

# STATE OF WONDER

DISPATCH 2012

from Jeffrey Davis & Tracking Wonder

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### **YOU ARE HERE**

*Where are you in work, creating, and relationship  
that you weren't five years ago that you're grateful for?*

In 2012, I'm in the middle but I'm neither stuck nor lost. I'm in the middle of my life. My little girl turned three this July two days before my father died and three days before he would have turned 74. Some days, my body seems like a fragile mobile home vulnerable to unpredictable winds. Other days, it astounds me with its capacity for renewal and agency of this creative mind. My father's absence, my daughter's presence, and my wife's partnership remind me daily of how extraordinary the simplest things are.

Every day holds so much promise.

I'm in the middle of my next book. The singular elegant idea conceived, the structure designed, the research near-complete, the next leg of intense work begins. The book looks nothing like its original conception a few years ago.

I'm in the middle of my business. It's assumed different shapes the past few years, but its latest incarnation took clear shape this year.

When you're in the middle - of your life, your business, your book - wonder is a welcome ally. Wonder rattles your perspective on what matters and what your life and work mean to yourself, your loved ones, your audience and customers.

This dispatch, STATE OF WONDER, is an opportunity for me to reflect on what has happened this year, give you a peak behind the scenes of Tracking Wonder, and share with you some take-aways that might prompt your own STATE OF WONDER.

## THE ENTREPRENEUR SERVES THE CREATIVE

*How is your business model serving your life model and creative model?*

"I'm less worried about accomplishment -- as younger people always can't help but be -- and more concerned with spending my time well, spending time with my family, and reading, learning things."

- Jonathan Safran Foer

In early 2012, I took stock of how my business model was not serving the entrepreneur or the poet in me. I was feeling spent, over-extended, and exhausted.

From April to September, I had one uber-goal: Simplify my mind's focus so I can create more of the work that matters and that captivates and serves my fan packs – readers, customers, clients, retreatants. Deeper & more articles & videos, poetry, my book manuscript, and events material.

That's what **the art and science of captivating creativity** is all about – captivating your own mind and time so your meaningful work can captivate the hearts and minds of the people you serve, delight, provoke. In short, your customers and fan packs.

But to simplify my mind's focus meant I needed to take care of business matters on the outside and on the inside.

### Falling into business & 3 brands

Quick biz history recap: In 1999, things changed. 33 and discontent with an interim dean and with my life, I left full-time teaching and full-time working for anyone but my best self. Two months newly married and not just a whole lot in the bank, I leapt.

I started two complementary brands: what would become Yoga As Muse (a series of signature methods, programs, & trainings that integrate yoga's practices & philosophies with creative process & creative living) and what became Center To Page, LLC (a coaching & consulting business for writers & authors).

Yoga had so indelibly and beautifully screwed up my comfortably, intellectually numb life that I went to India to study with [my teacher Sri TKV Desikachar](#), became a short-term resident at the rigorous [Zen Mountain Monastery](#), and taught yoga in Woodstock, New York.

In 2002, I sold the break-through book [The Journey from the Center to the Page: Yoga Philosophies & Practices as Muse for Authentic Writing](#) to Penguin-Putnam – later revised & updated in a far more elegant 2008 Monkfish edition. The workshops & coaching business boomed.

Features and mentions in the likes of Yoga Journal, Poets & Writers, and NYT science editor William Broad's [The Science of Yoga](#) continue to happen as the work has tapped into a yoking of yoga and creativity that others were feeling and [continue to yearn to explore](#).

But I was not completely aware business-wise of what was happening. My business background? Grad school studies of poetics, translation studies, and philosophical hermeneutics. I had spent most of my twenties writing poetry, essays, and fiction – and teaching creative writing and literature courses. Get the picture?

By 2005, I also had subtle inklings to follow wonder in my life and consequently in my writing. I tested out ideas and even devoted a year of workshops around wonder.

My father-in-law said, “So, what are you doing?”

“Tracking wonder,” I said.

“Only you could make a living doing that.”

### **And then falling in love with it all**

Then, I confessed. I admitted to myself I was a business owner and entrepreneur (I could no longer hide behind the knight-for-hire “freelancer” tag).

I boned up on business, studied other models, worked with two business coaches, and paid attention to what I was doing and how to do it better. I mis-hired a handful of assistants to help me take the businesses to the next level of efficiency and financial solvency.

The assistants didn't pan out, and a couple of years later [a lightning-striking house fire](#) put us out of house for 15 months during which time I contracted Lyme Disease twice and had a baby, too. Sort of threw me a little off-track of business & writing goals while I went into Emergency Momentum mode.

With renovated farmhouse and re-designed studio & conference room, I committed more to Tracking Wonder – as a way of life, a business venture, a focus for my writing & research & events.

My commitment homed in **on helping creatives and teams stoke their creative momentum on projects that matter**. I helped people write their books, craft their brands, and advance their enterprises in part by applying principles of positive psychology and mindfulness. With a commitment to both the art and the science of creativity, my clientele expanded.

I hired an exceptional designer to head up the website that would become **trackingwonder.com** and would mesh three complementary brands – Yoga As Muse, Center To Page, and Tracking Wonder. I hired a stellar assistant to help me navigate – and ultimately fall in love with – the social media world.

But the brand transition around Tracking Wonder along with the other two brands got messy, for me and for people who've followed what I do. And in trying to juggle and build three brands I became taxed and over-worked in my over-serving ways.

Another confession: Now, I do actually *love* business development and creative enterprising (never would've said that in grad school). Business development can be approached as an incredibly gratifying and creative endeavor itself.

However, if not managed well, **the Entrepreneur can encroach upon the Poet, the Storyteller, the Author**. My mind kept thinking more about metrics of the social media kind than of the poetic feet kind. Time to revamp!

### **Cleaning house with a smooth running pack**

I decided that in 2012 and 2013, I would travel less to teach and speak and “hunker down,” simplify, and create. So, six months ago, I decided to clean house. Namely, clean my brand and clean my mind and clean my time with the intention of having a clean house by October.

I interviewed 5 top-tier business consultants to see who could guide me through achieving 10 goals over 6 months and found the perfect match.

**Charlie Gilkey**, my younger big brother, steered me clear during some trying months.

**The uber-goal:** Simplify my mind so I could have more time & space to create deep. Among the strategic goals:

- 1) Consolidate my three brands into one.
- 2) Develop a more specific and compelling tagline.
- 3) Revamp trackingwonder.com to reflect the tighter focus.
- 4) Expand Tracking Wonder's offerings so more & more people can “get the wonder” in a greater variety of ways than primarily through live events.

**I help creative enterprisers of all stripes do this very thing**, but it was a relief to put myself in someone else's hands. Plus, as I had hoped, my coach had a grip on a whole host of issues that I had not considered and, honestly, don't want to spend my days thinking about but was happy to listen and apply. I was happy to be the humble student.

**The brand:** Tracking Wonder is now the umbrella brand. Yoga As Muse programs & trainings exist within Tracking Wonder. Center To Page – although still the name of our

LLC – has disappeared in name although the focus on author consulting is prominent as part of what we do at Tracking Wonder.

**The refined style:** We changed our tagline from the looser “Changing the Way Creativity Happens” to “the art & science of captivating creativity.” This is our reason for being at Tracking Wonder. We unfold the art & science of captivating creativity so people like you can create work that matters. We don’t shy away from science as nemesis to art & creativity.

Within that framework we serve up information, methods, and programs that draw on the pursuit of excellence (human potential & craft) + artistic engagement.

**The website:** Since my designer-programmer team was out of commission for personal reasons, I hired Charlie’s Productive Flourishing team of Lisa Woods and Dusti Arab. *Within six weeks*, we made radical non-cosmetic changes to the website. Streamlined navigation and update systems. Added several new pages under [About](#) to help people orient to the site. Added the [Outpost Shoppe](#) (yippee!). How did we do that in six weeks? I’m a project manager, and Lisa is a stalwart website developer. We both know how to get things done – and have fun.

**Expansion:** We’ve opened the Outpost Shoppe so people can equip their best creative selves without attending live events (although nothing compares to them!).

And since mid-August, the business has been getting even more organized at a foundational level. I hired an OBM for a three-month project to shape the company’s foundational systems and at the end of that three months hired a Smooth Operating Chief to keep the business running behind the scenes according to those systems. I also moved my virtual assistant to bookkeeper.

The Tracking Wonder Smooth Running Pack now includes me, a Smooth Operations Chief, a program & techie assistant, a communications assistant, and a bookkeeper.

### **The results?**

I am more relaxed & focused, more productive, and more dreamy in a good way than in a long, long pre-business time.

I can focus even more on the “big” stuff of creating and of working with my clients while I apply my Mind Rooms Method and other means for a fluent weekly work flow.

My clients are getting their needs met even more because my Smooth Operations Chief is available for them for logistics while I focus on their big projects.

### **Your smooth running pack**

A **smooth running pack** is a group of people, not necessarily a team, who contributes behind-the-scenes to you being able to create and to your business being able to serve your patch of the planet. Here are 4 things you can do to get running:

### 1. Take Stock

\* **Take stock of the helpers:** who keep you organized, who perform tasks for you that you'd rather not do, who cook for you or make coffee for you (peeps at your favorite cafe?).

\* **Take stock of the advisors:** who give you tips & perspective (your favorite bloggers or writers?), who guide you on a path of mastering new skills & who help you see the big picture (consultants, coaches, teachers).

\* **Take stock of the confidantes:** who hold space for you when you need to fall apart without going to pieces (coaches, teachers, therapists, true friends).

### 2. Express Gratitude

\* Send them a note. Call them. Acknowledge them in your meditation or prayers.

### 3. Get Them Running

- Share your core values and driving ideal. A pack means you run together. A Smooth Running Pack shares core values and beliefs that drive the business or project. Share those values with your pack and convey what ideal drives you as a creative or enterpriser.
- Keep running with those values and ideal. If something's not going right or if you have a team decision to make, check in with the project or business values and driving ideal.

### 4. Take Stock Again

- What 1-3 things could you organize to alleviate your mind of clutter and accompanying anxiety?
- If you learned how to do 1-3 things that would help you create more deeply and regularly, what would they be?
- Who could be a helper with the above?
- Who could be an advisor?
- Who could be a confidante?

I hope this more personal glimpse into the business of Tracking Wonder is valuable.

## DEEP CREATE ZONE

A lot of my entrepreneur-creative colleagues complain about not getting enough of their own time to create their own work.

The challenge is for you to take stock of at least three facets of your creative life:

- \* **Time:** Namely, how your mind relates to time and how you can shape and sculpt the time you're not "at work."
- \* **Relationships:** Every couple negotiates support for each other's (or one person's) creative work differently. But it must be negotiated.
- \* **Idleness:** Can you let yourself gear down and run idle? If not, you risk never getting into the deeply felt imagination where lasting art seeds. Because the nature of owning a business requires a fairly high-voltage mindset, trying to drop into idle is a creative entrepreneur's huge challenge.

Once I shifted my business model, I committed more seriously to a Deep Create Zone throughout the autumn and winter seasons. This period has been devoted especially to

- studying, writing, reciting, and performing poetry (an event in December and one in January before hundreds of people offered good fuel)
- shaping my next nonfiction book
- developing content for live events
- shaping the first long-term group author mentoring program

Each month also includes a 3-to-5-day deep create retreat. Sometimes, these are in-house; other times, they are away.

The people I work with, talk with, and study agree that regular retreats away from work are crucial. My wife and I have clear guidelines for our mutual monthly in-house retreats. Some people take one or two nights a month in a nearby b&b to work on their projects. Others borrow unused office space.

I'm spoiled with solitude.

But I come alive when engaged.

## ENGAGING MY PACKS

*Who are you engaging and enchanting in ways  
that enliven you and that enrich your patch of the planet?*

Wonder in the digital age comes with its unique pleasures. On one hand, digital work and play lets us find ever-new ways to engage and delight one another. New apps, hangout and virtual whiteboard interfaces, and ePublishing. On the other hand, an analog antidote is afoot. Creatives are checking in their digital devices for physical pleasures and checking in with what's real and true at conferences such as Wisdom 2.0. At Tracking Wonder in 2012, I took expeditions in both directions.

## My Inner Pack

I wanted to bring along some of you who wanted regular behind-the-scenes glimpses both into my business decisions and into my own creative process. So, some of you have joined me for free videos, a webinar, and check-ins via the [Create & Captivate Inner Pack](#).

Engaging with other creative-minded people committed to creating work that matters keeps me going through the cold season.

## Clients

Webex and Anymeeting let me engage an astounding pack of creatives and clients:

- **An Intel global marketing consultant** writes a screenplay and launches an LLC and website along the way. A software architect gets clear on what's next, claims her next calling, and refines her brand as well as website messaging.
- **A birth activist** owns her business self, catapults her revenue, and transitions her brand while allowing space & time for her passion - to write her memoir.
- **A corporate copy writer and messenger** conceives and completes the first draft of his high-concept young adult novel and starts a plan to build his author platform and land a literary agent.
- **A vice president of marketing** researches and refines his book notion into a clear singular elegant idea, and proposes a session on the subject to a major conference - all within two months.
- **A freelance copywriter** gains solo-preneur savvy about her revenue streams, shapes a pitch-collaborate-and-launch plan for her first book, and gets clear on her next writing project - all within three months.
- **An art historian** refines her book's singular elegant idea, drafts her sample chapters, and advances her book proposal - but along the way births a new website platform idea and sharpens her solo-preneur savvy to build her revenue streams.
- **A retired classical pianist and teacher** pursues mastery of the essay form, scores first prize in a publisher's contest, and lands a half dozen more high-caliber publications.
- **A therapist-turned-yoga teacher-and-poet** retrained her mind to relate to time more productively and how she pursues mastery of writing poetry while letting her newfound creative passion for her business enterprise emerge organically.
- **A geologist** doggedly pursues mastery of writing a novel and, after four years, completes the first full draft. Given her busy life, that's no small feat.



These are some of the amazing people whose talent, persistence, resilience, and wonder have stoked me this year.

## Live Events

Eight years ago, I held or was asked to speak or teach at a dozen or so events throughout and outside of the U.S. In 2012, I've traveled less but engaged more people. I engaged people live at a world-class center in the Bahamas - 200 people for lectures on creative living, mindfulness, and embodiment, and a select group for a course on the same. Another select group gathered for the seventh annual Tracking Wonder retreat at Mabel Dodge Luhan House in Taos, New Mexico.

In 2012, my outreach expanded beyond the authors and writers I have served for over 20 years.

I delivered talks to diverse groups such as presidents, vice-presidents, and administrators of organizations that grant funds to non-profit organizations. I defined their creativity thus:

*Creativity is challenging the status quo on behalf  
of the disempowered  
in order to make the world a better place.*

What's become loud and clear is that the people I and the Tracking Wonder Team are engaging mostly express these three core needs:

- \* **Creative people wanting an authentic shift** from hapless freelancer to intentional solo-preneur with business, branding, and platform savvy (How do I get there without selling my muse to the bottom line?)
- \* **Creative people seeking optimal ways to be productive** and productive people seeking optimal ways to stay creative (How do I create the right mix in my work days?)
- \* **People with ideas and content** they're yearning to shape and develop into brands, businesses, and books (How do I organize my brilliance into something meaningful and sellable?)

Engaging you thrills me to meet each day's dawn with wonder, wit, and wisdom.

## New Monikers & New Horizons

It's become clear that in addition to being WRITER and CREATIVITY CONSULTANT, more precisely I should own up to being a BOOK & CONTENT STRATEGIST with a focus on the art & psychology of captivating your patch of the planet.

I've written and shared a lot of content this year on story design and aim to stay breast of developments in the various ways you can be a savvy creator and a savvy publisher.

It was during Tracking Wonder's 2012 re-alignment that my own business consultant kept mirroring back to me where I spoke from a voice of confidence and power - books, authorship, publishing.

I love to bring into the world books that matter. Books that shift our thinking. Books that help us feel alive and empathetic. Books that engross the deeply felt imagination. Books that point to a new way to live each day.

But I kept hearing how confused people were about the publishing world and how frustrated they were by their own struggles with writing.

It was time to step up. I knew it was time to meet our audience's author needs in a format that was not solely 1:1 or solely live group experience.

We're launching the Your Captivating Book Mentorship Program, a six-month program. It will be exceptional. Less because of what I do and more because of the exceptional people from all walks of life who are signing up. Because authoring a book requires more than solitude. More than chipping away. More than studying the craft. Most of us authors do need a pack.

Great authors do not go it alone. Most of them at least. Why should you?

### **HV: CREATE - Face-to-face Beats Facebook**

I owe a lot of my contentment to the New York's Mid-Hudson River Valley - both its geography and its people. And as I have traveled and reached out abroad, I realized in 2012 I wanted to find ways to re-engage my neighborhoods that are densely populated with wildly creative people.

So, in December I instigated **HV:CREATE**, an informal meet-up for creatives to meet, connect, and inspire each other. I persuaded a cafe owner to open early the first Friday of each month so that for 90 minutes designers, writers, business consultants, coaches, artists, musicians, teachers, gallery owners, publishers, and more can know there's a place they can drop by and have an inspired conversation.

It struck a chord. Over 25 committed creatives and professionals showed up and connected. [It got good press](#), too. The next month over 40 showed up from as far as an hour away. Veteran scholars, musicians, artists, designers, Fortune 500 consultants and newbies and everyone in between.

This is my 'hood. And I love it.

Expect more live events and special 1:1 opportunities to be launched in the Hudson Valley in 2013.

## Blogs: Tracking Wonder, Psychology Today, the Creativity Post

In 2012, I wrote over 100 articles for three blogs. That's a lot for a guy who has difficulty thinking and writing in sound bytes.

What resonates with you seems fairly consistent: pieces that either help you be more productive and creative or pieces that disrupt common assumptions.

[How a Creative Mindset Busts Nighttime Monsters](#) has been shared over 720 times, close to 9,000 people have read The Creative Thinking Myth, and over 4000 people have read each [Myths of Right-Brained Creativity](#) and [Best Rest Practices for Optimal Productivity and Creativity](#).

Beyond your study of SEO metrics and strategies, the fire that will keep you writing blogs year after year will not be web traffic charts. It will boil down to your mind's passion + your pursuit of excellence. You will have an increased sense that you're finessing what works for your flow and for your business's ends.

## Outpost Shoppe & a Product Launch

Part of my six-month business revamp included a significant streamlining of our website structure, including the opening of our **Tracking Wonder Outpost Shoppe**. The shoppe includes webinars, my book, as well as our first eBook product, [The Mind Rooms Guide: a handbook to bypass overwhelm, shape time, and shape your work flow](#).

**Take-away:** With a clear sales page that defined the eBook's singular elegant idea, a fairly simple launch model, and the assistance of some invaluable collaborators, your response trumped our greatest expectations.

Clearly, we struck a chord.

And we've listened to your responses. We're incubating future ideas for you, and I'm in conversation with a tech company about a possible Mind Rooms app.

What has become wildly clear is that you need and want inexpensive yet substantial (and elegantly designed) products that will help you stay stoked *and* wondrous.

## Reflections

If you do the metrics game, we must be doing the right things as our traffic and lists build each month. But numbers don't drive my heart. On my Creative Momentum Map with milestones, strategies, and creative actions, I have a heart gauge - a measurement of how I want to feel while engaged in this work, play, and life. And I do thrive on optimal engagement and service to you while still heeding my own imagination's needs.

As I've traveled less and offered fewer workshops by design, I realize in some ways access to me has contracted. I'm also not satisfied with Facebook and Twitter as our chief social media outlets. In 2013, I plan to increase high-quality ways we can engage in groups - in [Your Captivating Book](#) and beyond.

My soul signals to me, though, loud and clear:

“While you make time to engage, make time to create deep.”

Captivating my imagination - that untouchable citadel - at a deep, authentic level remains top priority.

### **Experience Architects**

The companies thriving in this topsy-turvy economy - whether with 1000 or 1 employee - are reframing customer service around customer experience. They're taking stock of what people's first and lasting impressions are with their business. They're learning from artists, musicians, storytellers, and architects how to create experiences worth remembering and talking about.

They, like the authors I'm working with, learn to the art of being an Experience Architect.

It's also a good age to be an idealist. The companies growing have leaders driven by ideals that matter to the rest of us. So don't shy away from yours.

When reflecting upon your own business model, creative enterprise, or creative work flow, take stock of these areas:

- \* What ideal drives you?
- \* Which forms of engagement brought out the best in you and in your audiences?
- \* In what launches, events, projects, or services, did you falter and where did you flourish?
- \* Did you thrive in creating and launching products, in teaching and sharing ideas with groups, in team talks & presentations, or in 1:1 coaching and consulting?
- \* Did you favor remote & digital or live engagement?
- \* How did your fans thrive?
- \* What will you continue in 2013?
- \* What will you change in 2013?

### **MY FATHER**

I would be remiss at not saying something more specific about my father who died on July 19 this year.

My father was a delightfully complicated person. He thrived in the Dallas media world on his own terms. When I was a boy, he had hung the moon. When I was a teenager, he was at the top of the game. In late July, over 200 people crammed into a bar to toast and celebrate his life through story, slides, and audio. He was loved.

He loved me unconditionally, confided in me, told me repeatedly “You are my best friend,” and held me at a distance. As his memory and health faltered each day as I tended to him at the hospital, he apologized over and over for the trouble he was causing me.

He taught me how to sing and how to play “You Are My Sunshine” on the banjo when I was nine. He later encouraged me to play guitar.

When I was six, he gave me my first notebook - a daybook his own daddy (a doctor and poet) had kept. He told me I could keep my own thoughts in it.

When I was ten, he let me use his typewriter. He told me I could write my own stories on it.

When I was eleven, he gave me one of his tape recorders. He told me I could record my thoughts on it and talk with other people on it.

Of all the things he gave me, those are the most valuable because they taught me I could think, tell stories, and connect with other people.

For better or worse, he taught me that

- \* men can be emotional and sensitive and moody
- \* there's value in work you love and in working hard
- \* there's value in friendships
- \* there's value in play
- \* there's value in music
- \* there's value in my own thoughts and imaginings
- \* money is only important if it adds to good times with good people

I miss him every day.

To live in the space between a wide-eyed little girl and a faded-spirit father feels at times like walking on a suspension rope on the Brooklyn Bridge. But something in the way wind hums up here, the way light beats against your back, how the rope speaks and your breath rises, and the traffic beneath you maneuvers like pieces in a Rubik's cube - all of it makes a song, uncontrollable and wholly yours and the world's at the same time.

This is what we do. We walk in air held up by knots we trust will hold and blessed with breezes we hope will not knock us off. And we keep making song.

And this is what we do it for. For each other playing our songs and contributing our verses with the conviction that somehow we are not only making a mess of this world but that maybe somehow we are making of the world a symphony played by bones and tambourines and jugs and handshakes and wild embraces.

May this dispatch inspire you to take stock of your own state of wonder.

If you find it valuable, share it with a friend and reference this link in social media:

<http://trackingwonder.com/jeffreys-blog/stateofwonder>

See you in the woods

and

thanks for running with me,

*Jeffrey*