woolf's equation, the room of our own (or even a corner that we can call our own), that I think is a must for anyone with limited time or energy wishing to pursue their Important Work, and it's what I want to talk about here.

When I first started drawing classes at the end of the 90s I used to visit my teacher in her studio and was completely in awe of her and her workspace. It was part of her house and I envied the



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fact that she could just get up in the morning and have all her materials and equipment on hand. At the time I had only recently been diagnosed with [ME/CFS](#) and had VERY limited energy and the thought of just being able to roll out of bed and do a little work was so appealing, but at the same time I just couldn't imagine ever being able to marshal enough resources to be able to afford any sort of workspace of my own.

Start Small (and think smaller)

Now more than ten years later I have a studio at the bottom of my garden that I regularly roll into still in my pajamas (!). I'm very grateful for it. However I started off on a much smaller scale. My first workspace was a small table in the corner of my bedroom. What was important about it wasn't its size, but the fact that it was permanent. I could leave my materials and whatever I was working on out and ready and just pick up on my current project from where I left off.

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Some ideas:

- If energy and/or time are limited there's no point wasting either in packing away or preparing materials. You want everything where you need so you can make most efficient use of your time. If everything is waiting for you, then it really is possible to achieve a lot in just [twenty minutes a day](#).
- If it really is impossible to leave the tools of your trade out and ready then consider using a box or a bag to keep your things in. You can think of this as your portable workspace and just reach for it everyday when it's time to get on with Your Important Work.
- Finally think of ways you can scale down the things you need to get on with Your Important Work. The less you need the easier it is to find space to keep it, and the quicker you can just get on with Your Important Work. On days with very limited energy I can get plenty done in bed with my laptop and my (very old) graphics tablet.

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If you enjoyed this sample, click on the link below to find out how to download the full version of the book:

<http://www.sustainablycreative.net/gywd/>