

The goal of this chapter is to give you that push to start what you want to do—whether that’s painting, writing a novel, changing careers, moving, building a project, or starting a business.

Careful: not to contemplate the possibility of doing it, not to prepare to do it—no, no. To actually start. To take the first step. By now, you know your motivation, you know how to find ideas, and you have the basics of managing your energy. If you keep reading, it’s not to toy a little longer with the idea of what you could do; don’t treat it like a joke or a game, because your creativity and your dreams are not games—they matter. Who you can be and what you can create are already there somewhere; you just have to let them come through.

Exercise no. 1

Write down your creative goal.

It could be a project you’ve never dared to work on—a book, a film, a painting, a business, a life change, a trip—or an activity that intrigues you—playing padel, studying theology, taking a ceramics course.

If you already have a creative activity you’re dedicated to, or you’ve already gone back to writing, or you’ve already changed jobs, etc., you can indicate a project related to what you’re already working on.

For example:

- *Open a YouTube channel where I teach creativity.*
- *Launch an e-learning platform.*
- *Write a new book.*

Now list the reasons why you haven’t started yet. What’s blocking you? What are the resistances that keep you from moving toward your goal?

For example:

- *I’m afraid of looking stupid.*
- *I’m afraid of making mistakes.*
- *I don’t have time.*
- *I wonder what the point is.*
- *I feel it’s not the right time...*

Read your blocks out loud. You’ll notice that many of them don’t sound solid—once spoken, they lose their strength, because they’re just thoughts with no contact with reality. Some are old phrases you’ve repeated out of habit or hearsay, no longer valid or perhaps never valid at all; others are worries without any real-life experience (“I’m afraid of looking stupid” is very different from “I felt stupid once and I don’t want that to happen again”).

I could tell you that many are just excuses, but that wouldn't help much. The point is this: what you think are your blocks probably aren't; they're decoys, while the real blocks and fears are something else entirely. Our mind tricks us, protecting us from pain and suffering, so we end up saying simple things like "I'm a procrastinator," "I'm an impostor," "I'm never satisfied" rather than opening up to the real reasons that limit us.

That's why we can't break through fears and blocks just with our heads—it's like playing a chess match we can't win. We have to take another, much more practical route: we need to take fear of failure, fear of making mistakes, the belief that we don't have time, and all the other points we wrote down, by the arm—and start doing what we want anyway.

The supposed blocks around taking the first step dissolve when you take the first step. Once you cross the threshold, what was invented vanishes and only reality remains—your legs shake, your stomach flips; only then will you discover why. My aim in this chapter is to talk about common blocks and offer exercises to unlock them, hoping that one word among many, or one action, will spark a click somewhere inside you. If that happens, you'll take the first step, and you'll finally have the chance to discover the real reasons that were holding you back.

Block no. 1: The Fake First Step

Roberto wants to open a shop selling handmade bracelets and has been experimenting with metals for six months to find the best solution. Lucrezia wants to open an ice cream stand and has been studying how to make flavors for a year.

Both Roberto and Lucrezia believe they're working on their project, but in reality they're just procrastinating in a very sophisticated way. Roberto's goal is not "to invent new bracelets" but "to open a bracelet shop," and Lucrezia's goal is not "to invent ice cream flavors" but "to open an ice cream stand." The big risk for both is that they'll never actually open what they want and will spend the next two years in endless trials and experiments.

Someone might object: "Oh, but they're fine with it that way!" Sure, but if they really want to open their businesses, they're not on the right path!

Practical Unlock no. 1

If you realize you're stuck in endless preparation, dedicate yourself immediately to the real activity. If you want to write a novel and have been "gathering material" for six months, open Word and write the first

chapter. If you want to open a restaurant, go visit available premises. If you want to sell bracelets, try selling them at a market stall.

Block no. 2: I Don't Know Where I'm Going

Matilde is about to quit her job to go freelance as a graphic designer. She's building her website, yet she doesn't feel well—she's struggling to sleep from the anxiety. When I ask what's troubling her, she says: “I don't know where I'm going.”

This feeling is paralyzing because it's true. Uncertainty is part of creativity: every time we step out of a pattern, we truly don't know where we'll end up—it's like setting off on an adventure.

I smile and say: “That's the best part.”

I remember right after finishing university, torturing myself with awful thoughts (“What will I do now? Where am I going? Will I find a job? Will I be a failure?”), my great-uncle, then seventy, told me: “I envy you! Now the fun begins.”

That comment shocked me. I wanted to reply that I was terrified—terrified because of the economic crisis, didn't he see the news!? The crisis meant no jobs! And... and... and...

I stopped. Looking at the genuine spark of life in my great-uncle's eyes, I realized all my worries were nonsense. We'll always be afraid of what we don't know, of what's uncertain and unpredictable—it's human and obvious. But where did I want to place my focus? On terror or on excitement?

Since then, whenever I'm afraid of not knowing where I'm going, I stop, breathe, and seriously ask myself: “Matteo, would you trade places with someone else? Would you really give up living this adventure?” Usually the answer is no.

Practical Unlock no. 2

When you're afraid, stand up with your knees slightly bent. Feel the ground supporting you, that you're in balance, steady, like a warrior.

No one is forcing you to move forward. No one is forcing you to start the project, take the leap, or make a change. If you don't like it that much, or it's not the time, you can stay right where you are.

Picture on your left a reality where you fear the future, and on your right one where you can't wait to catch a flight, start a new job, smile at this new chance to experience life.

Then choose which side you want to be on.

Block no. 3: Perfectionism

Angela wants to open her shop of hand-dyed scarves, but the more she looks at her work, the more she feels they're not ready yet. Fabiana hesitates to launch her website because she's still not convinced about the colors and text. Mario isn't advertising his writing course because he doesn't think it's good enough—he wants to rework it again.

There's a big difference between “perfectionism” and “attention to detail.” I can assure you that people who pay attention to detail eventually look at what they've done with admiration and say, “Wow!” appreciating the richness of detail they've created. There's another word for perfectionists who endlessly rework something, and that's “procrastinators.” A creative knows perfection doesn't exist—on the contrary, the beauty of what we do often lies in its small imperfections.

Years ago, when I was launching UXBox, my online UX academy, I started by promoting a beta version of the website that was just barely acceptable. A week later, I realized no one was interested. So I changed the site's style and offer, and that did the trick: within 48 hours, I had two students! There was only one problem: I hadn't recorded a single lesson yet, and the students expected to start soon. I dragged the table near the window for some light, prepared the slides for the first six lessons, and recorded them as best I could. Then I inserted the YouTube links into a PDF labeled “First Module” (so I had an excuse not to send all the lessons at once).

I thought the students would be furious and tell me, “Matteo, this stuff is awful, recorded with spit and tape,” but they were thrilled! And that's how I began—building and improving the product over the following months.

This is common practice in the startup world: instead of launching a perfect product, you put out an MVP (Minimum Viable Product), the bare minimum that still works. Meaning: don't launch a fully polished app, launch an acceptable version; don't launch a writing course with expensive professional videos—focus on the content, even if the videos are shot in your kitchen.

The concept of MVP exists precisely to “fail as soon as possible,” so you can improve the product as you go.

Practical Unlock no. 3

If you're stuck because of perfectionism, adopt the MVP logic. Make ten sample scarves and try selling them to gather feedback. Publish the website and see how it works (you can always change it later!). Launch your writing course as it is and improve it in the future.

Block no. 4: Fear of Not Earning Enough

Ruggiero wants to leave his steady job to start his own business but is afraid of running out of money—he still has a mortgage. Barbara wants to start a freelance career but thinks of her daughters, and the thought of not having a steady paycheck terrifies her. Claudia wants to focus only on writing but won't even consider quitting her job—she doesn't have much savings, and every day she looks at her bank account wondering, "How long would this last?"

The fear of not earning enough is reasonable. Ruggiero, Barbara, and Claudia aren't wrong to be concerned. The problem is that this fear blocks them before they even start. It's the same fear that drives parents everywhere to warn their children against becoming artists, writers, or singers and to encourage them to be doctors or lawyers instead: because it's harder for the first group to earn a living, while for the second, work seems guaranteed.

One evening I spoke with Federica, a 35-year-old woman who'd been saying for six months that she wanted to open a handcrafted sunglasses business, yet she kept making product tests without actually launching. I pointed out she was procrastinating, and she admitted it. Federica didn't have money problems—she owned her home and had plenty of savings—so I asked, "If you needed money, would you get moving?"

She shot back, "Of course! If I needed money, I'd go get a job as a shop assistant immediately!"

The fear of not earning enough shows up differently for each of us, but the root is the same: we can't imagine a reality where we make money doing what we love. Federica couldn't imagine earning from her sunglasses—that was clear. The same goes for Ruggiero, Barbara, and Claudia. If they believed they could make enough to live, they'd have no problem starting.

When I launched *intùiti* on Kickstarter, I raised nearly €50,000, which I used for the first production run and to ship the product to all backers. Then I didn't know what to do next. An accelerator in San Francisco invited me to move to Silicon Valley to grow the project into a full-fledged business, and I said "No." How could that deck of cards become a company? I couldn't put the pieces together—how would it sell? In what way? With what money? It seemed impossible.

I didn't go to San Francisco because I couldn't picture a scenario where a creativity tool could become a company.

It took me another six years—not because I suddenly convinced myself, but because when I tried selling another of our products, *Fabula*, online, and sales started pouring in, I had proof. It was right there in front of

me—I could see the numbers. You don’t need to convince someone who’s worked for years in a bar that bars can work. They know—they’ve lived it. So when I saw 20–30 *Fabula* orders a day, I rushed to open the company.

Unlock no. 4

You can’t convince yourself in your head, and I can’t convince you with my story. No one can. You have to try and experience it for yourself. So try earning even just one euro from what you want to do as soon as possible: find a small freelance gig, set up a website for your service, and... give it a shot. Sometimes it only takes a few evening or weekend hours to start a business. You don’t have to change your life overnight—just prove to yourself whether it can work or not.

If you start selling your prints online and after a month no one’s bought a single one, it means it’s not working (or that you’re not yet able to make it work); if you sell ten and make €500, you can start asking yourself how many you’d need to sell to do it full-time.

Note on “special cases”: For Claudia, who wants to be a writer, the situation is different. If she researched properly, she’d find that most writers don’t make money from books (very few do) but from courses or from working in publishing. In other words, professional writers usually have a steady job related to writing and work on their books in their free time. That means Claudia doesn’t have to quit—she just needs to carve out enough time.

Block no. 5: I Don’t Have Time

Valeria wants to work on her personal blog, Francesco wants to design a new product for his company, Giuliana wants to rewrite her CV to change jobs—and they all say the same thing: “I don’t have time.” There are always other commitments or urgent tasks demanding their attention: work, family, errands.

This block is something unreal that we manage to make very real. It’s not true that we don’t have time to write our new book, but somehow we allow external agents to invade our time so that we truly don’t have any.

A simple example: if I’m a freelancer working from home with a client deadline, I’ll defend my time firmly. When my girlfriend, who finishes work at 5 p.m., asks me to go grocery shopping, I’ll say: “No, love, I have to finish—I’ll need at least another two hours.” But if I’m working on my new book (with no set deadline), I’ll likely agree to go with her, and at the end of the day, I’ll feel like I didn’t have enough time to write.

Commitments without obligation are the hardest to honor. If it’s work, we’re usually pretty good at drawing boundaries; when it comes to our

passions—when there’s no boss, supervisor, or client—we stop valuing our time.

When my friend Giorgia told me she didn’t have time to produce the ceramics she wanted to sell, I asked: “Why don’t you have time?”

“I have to look after my son,” she said.

So I asked again: “And if I ordered ceramics from you and needed them by the end of the month—what would you do?”

Without hesitation, she replied: “I’d take my son to my mother’s in the morning and pick him up in the evening.”

Practical Unlock no. 5

Whenever you think you don’t have time, ask yourself: “What if I’d been commissioned to do this?” What if someone were paying you to write that novel and gave you three months? What if a client had hired you to create that new product?

I’m sure that, magically, you’d find all the time you needed.

First point to reflect on: we’re all great at working overtime in the office—I’ve seen people wipe out their social life completely just to please their boss or company. We should ask ourselves: “Why don’t I want to please myself?”

Second point: when creative work stops being a hobby and aims to become a life choice—a real job—it may be more enjoyable than doing something we dislike, but it’s still work. That means it requires commitment, sacrifice, dedication, and respect. And the time it needs must be defended. If I open my barber shop but am never there because I’m busy with a thousand other things, the shop will fail.

Block no. 6: Wanting to Keep Both Sides

Gloria is 45, a bank manager, and wants to start her new career as a coach—but she’s terrified of throwing away the life she’s built so far.

This block is tied to the image we have of ourselves and our past: “What will become of the old me? How can I abandon it after all the effort I put into building it?”

Gloria doesn’t take the decisive step because she’s still on the edge, wondering if there’s a way to keep both sides.

The flip side of this block is Renato, her colleague downstairs, also a manager for over twenty years, who wants to start the Amazon shop

he's been thinking about for a long time—but doesn't because he believes you can't "keep a foot in both camps" and waits for the courage to quit entirely, courage that will never come because, like Gloria, he's afraid to let go of a part of himself.

No one likes to abandon a self-image they've built. I was very attached to mine as an art director/designer: it was comfortable to identify with that label, I'd studied for years for it, and it felt like a warm blanket. It was hard to switch to "publisher." Where had Matteo the advertiser gone? Matteo the art director?

It's scary because we ask: "Will people take me seriously? And if I change my mind, can I go back? Will I ever find a job again?"

Death is transformation, and to evolve, some parts of us have to die to make room for the new. The employee dies, and the entrepreneur is born. The cynic dies to make space for the compassionate. The same happens with our masks: we created them for a reason—to support, protect, or hide us—and when we no longer need them, we can remove them, thank them, and let them go.

We are not the bank manager, the art director, the baker, the greengrocer, the coach. We have practiced those professions, and when we decide to do something else, our experience comes with us. Gloria's managerial skills will serve her in her new coaching business. The same goes for Renato with his e-commerce. Sometimes it takes twenty years in a job we don't like to learn how to choose the one we truly love. Those years aren't wasted—they're a great lesson.

Many feed this block by thinking they have to go from zero to one hundred, quit immediately, and change their lives overnight. It's not true—almost never necessary. Don't create unnecessary drama. Statistically, new entrepreneurs with the highest chance of surviving their first year keep their old job, even part-time, which prevents them from making reckless decisions.

Practical Unlock no. 6

Don't think of it as an apocalypse—start doing what you want step by step, without it having to be a dramatic life change. Take on two coaching clients and see how you feel—whether you enjoy it, how much time it takes. Open your e-commerce while doing something else—manage it in your free time and see where it leads.

You are still you. It's one more piece in your life: think of it as adding rather than subtracting. Rest assured that whatever needs to go will leave on its own without fireworks.

Block no. 7: They Convinced Me I'm Worthless

Many of us have real creative traumas. Someone in our family or at school brutally conditioned us, saying things more or less harsh like: “You’re worthless,” “You’re no good at this,” “You’d better get a real job,” “You’ll never manage to do that.” A special category of these statements is reserved for women only: “Better marry a rich man,” “You’re too frivolous, find a solid man,” “You can’t make it on your own.”

Unfortunately, these phrases get inside us, take root like a virus, and shape us for life. Even if we’re aware of them—remembering the exact words and who said them—the block doesn’t go away easily. There’s a process called “repetition compulsion” in which we unconsciously seek out situations similar to our past traumas, hoping to overcome them once and for all, often ending up stuck in a vicious cycle.

They told me I was worthless, and “mysteriously” I keep finding myself in workplaces where I’m unappreciated. They told me I couldn’t write, so when I sit down to write, I’m gripped by tremendous anxiety, freeze up, and judge myself: “See!? They were right! I’m worthless.” They told me I’d never succeed, and every time I post something of mine on social media, I desperately look for criticism; even if there are ten enthusiastic comments and one negative, I fixate on that one and torture myself.

Practical Unlock no. 7

These traumas don’t resolve on their own—they require energetic work as well. My advice is to find a competent practitioner and get help.

Still, there are actions you can try. First, stop fixating on those phrases (they were said—you can’t change that fact) and try not to feed the anger you feel, which only strengthens them. Picture the person or people who said these awful, hurtful things—whether it’s your mother, father, siblings, grandparents, or a teacher—and allow for the possibility that what they told you was their reworking of something someone else once told them. I’m not suggesting you justify or forgive them, or pity them—only to allow space for the possibility that they too suffered something similar to what they then passed on to you.

See them in their entirety—not only as perpetrators but also as victims. See where the pain they made you feel came from. Make a gesture with your hands, palms facing upward, to respectfully return to them the weight that does not belong to you.

You can say something like: “I now release all conditioning, prejudice, and external judgment. I know my worth, and I am enough.”

Block no. 8: Fear of Money

Giulia is a painter with great talent, but she doesn't want to organize an exhibition because the idea of selling one of her works disgusts her. "I don't paint for money," she thinks constantly. Roberto wants to attend a craft fair with his handmade goods but is disturbed by the idea of standing there waiting for someone to pay him. Fabrizia wants to offer her ceramics to shops but trembles at the thought of talking prices with the owners.

All three fear money in some way: Giulia fears being corrupted; Roberto feels like a street beggar; Fabrizia feels ashamed, like a thief.

I remember the first time I named a price for my freelance services. I said the number aloud during the meeting and then sat there staring at the clients, pretending to be confident. Inside, I was terrified they'd burst out laughing and walk away. Instead, the oldest one said: "Perfect. We'll pay you half now and the rest upon delivery, okay?" I nodded, but inside I thought: "Damn, I should have asked for more." It took me years to feel truly at ease naming a value for my work or products. Now, if someone says it's too expensive, I'm the one who walks away.

Money is energy. With money, we eat, dress, stay warm in winter, buy a roof over our heads, send our children to school, care for our loved ones. Rejecting or fearing it is not very wise. When we work, create art, write a novel, or develop a project, we invest our energy—and it's right and necessary to receive energy in return. Otherwise, we'd stop doing what we do.

Practical Unlock no. 8

Try selling something of yours as soon as possible. The goal is to experience and get used to the exchange of money. If you feel ashamed, embarrassed, or uneasy, it means you haven't yet recognized a value for your creativity. In that case, listen deeply: what's happening inside you? Did you ask too much and feel like a fraud? Did you ask too little out of fear they'd say no?

Remember: the café owner, when you hand over €1.20 for a coffee, doesn't feel lesser than you because he's taking money. And you're not doing him a favor. He proposed a price; you accepted. It's an equal exchange. He made you coffee; you repaid him with money.

Why should it be any different for the products or services you offer?

Block no. 9: Ingratitude

Giovanna has a well-paid job in a stable company, with a boss who treats her respectfully, and a wonderful family. Carlo also has a good job, is building his career, and has a wife he loves who loves him back. Filippo has just received a raise, and his boss treats him like a son.

Yet Giovanna dreams of writing a novel, Carlo wants to devote himself to photography, and Filippo longs to move abroad. When they think about their ambitions, all three shake their heads and feel ungrateful. “With all the good I have,” they think, “how can I want more?”

What blocks them is guilt. How can they dare to want a different life? It feels like a betrayal—toward their loving family, their respectful boss, the generous universe.

Here’s my take: be very careful with guilt, because it’s one of the most powerful control systems that exist. How can expressing yourself and becoming who you truly are possibly be a crime?

Practical Unlock no. 9

Your boss, however respectful and kind, is still your boss—not a friend or family member.

The person who loves you—if they truly love you—wants you to be authentic, to express yourself, not to live compressed in a life that isn’t yours. If you think about it, you want the same for the people you love.

Your children can sense if you’re deeply dissatisfied. What example do you want to give them—the example of people who are serene, or of people who are fulfilled?

And as for the universe: if you really want to be grateful, commit to living your life fully—which doesn’t mean trampling over others with selfishness, but neither does it mean settling for a situation that doesn’t resonate with you and forcing yourself to smile.

Remember: the universe loves you. Love yourself, too.

Block no. 10: I Have No Energy

Maria wants to work on her project but is always tired—she wakes up tired and, as soon as she comes home from work, collapses on the couch and then in bed. Something similar happens to Paolo, who wants to change jobs but feels exhausted at the thought of preparing his CV and sending it to companies. Both complain: “I have no energy.”

It’s not that we don’t have energy—it’s that it’s blocked. This can happen because we’re repressing something or because we’re living in a way we don’t like. It’s a big problem because we end up in a vicious cycle: we don’t change our situation because we have no energy, and we have no energy because we don’t change our situation.

Practical Unlock no. 10

To increase your energy level, start by breathing: whenever you notice you're holding your breath or breathing shallowly, stop and allow yourself to breathe more and deeper, inflating your belly.

Another practical action is exercise: go running, walking, to the gym, climbing, swimming—anything that brings you back into your body. Feel yourself—there you are, you managed to run five kilometers, climb that mountain, you're breathless, your heart is pumping.

The truth is—you are full of energy.

Block no. 11: I Have So Many Blocks I Don't Even Know Where to Start Breaking Them Down

This isn't even a block—it's just a funny little resistance that can appear when you're close to unlocking.

One evening I was talking with my friend Lucia, who couldn't start her project, and I helped her dismantle one or two blocks. At that point, her eyes were darting around a bit, her complexion was brighter—she was probably realizing that the fog she'd felt between herself and her project was lifting—and that's when she took a step back, shook her head, and said: “No, forget it, it's useless. The truth is, I have so many blocks I don't even know where to start to break them all down.”

When this happens, you're just resisting change. The number of blocks you could list in those moments is practically infinite: “Everything's already been done,” “I'm a pessimist,” “I'll never do it as well as that great author or designer,” “I'm afraid of failing,” “I'm an impostor,” and so on.

These are just limiting thoughts, often quite banal. What can we say to “Everything's already been done” or “I'm a pessimist”? The first is false, the second a powerless complaint. Let's be honest—they're tantrums. Of course I'll never write like Henry Miller (I'm not Henry Miller!), but I can aim to write like Matteo di Pascale. Of course I'm afraid of failing—if I weren't, I wouldn't care about what I do.

Practical Unlock no. 11

This resistance can be broken in an instant.

No one cares about your tantrums and excuses. Say it to yourself out loud in the mirror, if you need to. Not only that—if you're honest, you'll realize you don't even care that much yourself.

Block no. 12: Not Seeing Reality

For years, people called me courageous: when I quit my secure job in Milan to escape to Amsterdam with nothing in hand; when I left the prestigious Leo Burnett agency to finish writing a novel and go freelance; when I dropped everything to go to China; when I came back after only two months; when I gave up my UX designer career to start a company.

But I never felt courageous: I simply aligned myself with the reality I saw.

When I lived in Milan, I earned €1,200 a month and spent almost all of it just to live: I did a job I hated to have the money to live in a city I didn't like. When I quit Leo Burnett, I was dizzy from stress—coming home leaning against the walls, hating my job, and thinking only about the novel I wanted to finish.

Before opening Sefirot, I was always dissatisfied with my professional life—I'd get hired, then quit after a few months, sabotage job interviews, and complain about all my freelance clients. The only things I cared about were my books and my products.

The truth is that, once we see reality for what it is, we realize we don't have that much choice.

When I hesitated before starting the company, I burst out laughing: "Matteo, what second thoughts could you possibly have? You don't have any other options."

The only courage is wanting to see reality—the rest is just a consequence. If you've wanted to write your novel for ten years and everything else disgusts you, what other option do you have but to finally try? If your job disgusts you, you can't stand your colleagues, and the pay doesn't "compensate" for all you dislike, what do you think will eventually happen?

You see, I don't believe creative blocks truly exist. Once we choose to walk the creative path, we'll face a thousand difficulties—sure—but it's rare that ideas don't come, that projects are abandoned halfway, or that we turn back. I think we're just incredibly good at delaying that first choice, pretending for years not to be who we know we are, not to love what we love deeply, burying ourselves under tons of ineffective attempts, and staying there like embers under ash.

Have the courage to see reality as it is—that you are creative, and that you will never truly feel alive or in your place unless you surrender to the only possible choice: to express yourself.

That, I assure you, is the first step.