

# What Floats my Boat

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Portia Tung, BCS SPA Conference, July 4 2012

## Introduction

Portia is particularly interested in storytelling and playmaking. Today will be structured around a story.

Portia has tried 20 times or so to write a book. She quickly became bored each time. The lizard brain is hungry, horny, fearful etc. Writing a book is a very good way to get to know yourself! In Portia's case, the fear manifested itself whenever she got close to finishing a book – until at about the 20<sup>th</sup> attempt she managed to overcome the fear.

## The Dream Team Nightmare

Portia distributed story cards that described a scenario – very similar to a fantasy adventure game.

2 schools of thought: keep dreams to yourself, because they then force you to get on with it. Or, face your fears and tell the world, because that will reinforce your commitment and make you visualise the results of your efforts.

The first approach didn't work for Portia. Another author told her that the words in his head clamoured to be set free by being written down.

Another approach: Portia started writing a blog, generating hits and feedback. She made a start on a book on 26 December 2011. She signed up to a scheme that would print and publish the book by May 2012! She used a value burn-up chart to motivate herself to complete a certain number of words each day.

Writing makes you think about things. You experience a sense of joy and of loss! Other ideas that occur to you while writing have to be written down and parked somewhere – keep focus.

“Go out into the world and do well, most important of all, do good” (classroom poster).

Portia found that her ideas about the plot would vary from one day to the next – so she decided to use the “create your own adventure” format.

## Play

“Necessity is the mother of invention. Play is the father of creativity”. (Roger von Oech)

Bradbury's rule is that you need 10,000 hours to become really proficient at any skill.

Portia also had to coach herself about the practices she was following to create the book:

- Chunk it up
- Do something every day
- Test

Testing took the form of putting early drafts in a dropbox for a group of up to 20 early readers to look at.

It became a little like a game – readers were moving the pieces about. It was an exercise in being truly agile.

“When critics disagree, the artist is in accord with herself” (Oscar Wilde). All contributions are valuable – even if not for the current book. Showing the work in progress to others is another way of motivating yourself.

“If you made it up, you have to live it down” (Robert Fulghum)

## Avoiding Waste

Using ideas from “Lean Startup”, Portia asked on Twitter who would buy a business novel she had written. Someone swooped in saying he would pay her *not* to write it. It turned out the critics just didn’t like the format of a business novel.

Be aware that the result of your work will have to exist on its own one day.

“A teacher affects eternity; he can never tell where his influence ends” (Henry Adams).

Portia tried to make the story as practical and usable as possible.

“There is no lighter or more agreeable burden than a pen” (Petrarch). How untrue. Yet how true.

Be in balance with what you believe – live your dream, walk the walk.

## Questions

Was 20 minutes a day really enough to make progress in a month? Portia joined a self-support group with all sorts of off-the-wall projects. It was amazing how much you can achieve in 20 minutes of concentrated time per day. Procrastination is particularly easy if you’re quite intelligent!

Do you still have your novel inside you? Yes, it has been festering away.