People ask me what I am, and I give various answers, as should we all. A writer, after all, is not merely a writer, nor an artist an artist, nor an actor an actor.

I have learned finally, more often than not, to reply:

I am a magician.

And not only a magician, but a boy-magician with a false moustache that falls at my feet as I finish an illusion. It is that boy, and not me, who works the miracles, traps life, shrugs with amazement, and hands the whole incredible stuff on to the man I'm supposed to be.

So should it be with managers and management. If, when asked what they were, such chaps responded with "I'm a manager," or "I'm a businessman," then I think they should be writing them off as doomed. Or, at least, in my magic book.

For, really, isn't it true, we are all up to the same business? We go about it differently, but the result is the same. We are survivors who learn and live and teach survival, this man this way, that woman another. But all of us inhabit one earth and the sum of us is life itself, and all of us on our way through that life must find his or her way to survive. When we learn that lesson well, we can pass it on to our friends and children.

Books, printing, typing, writing, reading, are ways of trapping time and information and funneling it on to the present and future generations, thus hoping to improve their chances at survival and enhance their lives while they do it.

It follows then that a manager is not a manager nor is management a coterie of managers, but single human beings and a great mob of humans engaged in their own effort of survival, singly and by the numbers.

Let me go back to that boy-magician. If you will allow.

Have you ever, as employee or employer, powerless or with power, sat at a meeting with your peers, as I have, and looked around suddenly in panic to think:

What am I doing here? These people are all forty-five, fifty, and fifty-five years old! They know what they're doing! And I am ten, twelve, thirteen at the most. And know nothing!

Sound familiar?

It happens to me all the time. Not just once a month, or once a week, but almost daily when people turn to look at me and ask my opinion. At museum conferences, in film studios, following plays where I am asked onstage to be part of an analytical panel, or when my daughters come to look in my face to chart the future. Sometimes a large moment of panic ensues. If not that, at least a small one, and then I regain my calm and think: But we are all this age, aren't we, trapped in the older self, still feeling a lack of education, still sensing we have not yet learned to think? Yet here are all these curious folks, craning their heads like dinosaurs in a swamp, staring at me as if I were Tymanosaurus rex, when at most I am, simply the boy who holds the nervous rabbit on his lap, waiting for others to begin.
It is to this boy, the boy who inhabits your blood even as you read this, that I will seize you back again and again. For if he has not survived, your own ability to write, act, paint, husband, father, or manage will be impaired if not crippled. If you have starved him, if you have forgotten how to have fun, how to play, how to love, then no matter what you set out to do, you will not do it well.

How do you feed and sustain that kid? What is there in diet and intellectual nutrition that differs as between a writer like myself and you who read these pages and hope to learn how better to creatively manage whatever business it is you are part of? In order for all of it to enjoy your creativity?

I contend that we are not different in any way and proceed with amiable arrogance to give you my recipes...

Feeding Creativity

Well now, when was the last time you ran to a library and took home more books than you could read, like stacked loaves of bread, warm in the arms, waiting to be chewed? When, for that matter, was the last time you opened a book, placed it to your nose and gave a great sniff? Heaven! The smell of bread, baking.

When was the last time that you found a really great old book store and wandered through it hour after hour, alone, finding yourself on the shelves. With no list, no intellectual priorities, just wandering, sniffing the dust, plucking the pigeon books off the shelves to read their entrails and, not in love, putting them back, or in love, losing them home? To be lost in time is to find your roots. How long ago was that? How long ago did you try? How long ago did you simply do?

When was the last time you told your son or daughter that you loved him for her? When was the last time you said the same thing, bless his grey head, to your living father?

When was the last time you went into a stationery store and bought forty bucks worth of stationery you didn’t really need, because it looked rainbow bright and all noonday sun?

When was the last time you ate lunch alone, so you could find your own thoughts and maybe know just who in hell you were, instead of giving your energy away at lunch with people you really didn’t want to be with?

When was the last time you took a train across country only two-and-one-half days away from telephones, with that book you’ve been wanting to read, and a bottle of champagne at midnight to “be drunk as you watch the little towns go by and wonder who in hell all those people are in the houses with the bright windows? Here they come, there they go!”

When was the last time...

When was the last time you stuck your head in at an office meeting just after lunch and said, everyone the hell out, go swim, go make love, come back at four for that meeting?

Because, if you do that, and people go swim, jog, run, jump, love, and come back refreshed, did you ever figure maybe you might get more done in one hour of chat than in three hours of pressure?

For that matter, did you ever think that maybe taking your whole staff to the desert to sit around a pool and swim and figure problems might be better than those damned meetings you sit at and terrify one another with, and sweat with and try to solve problems with? For we all know, don’t we, I mean don’t we, that the harder you try the less you do, and the more you try to think the less thinking gets done?

I’ve had these signs by my typewriter for 40 years:

DON’T THINK. DON’T TRY. JUST DO.

For in doing, in the process, thought evolves. There’s plenty of time to think after the doing, after the action, after the fun. To approach problem solving grimly, in business or anywhere else, is to be non-creative. Do you run your business like the Inquisition, condemning ideas by being too serious?
I hate serious people. When I see someone sitting down with me or anyone else to have a serious discussion, I know the Muse will be dead by noon, carried out with the trash by three, buried by dusk, forgotten by dawn.

I have seen more problems destroyed by overthinking than I have seen solutions created.

If I were to toss out another motto it would be:

LEAVE PEOPLE ALONE!

If we gave each other more breathing space, we would all create better, work better, live better. Don’t nag. Suggest. That means to yourself, too.

Stay away from newspapers, television, radio, and telephone calls early in the morning. It’s your best time, your creative time. Depending, of course, on the business you’re in. If it’s the stock market, forget it, you’re sunk already.

Stay away, then, from anything you can’t even begin to solve, which is why I mention TV, radio and newspapers, because it’s too late for the rapes, murders, and robberies, right? If you carry that burden into your life, at breakfast, you might as well go back to bed. Okay to read Barron’s and The Wall Street Journal. But try them at night, okay?

Stop watching the 6:00 News, or the 6:30 News, or come to think of it, sometimes even the 7:00 Intercontinental and National News. Stop watching the 11:00 News. If you must, watch Ted Koppel on Nightline at 11:30 at night on ABC. Or the MacNeil/Lehrer Report.

Why this advice? We have become a nation of doomsayers and thought destroyers. We are no good, we say, we are beneath notice, we are dustworms, we are graveyard dirt, we are lousy, we are the world’s worst.

Well, son, and daughter, it follows that if you believe that, you will stop living. You won’t be able to manage your zipper, much less a small business or a medium corporation.

Instead of the French intellectual’s dictum—oppose in order to learn and be enlightened—we oppose out of easy cynicism, rampant self-detestation, and the will not to listen.

Creativity cannot exist in an acid-rain of murder, rape, suicide, car-crash, and nuclear meltdown. For Christ’s sake, the world isn’t ALL that. Come off it. Jump from the Bubonic Plague Express and join us plain peasants on the road, getting our work done, and with some small hope, no matter how pitiful, for the future.

After all, think of it, every single leader in the history of the world has been an optimist. Can you name one that wasn’t?

Did any of them run on the ticket Doom and Gloom, tomorrow will be lousier than yesterday? There’s no hope? Give up? Lie down? Fester? Don’t bother to repent? Die?

They did not: Not even Hitler. He was out to bust the world, bust, or know the reason why. And, by God, he almost did it, while others stood around and said nothing could be done.

Turning Job into Play

Now if none of the above things seem to apply to you, don’t be so certain-sure!

After all, what is life supposed to be about? Love and fun, isn’t it? Good grief, if everything isn’t fun, why do it? Or most things, anyway. There’s always a certain amount of drudgery connected with any work, business, art, or even playing basketball. The latter isn’t easy, but unless you frolic at it, like a healthy animal, you had better hit the showers.

If someone told me that, from now on, for the rest of my life, I must write only serious novels and be a serious thinker thinking deep long thoughts, I would either kick the son of a bitch, run like hell, or quit writing. Even my serious novels, and I have done a few, were absolute delights to
write, were delicious enterprises that surprised and shocked me as I went. If life isn't cracker-jack, the more you eat the more you want, what the hell is it?

Yes, yes, I can hear you, this is some damn fool aging Martian maniac running around laughing all the time and making people want to drown him in the nearest pool. Not so. It's just that I absolutely love my work so much I want to pass the secret on. When you love work it's no longer work, we all know that. Love is the lubricant that turns Job into Play.

And we stop loving work when we ignore the long cliche-ridden list I have laid out for you in this essay. We forget sometimes. This article is to remind you where you lost yourself along the way.

If your meeting room, your board room, or your office (take your pick) isn't a nursery for ideas, a rumpus room where seals frolic, forget it. "Burn the table, lock the room, fire the clerks. You will rarely come up with any solutions worth entertaining. The dull room with the heavy people trudging in with long faces to solve problems by beating them to death is very death itself. Serious confrontations rarely arrive at serious ends. Unless the people you meet with are funloving kids out for a romp, tossing ideas like confetti, and letting the damn bits fall where they may, no spirit will ever rouse, no notion will ever birth, no love will be mentioned, no climax reached. You must swim at your meetings, you must jump for baskets, you must take hefty swings for great or missed drives, you must run and dive, you must fall and roll, and when the fun stops get the hell out. The whole idea of brainstorming, unless it is a storm of hilarity and ideas clamoring to be born, is silly and non-productive. God deliver me from such.

That just about does it. Save to add one immense irony: Even insane people like the world so much they don't want to leave it. How's that? Rather than commit suicide people hole up in madness, hide away in insanity, in order to survive. Anything, they say, is better than nothing. Being crazy is better than being dead. There's a lesson there, if we want to take it.

You are neither mad nor bad nor dead. You are alive, but sometimes you forget it. Life is running through your fingers and you forget to mould, touch, shape it as it passes. Touch it, mould it, shape it.

Or, conversely, on certain days, emulate Darwin.

What did he do? He strolled out to stand in the middle of fields waiting for a bird to land on his shoulder, watching for the foxes to come home at dawn, listening to the sounds of the world and knowing delight as well as discovery.

Tomorrow, go stand in a field somewhere. You might just meet yourself, coming home, at noon, or as the sun sets, and your heart will know delight.

"If your meeting room, your board room, or your office (take your pick) isn't a nursery for ideas, a rumpus room where seals frolic, forget it... You will rarely come up with any solutions worth entertaining."
"It's important for companies to promote from within. Otherwise, there's no career path for the people there and it forces [employees] to constantly be job hunting because they know they're not going anywhere in that company," says Penelope Trunk, founder of Brazen Careerist, a networking hub for young professionals. While leadership development programs are great for identifying existing talent within your ranks, it's also a good idea for business owners to establish an overall company culture of promoting from within. Talent Management from Within. Staffing Critical Job Roles by Developing Internal Talent. Top talent is today’s competitive differentiator that makes the difference between an organization that is thriving and one that is stagnant or declining. Organizations need to find ways to define and develop the right mix of critical talent to support and grow their businesses other than by looking outside. To ensure a flow