

# START NOW

**Poke the Box: The Workbook**



***What would our world look like if more people started projects, made a ruckus, and took risks?***

***Seth Godin***

## About *Poke the Box*

*Poke the Box* is Seth Godin's latest book and the first book coming to you from The Domino Project, a pioneering publishing venture launched by Seth and powered by Amazon. *Poke the Box* is a book about taking initiative, a first step toward creating change. This study guide is brought to you by The Domino Project and we hope you use it as a guide to start poking.

## About This Workbook

This workbook was written to ask one basic question:

**What would our world look like if more people started projects, made a ruckus, and took more risks?**

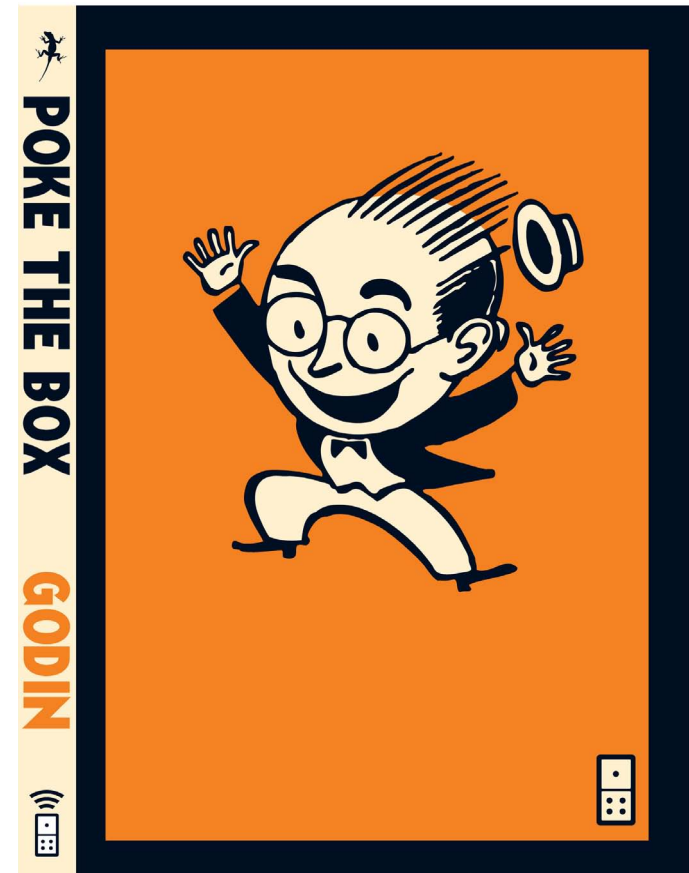
If you are up for the challenge of helping us make that vision a reality, please read on. Be warned that we are going to push you to go beyond the point of no return, to commit yourself and make something happen.

If you like this workbook, please send it to everyone who needs to read it. Feel free to email this file directly or post it on your blog.

There are more questions here than answers. That's intentional. The answers come from **you**. This will require you to explore corners of your life where you hesitate, procrastinate, or weasel your way out because you're afraid.

We've filled these pages with quotes, action items, and excerpts to light a fire under you and get you started.

Let's light a fire...



Click the cover to learn more about *Poke the Box*.

# shall we?

***The job isn't to catch up  
to the status quo;  
the job is to invent the  
status quo.***

***Seth Godin***

## GO

The simple thing that separates successful individuals from those who languish is the very thing that separates exciting and growing organizations from those that stagnate and die.

Starting.

What if more people began to speak up, notice things, and start things? Our world, the people around us, and our attitude about what we did all day would change. All it takes is initiative. Even just a bit.

## How To Get Started In Three Easy Steps

Winners have turned initiative into a passion and a practice.

Here's how:

1. Don't think about it.
2. Just start.
3. Keep starting.

## Where Do Good Ideas Come From?

You.

You who are willing to think out loud, to act on instinct, to broach the un-broachable. Yes, you've done this at least once before in your life.

Now look that list over and add more and some more. Now you have a new problem: you're on the hook to start something.

Make a list of what you should have, could have, would have done "if only."

***The most common way  
people give up their  
power is by thinking  
they don't have any.***

***Alice Walker***

## Talk Yourself Into It

Did you have an idea but talked yourself out of it? Did you convince yourself that your great idea would just take too much time and effort? Perhaps you concluded that if it's such a great idea someone has probably already done it or will do it.

Think again.

Why not the more the merrier? Add yours to the mix. Steve Jobs *and* Paul Allen. Dogfish Head *and* Magic Hat. Why can't your contribution sit next to Emerson's or Jagger's?

It can, in fact.

## Pick Yourself

Why is it that many successful people assume that permission to start comes from being validated by someone else?

Even the most creative and entrepreneurial people among us believe that they have to wait to be chosen. Authors wait to be chosen by an agent and then by a publisher. Entrepreneurs find themselves waiting to be chosen by a venture capitalist or investor. 'Pick me' acknowledges the power of the system and passes responsibility to someone else to initiate.

## Get Into The Habit Of Starting

Make your schedule before you start. Don't allow setbacks or anxiety or fear to push you to distract yourself from your task. If you're doing hard work and still getting rejected, failing, working it out, writing and rewriting and rewriting—this is not the best time to slack off.

Keep going, nap later.

***We are what  
we repeatedly  
do. Excellence,  
then, is not an  
act but a habit***

***Aristotle***

Choose one thing you could start today. Make it simple—make file folders—or make it grand: write a proposal to Delta airlines to eliminate the Styrofoam cups they use and replace them with the recycled cardboard cups you are going to develop and design with advertising space for additional revenue.

Got it?

Ok, now do it.

### Let's Go

What differentiates us from every other creature is that we willingly and frequently go places we've not gone before. We approach life open to discovery, surprise, and the risk of exploration.

Here's the scary part: going somewhere new is risky.

Here's the good part: it's usually not as risky as we think it is going to be. In fact, it could be fun and often leads to further adventures.

### Risking It All?

What are you afraid might happen if you took action on your ideas? Do you worry that you will be destroyed? Your reputation ruined? Or like most people are you really afraid that you might actually succeed?

When you try something new or take a risk, you often feel uncomfortable, fearful, and insecure about making mistakes. That is natural, but it's not natural to stop here. Most times we stop here. But if we continue, there's a (high) chance that we'll overcome our fear and get to a place of confidence, knowledge and a faith in our abilities. And there is nothing wrong with making a few mistakes—or many. In fact, that's how we learn what not to do.

***All growth is a leap in the dark, a spontaneous, unpremeditated act without benefit of experience.***

***Henry Miller***



***Adventure comes with no guarantees or promises. Risk and reward are conjoined twins—and that's why my favorite piece of advice needs translation but no disclaimers: Fortuna fortes adjuvat. 'Fortune favors the brave'. In other words, there are many good reasons not to toss your life up in the air and see where it lands. Just don't let fear be one of them.***

***Mary South***

The journey is what takes us from novice to experienced, from scared to wise. Sticking with it when it's risky is what gets you to the other side.

## Facing The Inevitable

Some common fears:

**We'll look stupid and people will laugh at us.** We've had this happen to us and the embarrassment was more than we could bear. It's hard to try anything new after that.

**We'll fail, miserably.** Yes, we might. We've failed more times than we can count, but unless you're free climbing Yosemite's El Capitan chances are failing won't kill you.

**We'll hurt someone we love.** This one is hard. We don't want our mistakes to hurt our friends and family or disappoint the ones we love.

We might not be able to immediately grapple with the root of our fears, but knowing the source might sort out what's risky and what just feels risky because we're not used to taking initiative.

## Spring Training For Risk Takers

Like an athlete who trains for game day, you need to train yourself to take a risk. You'll need practice, the right support, and a dose of courage.

We're not trained to take risks, but we are trained to hold meetings, stop talking when we're told to, and stay the course. We're told to look for security and to silence our creativity if it speaks

What is your biggest fear about starting?

What would happen if that fear came true?

Would it stop you from trying again?

***Don't bother just to be better than your contemporaries or predecessors. Try to be better than yourself.***

***William Faulkner***

too loudly. Initiative hides from cultures and companies that ask us to fit in.

Starting thrives on our ability to play, to humor ourselves, to look at things in a unique way. It's not easy, but that's why it's worth the trouble.

### **Starters Everywhere, Unite!**

Starters need support.

Is there a group of people who will support your initiative? These are the people you should surround yourself with when you're starting something. These are the people you want in your corner when you're experimenting.

Make a list of these heroes. These could be friends, strangers, stuffed animals – anything and anyone who you can look to when you want to give up.

What type of training do you think is necessary to start things more often?

What support will you need as you begin to poke?

Is there a group of people who will support your initiative?

# HEROES

***My favorite lesson is that you need to surround yourself with likeminded people, and that putting yourself in the right circumstances can protect you.***

***Po Bronson***

Is there a group of people who will derail your efforts? Do you have a friend that criticizes more often than lends a hand? Do you have a family member or a co-worker that's always telling you why you shouldn't do something?

These are the people you should steer clear of as you start. Your new job of starting is hard enough, without having extra negative energy around you. You don't need to explain your project and why you're doing it. Your job is to believe in it and keep on track.

Return to that list of supportive heroes, these are the people you want to talk to if you need help or advice with your new initiative. You will also need them to remind you that they are more important than your detractors.

Is there a group of people who will derail your efforts?

How will you be resilient and keep up your poking when your environment doesn't support it?

What will be your weapons against people who tell you to lay low and avoid taking a chance?

# ENEMIES

## **Start. Stop. Start. Stop. Start**

Think about this for a minute: Is there something stopping you from starting that new project?

Sometimes just as we're about to start, we give in to our fear.

Acknowledge that feeling. But don't give in.

## **Take A Look At Yourself: You're A Risk Taker**

When did you do something that felt risky? What made you do it? How did you feel after you did it?

What does taking risks mean to you? Do you think it's a part of your character, and would you like to make it so that it is?

How willing are you to take a risk? How does your past experience inform your willingness to take risks?

How risky does trying something new feel after you've failed a hundred times? How does it feel after you've succeeded a hundred times? Even if you have succeeded that should be all the more incentive for you to take even more risks.

## **Making Mistakes Is Essential**

Now that we know how to poke, we can take the drama out of it. Poking means seeking embarrassment. If you're not flailing around embarrassed all the time, you're not shipping enough. To poke means to do and ship so much that mortified becomes your norm. Yep, you crave it. You demand it. Soon, just like Lady Gaga and Steven King and the Governor of California, success and persistence and poking will speak for itself.

Is there something stopping you from starting that new project?

Every innovation and accomplishment in our world started out with a long list of failures.

Mistakes are a part and parcel of poking. You have to experiment, and that means putting yourself out there, seeing what happens, taking a chance at not knowing what the outcome will be. Risk failing. In our acceptance that we'll fail, once or twice, maybe twenty times, we'll get to a place where failing is natural, and we accept it as so. Once we do this, we're more powerful and increase the chance of an eventual success.

### **Ever Been Called A Failure? You're In Good Company**

In *Poke the Box*, there's a list of famous people who failed many times, including Harlan Ellison, Steve Carrell, Oprah Winfrey, Richard Wright, Mark Cuban, Mehmet Oz, George Orwell, Michael Bloomberg, Nan Talese, and it goes on and on.

You don't need to be famous to fail, but it's nice to know that even the most successful among us started out probably right here.

Did that list surprise you? Wouldn't you like to be included? It takes guts to constantly and consistently fail, and that's what it takes to be the Walt Disney's and Gloria Steinem's of the world. A long list of failures, a large dose of resilience, and the ability to keep starting.

***Who we  
are never  
changes.  
Who we  
think we  
are does.***

***Mary S. Almanac***



## Celebrate!

When we succeed, we pat ourselves on the back, yet when we fail we often get frustrated and grow ever more fearful of trying again. Can celebrating the guts it took to fail help combat the normal stuff that comes up when we don't succeed?

Do you know someone who has a long list of failures who is now happy personally and professionally? Why do you think they're successful now?

Certainly making some mistakes is easier than making others. For example, those that don't cost us much—financially or emotionally. Similarly it might be easier to take risks when the consequences reveal themselves more immediately—such as telling your mother in law that she is a lousy cook. For others, when the distance between action and outcome is longer the risk is more appealing.

What is your favorite failure and why?

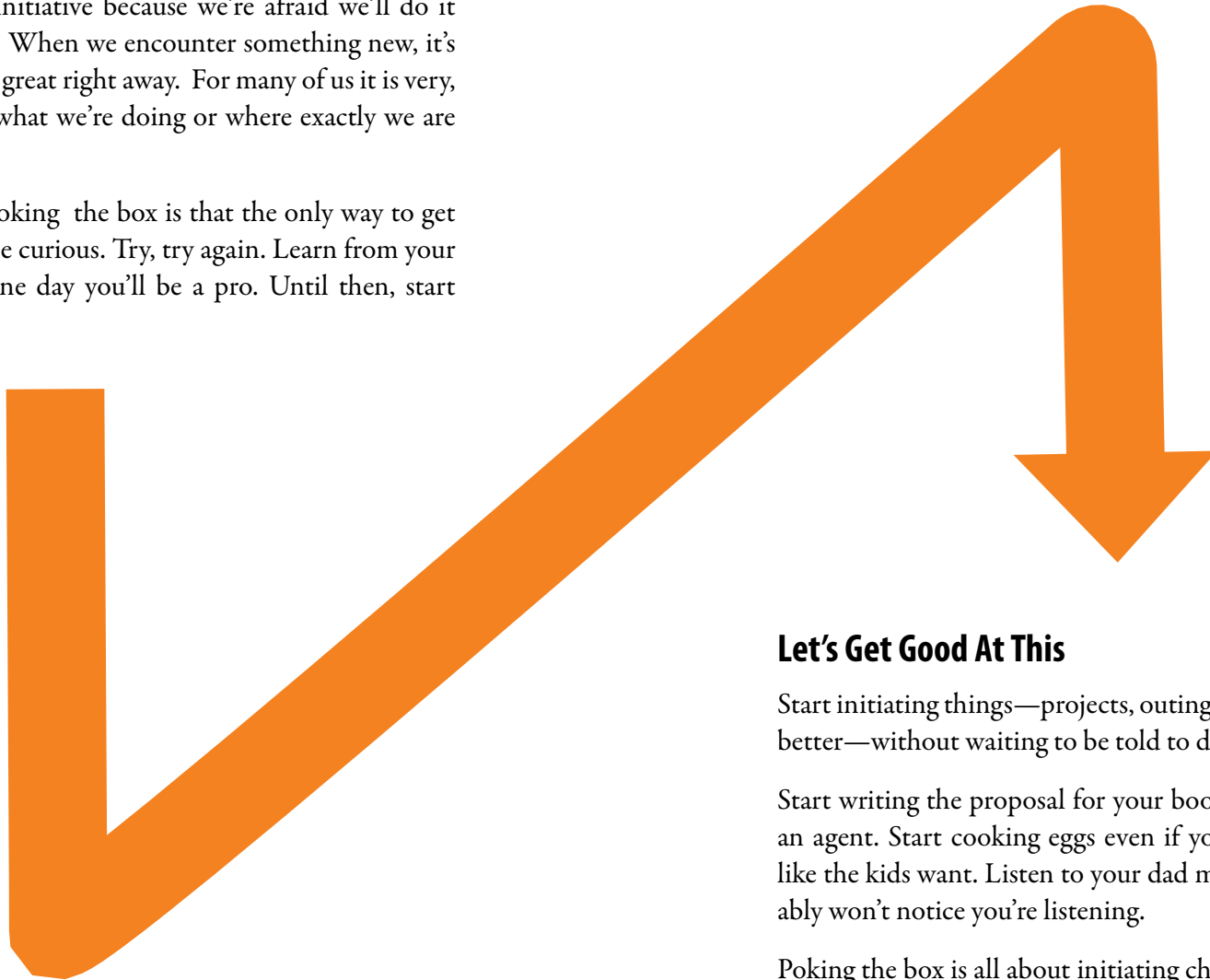
Do you feel better about making certain mistakes over others?

What are some of the biggest mistakes you've made, personally or professionally?

## I'm No Good At This

Many of us don't take initiative because we're afraid we'll do it wrong, which is natural. When we encounter something new, it's our nature to want to be great right away. For many of us it is very, very hard to not know what we're doing or where exactly we are going.

The great thing about poking the box is that the only way to get better is with practice. Be curious. Try, try again. Learn from your mistakes. Be patient. One day you'll be a pro. Until then, start again.



## Let's Get Good At This

Start initiating things—projects, outings, ways to make your office better—without waiting to be told to do so.

Start writing the proposal for your book without thinking about an agent. Start cooking eggs even if you can't make them runny like the kids want. Listen to your dad more even though he probably won't notice you're listening.

Poking the box is all about initiating change, both large and small (hint: starting small is easier and often leads to big successes).

To poke is to push yourself to start. Anything.

## Where Do I Start?

Is there an area of your life that needs poking? Can you make things better for you and those around you?

- If you never pick the restaurant, can you make reservations next time?
- Can you be the person in your family who exercises consistently?
- If you're laid back, can you start initiating and planning activities?
- If you wash the dishes every day and someone else cooks, can you switch roles?
- Can you start to solve the problem while other people are still talking about it?
- Can you say your idea at a meeting even though you'll be thought as strange?
- Can you apply for the job that you think is out of your reach?
- Can you propose that you work from home two days a week because the office noise is too distracting?
- Can you start on the project because you think it's a good idea even if you don't have buy-in from your boss?
- Can you organize the family reunion even though it will be stressful to do so?

Once we learn how to take initiative we see opportunities all around us.

What are some small things you've taken charge of in your life?

What compelled you to finally start?

## **Start Here, Start Now**

Sometimes we do things unconsciously. We go along with societal “norms” when all we really want to do is take charge of the situation. It’s time to start listening to that little voice inside of us that says “start now!”

When we start things we inspire others to do the same. We take the mystery (and the fear) out of poking when we experiment and try new things. There is no better way to lead than by example.

## **Poking Is Crazy**

Thus when you poke, you’re crazy.

Because it’s not common, poking is often seen as disruptive, abnormal or inappropriate. When you experiment and the people around you want to do so but don’t, you’re seen as an outsider, an infidel. They’re scared (just like you) but poking is your game—you’re doing it anyway, no matter what. It’s hard at first but the more you begin to do the things you want, to push yourself, it won’t matter what the people around you think. When you start something there is almost always instant gratification. Just knowing that you’re capable of creating something new is empowering.

Have you ever received support from someone who really wanted to start something but couldn’t do it alone?

Once poking makes you happy, you’ll keep on doing it despite what others say. And you’ll find yourself encouraging others to do the same.

***Do not go  
where the  
path may lead,  
go instead  
where there  
is no path and  
leave a trail.***

***Ralph Waldo Emerson***

## Celebrate Your Milestones

Celebrate the progress you make after starting.

List small milestones you'd like to honor and then really give yourself the attention you deserve for accomplishing them.

List small milestones you'd like to honor

What will you do when your initiative is successful?

When was the last time you were delighted by the results of something you started?

***To thine own  
self be true,  
And it must  
follow, as the  
night the day,  
Thou canst not  
then be false  
to any man.***

***William Shakespeare***

## **Go. Change The World**

If you were invited to give “the talk of your life” as TED talks invite us to do—what would it be about?

What would you want to teach others? What would you personally want to learn from the experience?

If you were given the opportunity to start something that could change the world, what would it be?

What will the world look like once you take initiative?

Why are you waiting to start? What are you waiting for?

# Go



Click the cover to learn more about *Poke the Box*.

### Learn More

More information about *Poke the Box* and  
The Domino Project at  
[www.thedomino.com](http://www.thedomino.com).

This workbook was written by  
Ishita Gupta, Amy Richards, and  
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Thanks for reading!

