



The Power of Support

by Thomas Wolfe

EDITOR'S NOTE: The folks here at Idea Champions have never met Thomas Wolfe (though we've read some of his books back in our college days.) The passage below is one of the most moving pieces of writing we've ever encountered on how important it is for people in the throes of a creative project to get support. Creating anything new can be a daunting task. Doubts arise. Fears. Despair. Loneliness. And unexpected bouts of hopelessness. Somehow, it all seems to come with the territory. And while it is possible to "muscle through" these existential rites of passage, it is far preferable to have someone in your corner with the chops to help you navigate the often rough waters of the creative process. Thomas Wolfe was fortunate to have found this person, as the following passage describes. We invite you to read these words aloud. Hearing them makes them even more powerful. And don't be afraid to cry should tears start welling up. And when you're done, contemplate WHO you can invite to play the same role Wolfe's friend played. Then ask for their help. You are NOT in this alone.... (With Great Respect for Your Creative Process, Mitch Ditkoff)

"During this time I reached that state of naked need and utter isolation which every artist has got to meet and conquer if he is to survive at all. Before this I had been sustained by that delightful illusion of success which we all have when we dream about the books we are going to write instead of actually doing them. Now I suddenly realized that I had committed my life and integrity so irrevocably to this struggle that I must conquer now or be destroyed. I was alone with my work and knew that no one could help me with it no matter how much anyone might wish to help. For the first time I realized another naked fact which every artist must know, and that is in a man's work there are contained not only seeds of life, but the seeds of death, and that the power of creation which sustains us will also destroy us like a leprosy if we let it rot stillborn in our vitals. I had to get it out of me somehow.

I say that now. And now for the first time, a terrible doubt began to creep into my mind that I might not live long enough to get it out of me, that I had created a labor so large and so impossible that the energy of a dozen lifetimes would not suffice for its accomplishment.

During this time, I was sustained by one piece of inestimable good fortune. I had for a friend a man of immense and patient wisdom and a gentle but unyielding fortitude. I think that if I was not destroyed at this time by the sense of hopelessness which these gigantic labors had awakened in me, it was largely because of the courage and patience of this man. I did not give in because he would not let me give in, and I think it is true that at this particular time he had the advantage of being in the position of a skilled observer at a battle, covered by its dust and sweat and exhausted by its struggle, and I understood far less than my friend the nature and progress of the struggle in which I was engaged. At this time there was little that this man could do except observe, and in one way or another keep me at my task, and in many quiet and wonderful ways he succeeded in doing this.



I was now at the place where I must produce. Even the greatest editor can do little for a writer until he has brought from the secrete darkness of his own spirit into the common light of the day the completed concrete accomplishment of his imagining. My friend has likened his own function at this painful time to that of a man who is trying to hang on to the fin of a plunging whale, but hang on he did, and it is to his tenacity that I owe my final release."

Thomas Wolfe 

This article is excerpted from **BANKING ON INNOVATION**, a 172-page workbook that accompanies Idea Champions' 2-day creative thinking training. Log onto www.ideachampions.com/banking_on_innovation.shtml for more info.