



## 135: Fill the Vault

I'm Emily P. Freeman and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode 135.

This is a podcast about making decisions, but also about making a life. If you struggle with decision fatigue, chronic hesitation, or if you just need a few minutes away from the constant stream of information and the sometimes delightful, but also distracting hum entertainment, you're in the right place for a thoughtful story, a little prayer and a simple next right step.

For the last few years, this is the time of year where I slow down a little bit on purpose, and I'm doing it again this year. In today's episode, I want to share with you what that looks like practically, and a few ideas that can help you do the same, especially if you're struggling with decision fatigue. Listen in.

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About two years ago, I read a book called *The Actor's Life* by actress Jenna Fischer, for the six of you who don't know, she's most known for playing the character Pam on *The Office*, but her book is all about what it's really like to become an actor in Hollywood.

One of the things that she mentions in the book is about the importance of filling the vault. Here's a quote from her book.

She writes, "Every project you finish has value. Whether it's the one-woman show you wrote the web series with only 24 views. The pilot you wrote with your friend, all are important and will pay off. Somehow putting things in the vault is important.

I have a friend who has been writing a hilarious and irreverent series of children's books for the past two years. She's a struggling actress who said to me one day, 'I don't know why I keep doing these books. No one's going to publish them. At the very least, they keep me sane, and I love them.' And I told her one day, 'You're going to break out in a big way. I just know it. And your new fancy agent is going to ask you what ideas you have. And you will go into your vault, pull out this series of children's books and say that you have a fully developed idea for an animated series. And it will happen because that's how this stuff works. When you become a busy working actor, you won't have time to fill the vault. So fill it now.'"

I love that image that Jenna paints for makers who may be feeling discouraged, that their work isn't being shared with the masses yet, or hasn't been shared at all. And I love how she points out the importance of doing the hard, good work, and filling the vault now so that later you'll have work to pull from after you

get super busy.

But I want to take the liberty to extend this concept of filling the vault even further, because the truth is we need to be in a practice of filling the vault even after we get published, land the job, seal the deal or quote unquote, make it. If we don't have a regular practice of filling the vault, even in small ways, we'll get bored, burnout, give up or lose our creative spark.

And I'm just going to add here, too, that filling the vault is really for all of us, whether or not we ever realize our dream or hit that big goal or make that big deal. Whatever the case may be, filling the vault is part of being human. It's part of the creative process. And it is so deeply important.

Taking my inspiration from Jenna Fisher. Here are three ways to fill the vault no matter where you are in your own vocational journey so that you can keep doing your good work forever.

### **#1 Keep a Quote Journal**

I'm a reader. And I'm a firm believer that my very best ideas are not exactly new, but tend to stand on the shoulders of the best ideas someone else had. I'm admitting it now, there you go. You heard it here first.

I've made peace with this. And I realized part of the way I fill the vault is to pay attention to and write down quotes that are meaningful to me so that I can let the thoughts and ideas from other creators sing in harmony with my own experience. And hopefully, one day, that will become a new song.

This is a lovely way of honoring the work of other writers and letting their work inspire new work in me, not as a way to copy them, but as a way to learn from them. Not to get too meta, but the title of this episode, Fill the Vault, those aren't even my words, as I've already mentioned, those are Jenna Fischer's words. And I got them from a paragraph in her book. And that paragraph in her book inspired an entire episode of my podcast. See how that works?

### **#2 Create, Write, and Store Every Idea**

This one is most close to the intention I think Jenna had in her book when she wrote about filling the vault. Have a way to categorize your ideas. It doesn't have to be fancy. It just has to work for you. This is for you if you are a high school student with dreams of going to film school, or if you're retired and wondering what might be next.

My dad wrote his first book at age 66, and after retiring, he now co-runs hope\*writers full time with me and Brian Dixon. He's using skills that he filled the vault with for decades. Now he's using them in hope\*writers, but he never knew if they would be useful one day.

Spoiler alert, they are useful and his life is proof.

### **#3 Rest on Purpose**

There's a woman named Tricia Hersey, who I've been learning a lot from lately. She sees rest as a healing tool for empowerment. She's the founder of The Nap Ministry, which you can find on Instagram @thenapministry. And her work is to examine the liberating power of naps. Yes, naps like I'm going to take a nap like a toddler.

Well, she believes rest is a form of resistance. And in her words, a key component for justice in her work, she speaks specifically to black women who are especially burdened and exhausted by the state of the world today. One way to fill the vault is to rest on purpose. Imagine the lasting healthy change that could come from well rested people.

And that is essentially where you'll find me today. Every year in July, I try to take some intentional time away. You won't see that reflected in these episodes because I've worked ahead, so that they can drop on time. Last year, I took a month-long sabbatical. This year, it's only two weeks, but these two weeks are vital for the health of my soul, my family, and also the work I do here. With every book I've written, with every new idea I've had that has grown into something lasting, I can point back to a specific and intentional time away from where that new idea was born or took more meaningful shape.

I've learned not to approach my time away of retreat or of silence with the expectation of finding my next big idea. I don't see them looking forward, but I can see them looking back. So what does filling the vault look like for me right now? These days, it looks like deleting my social apps from my phone and not apologizing for my absence when I come back. It looks like listening to more music, lighting candles at dusk, watching videos of creative people talking about creative things, reading fiction, drinking a second cup of coffee in the morning. Filling the vault looks like lingering around the table, asking the second question and taking notes when necessary.

In July, I fill the vault. What about you?

What do you need to listen to? Is there a book you've been wanting to read, but you worry, it's too close to your own idea for a book? Don't be afraid. Pull that book out and take good notes.

What do you want to create? Do you have a creative endeavor? You're putting off a song. You've been meaning to write a story. You've been meaning to outline a party you want to throw, what are you waiting for? You might not be able to finish it yet, but you can start work on it.

Now, what does rest look like? Are you exhausted from managing weird schedules, having zero time alone, and trying not to get COVID-19? Rest on purpose. Delete what you have to delete. Pause what needs pausing and listen to the life-giving work of other artists who have done the work of filling their own vaults so that they have something to give to you.

Do the work of creating, listening, and resting while no one is watching so that when they look your way, you'll actually have something to say. If you're not sure where to start, just ask yourself our simple abiding question. What does it mean for me today to simply do my next right thing in love?

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Thanks for listening to episode 135 of *The Next Right Thing*.

Well, I hope this simple practice of filling the vault can be just one more rung on the trellis upon which your rhythm of life can continue to grow because while it's true, this is a podcast about making decisions, the bigger truth is that our daily decisions are actually making our lives.

As always, you can find me on Instagram @emilypfreeman and online at emilypfreeman.com, where we always provide a transcript for every episode, either for you, if you prefer reading to listening and also for our deaf and hard of hearing friends who would otherwise not have access to an audio offering.

If you'd like some more direction on how to fill the vault specifically on how to rest on purpose, check out episode 88, Come Away For A While, where I share the difference between vacation, Sabbath, and sabbatical.

In closing, here are a few good words from my friend, author, and spiritual director, Tara Owens. These are the words she wrote in a guest post for me years ago, inspired from her book, Embracing the Body.

She writes this, "I'm so used to pushing and running and enslaving my body to things like productivity or performance. I didn't expect God to tell me to pay attention to the aches. I didn't expect God to tenderly take this worn and worried woman off the altar and show me that tension I've been carrying around my shoulders were a message from him. I'm lifting my burdens that he's meant to carry. I didn't expect the God of the universe to tell me that giving those burdens to him meant taking a nap when all I could see was my to do list. Here's the thing, giving God my body risking that with him, freed me to listen to his murmurs through my muscles, his blessings through my bones.

Thanks for listening. And I'll see you next time.