

## Working for Peanuts by Mark Matteson



Whenever I walked into the room as a kid, my father would say “Hiya, Charlie!” You see, when I was five years old and living in Japan, I looked just like Charlie Brown, the *Peanuts* character. I had a big round head, a wisp of blond hair with a cowlick, and I could most often be seen in a tee shirt and shorts. I was a dead ringer, complete with the paradox of hope and self-doubt on the inside.

As I grew older, there was something about the *Peanuts* message and characters that really resonated with me. I always felt better after reading the daily strip. It was unlike any other cartoon of the day, thought-provoking, with little kids talking like adults. At age 10, I began my very first journal. I would cut out the daily *Peanuts* cartoon and paste it into a scrapbook. I bought every *Peanuts* book I could find. To this day, I draw a mean Charlie Brown.

I recently finished listening to the audio book, *Schulz and Peanuts*, by David Michaelis. It’s an incredibly well-written biography profiling the extraordinary ascent of an American icon. Born on November 26, 1922, he was a great humorist, philosopher, and, of course, world-renowned and beloved cartoonist. Click the link below for an interview with the author.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l6cwIqekWH0&NR=1>

“Sparky”—his childhood nickname in Minnesota—was a shy and solitary boy, not unlike Charlie Brown. Younger and shorter than his classmates, he lacked confidence and self-esteem. He endured the hardships of girls ignoring him and older or bigger kids picking on him. Fortunately, he found a way of processing his demons through drawing. He had an affinity for cartooning, beginning at age six, when an elementary school teacher offered up some words of encouragement. After some praise, the light came on, and cartooning became his magnificent obsession.

Twenty years later, he was well on his way to fame and fortune. He found a unique and personal way to serve his fellow man. Each year, he increased his service to others, as well as his skills and knowledge of his chosen craft. Maybe the most important thing “Sparky” did was follow his bliss from an early age and not quit!

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qbiYFA0-8mU&feature=related>

Five months and eleven days before me, on June 8, 1957, a young boy was born in Windham, New York. From childhood this second child of Virginia, a homemaker and assembly-line worker, and her husband, Paul, a postal clerk, knew that he wanted to be a cartoonist. His mother told him he could be anything. “She said I could be President. I wanted to be Charles Schulz.”

But the road to success as a cartoonist was a rocky one for this young man. He was rejected by the Famous Artists School at age 11 and got the lowest grade in his class for the one drawing course he took at Hartwick College in Oneonta, New York.

His cartoons were rejected by *Playboy*, *The New Yorker*, and a long list of syndicators. Resigning himself to making a living some other way, he chose economics as his college major. “I figured that if you worked hard and you were smart, you could get promoted,” he says. “It wasn’t until I was well into it I realized that you also had to be tall and have good hair.” If you’ve seen pictures of him you know that he’s only 5’8” tall, with what *Newsweek* calls “a visibly endangered blond mane.” I can relate; I have had a bad hair LIFE! Even his girlfriend says he looks like an accountant.

Exactly like his mentor, Sparky, he ended up in California, where he took a job as a bank teller and was twice robbed at gunpoint. He also worked as a commercial lender, a computer programmer, and got his MBA at Berkeley. In 1986 he was hired as an applications engineer at the Pacific Bell Telephone Company in San Ramon, California, where he occupied cubicle 4S700R. Although he was making \$70,000 a year, he would later say, “In my seventeen-year experience, I never once did anything that helped a customer.”

Late one night, he flipped through television channels and caught the closing credits of a show about cartooning on PBS. He decided to write the host of the program and ask his advice on the profession. A few weeks later, he received a handwritten letter answering his specific questions about the materials needed and the process of cartooning. He was also advised to keep going despite inevitable rejections and that his drawings showed real promise.

He doodled in his spare moments as an applications engineer. He drew, submitted, and was turned down time after time. Discouraged, he put his art supplies in the closet and forgot about cartooning. A little over a year later, the host of the PBS show wrote him a second letter. It ended with the following words: **Sometimes encouragement in the funny business of graphic humor is hard to come by. That's why I am encouraging you to hang in there and keep drawing. I wish you lots of luck, sales, and good drawing!**

The letter inspired him to drag the art supplies out of the closet and start inking strips again, this time with a renewed sense of purpose. It's amazing what the right words from the right person will do at just the right time in one's life. Drawing on his experience in business and life around him, he eventually created a character that was a composite of his co-workers. "They all had little potato-shaped bodies and they had glasses," he says. About this time he came across a simple idea. He realized that he needed to STOP whining and START affirming his number one goal on paper!

Here is his simple process in his own words:

**"The basic idea is that, 15 times a day, you just write down whatever it is your number one goal. Then you'll observe things happening that will make that objective more likely to happen. It's actually a process of forcing your environment to change."**

Though committed to the process, he was skeptical at first. His initial goals, which were done as a kind of test, were impressing a certain woman and getting a date and successfully picking winning stocks. It worked! Still a little skeptical, he decided to be more specific. He was about to take the GMAT test, to get into business school, so he asked of himself on paper for the precise score of 94. When he got the results back, his score was...94. Affirming on paper worked. He was sold on the process.

He started writing, **“I will become a syndicated cartoonist,” 15 times a day on paper.** He believed in the process and was determined to make it happen.

At first his character was nameless. It wasn't until 1989 that his strip was adopted by United Media, the same syndicate that published *Peanuts*. **It was a start! With a new level of confidence, he wrote out a new number one goal.** His new affirmation was, **“I will be the best cartoonist on the planet.”**

Cartoonists keep score and compare themselves with their competition and measure success in terms of book sales. Two guys stood in the way of his new goal: Gary Larson, creator of *The Far Side*, and Bill Watterson of *Calvin and Hobbes* fame.

**“I actually consciously thought, ‘I need those two guys to leave.’ I started thinking very consciously, and probably every day, that I just really wanted them to retire. A little over a year later they did; they both retired the same week**

Marketing, giving the customers what they want, was something he intuitively grasped. A year after he got his syndication contract, his strip appeared in 100 newspapers. The business-oriented strips were the ones that were catching on, being cut out and tacked up on cubicle walls. So, he switched the emphasis to 80 percent business and technology, and that's when the strip really caught on.

The tipping point came in 1993, when he persuaded United Media to let him put his e-mail address on the strip and this provided the feedback he needed. The cartoonist? **Scott Adams**. His cartoon? **DILBERT**. In 1995, Scott Adams got 1,000 e-mail messages a day, and his Web site, The Dilbert Zone, reportedly received 1.6 million hits a day. It is Adams' responsiveness to communications from the trenches that has made *DILBERT* the fastest-growing strip in the country, running in over 1,000 newspapers and read by some 60 million people. Adams has sold more than a million books (over 750,000 of *The Dilbert Principle* alone) Licensing for *Dilbert* items—calendars, stuffed toys, mugs—made him a millionaire. Like “Sparky”, he kept looking for ways to increase his service to others.

Like Schulz, Adams decided upon a single goal, **to be the greatest cartoonist on the planet!** You just know that somewhere in a dark room is the next Scott Adams, writing out his goal 15 times a day in relative obscurity, and working for peanuts.

I just can't bring myself to say to my three boys, “Hiya, Dilbert!” But I can embrace the process and commit to it for 90 days on paper. As I write this, I am on day 42 of the process. Things are changing, exactly as Scott Adams said they would: inside out, hunches leading to new ideas and business opportunities, people and processes coming out the woodwork. I call them **ROAD SIGNS**. They are the **HOW** connected to my **WHAT** and **WHY!**

Would you like to make more money? If you are in sales, how about doubling your close ratio? If you are a manager or leader, how about improving morale and productivity while simultaneously lowering turnover? If you are responsible for a large business channel in a Fortune 1,000 company, how about increasing your net profit by five percent or decreasing churn by 50 percent? Maybe, just maybe, you are tired of “working for peanuts?” Get specific about what you want, **“HOW MUCH, BY WHEN?”** What if you wrote down your new number one goal 15 times a day for 30 days as a test? It will take you about 20 minutes a day.



## ***How did you do?***

*The point is, none of us remember the headliners of yesterday.*

*These are no second-rate achievers.*

*They are the best in their fields.*

*But the applause dies.*

*Awards tarnish.*

*Achievements are forgotten.*

*Accolades and certificates are buried with their owners.*

***Here's another quiz. See how you do on this one.***

- 1. List a few teachers who aided your journey through school.*
- 2. Name three friends who have helped you through a difficult time.*
- 3. Name five people who have taught you something worthwhile.*
- 4. Think of a few people who have made you feel appreciated and special!!*
- 5. Think of five people you enjoy spending time with.*

*Easier?*

***The Lesson:***

*The people who make a difference in your life are not the ones with the most credentials, the most money, or the most awards. They simply are the ones who care the most.*

*Pass this on to those people who have either made a difference in your life, or whom you keep close in your heart.*

*“Don't worry about the world coming to an end today. It's already tomorrow in Australia!”*

***"Be Yourself. Everyone Else Is Taken!"***