



FINISH YOUR DAMN BOOK

6 PROVEN STRATEGIES
TO GET UNSTUCK, WRITE BETTER
CONTENT, & FINISH YOUR DAMN BOOK

BY LAURA THOMAS
.....
NEXT LEVEL STORY

INTRODUCTION

*YOU'VE BEEN TAPPED ON THE SHOULDER
to bring your story into the world.*

Your brilliant idea struck. Maybe it happened in the shower. Or while commuting to work. Or while making sweet, sweet... ahem... well, you know.

It's too late. The idea has taken root, and good luck getting that bugger out.

This is a good thing. A very good thing, in fact.



"EACH ONE IS LIKE
A JOURNEY TO A
DISTANT LAND..."



Stories have the power to change the world. Your story deserves to be told. Not only for the world, but for you—it will change you, too.

I've written several books and worked with dozens of authors to do the same. Each one is like a new journey to a distant land, taking in unfamiliar sights and sounds, and returning home a changed person. A better person.

Do you know why your story tapped you on the shoulder?

Because you're the only one who can write it. Your lived experiences, your joys, your sorrows, and your unlimited mind make you uniquely qualified to tell your story.

So you grabbed a pen. Maybe you've sketched the opening scene. Or uncovered the title. Or you're toeing the edge of a significant life event that will be hard to tell.

INSPIRATION STRUCK. NOW WHAT?

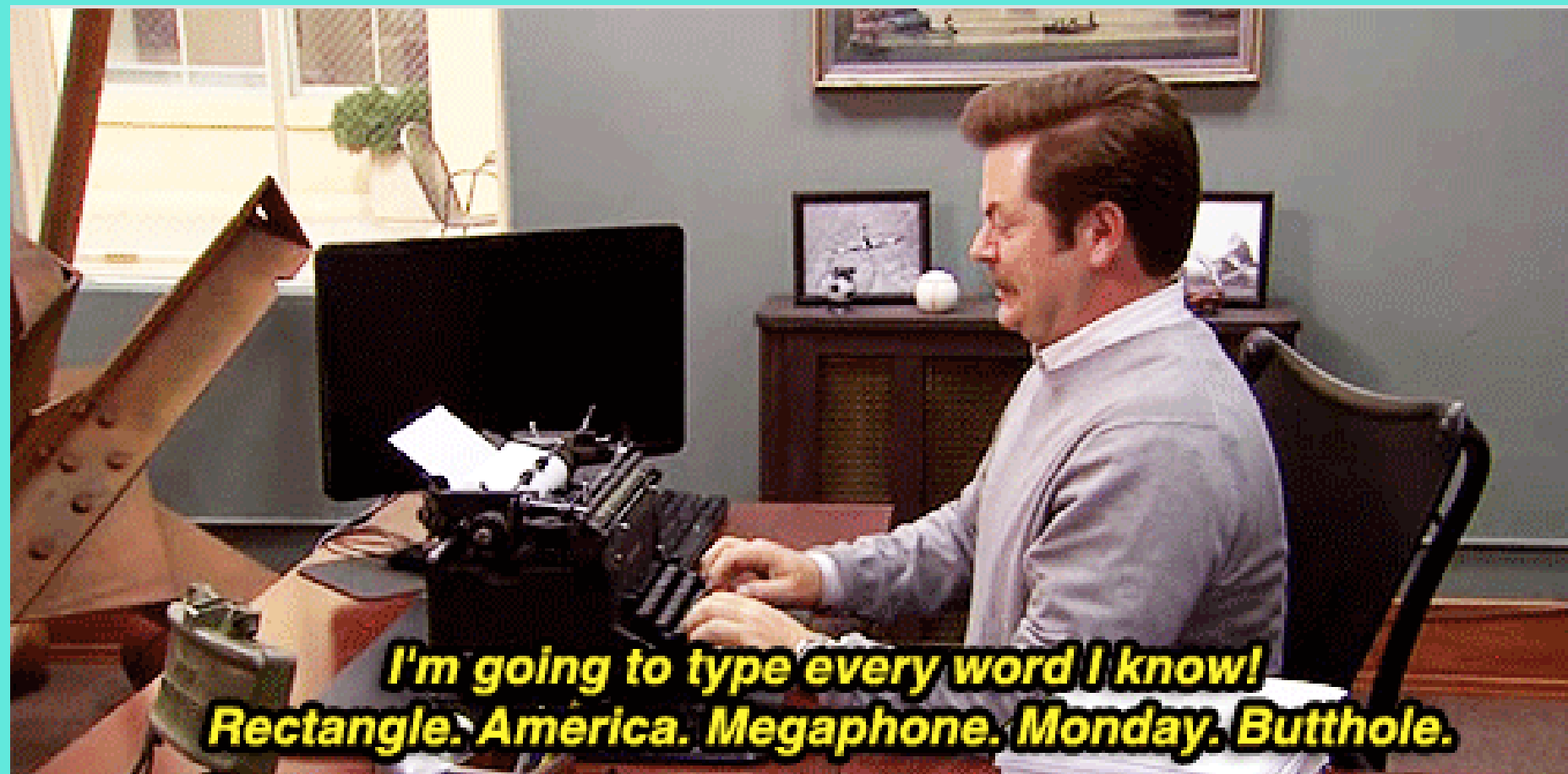
Well, my dear reader, you've reached the tipping point.

That mysterious inspiration is a sign that you were meant to tell this story. But if you don't tell it... kinda soon... it'll find another person.

This is where most writers fail. As your excitement fades, doubt settles in its place.

Here are some common signs:

- 1. You're asking questions like:**
 - a. "Am I even a good writer?"**
 - b. "Is anyone going to read this?"**
 - c. "Is this the right thing to do with my time?"**
- 2. Your word count has slowly trickled to a stop.**
- 3. You planned to write today, but somehow you ended up dusting the windowsills, mowing the grass, and organizing your high school yearbooks.**



THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN WRITERS WITH AN IDEA OR A FINISHED BOOK

As a professional writer and editor, I've been through this process hundreds of times.

The good news is it's normal.

The better news is it's 110% possible to overcome doubt. Every writer on the planet has been here.

So how do you get to the finish line with a book you're proud of?

The difference between the writers who have ideas, outlines, or half-finished drafts and those with a finished book in their hands is only a matter of a few proven strategies.

In the following pages of this free book, I explain several tools that will help you get unstuck, write better content, and finish your damn book.

WHY AM I DOING THIS?

Because I'm head over heels about stories. Fiction. Non-fiction. Children's book. Screenplays. Fairy tales from lands faraway and near.

My passion is helping people take their stories to the next level, because I know those stories have the power to change the world.

Think about it—who you are today is shaped by stories. The ones you read in childhood. Or your favorites as an adult. And the ones we hear on a daily basis, from the news or friends.

Stories help people heal. Help leaders in tough times. Help younger generations access wisdom from the past.

While writing and performing over the last 15 years, I've studied the craft of storytelling. I'm honored to share what I've learned with you, so that you, too, can change the world with your story.

****BEFORE I GO, ONE LAST THING. DON'T GIVE UP. AN IDEA TAPPED YOU ON THE SHOULDER FOR A REASON. YEAH, YOU'RE FRAZZLED BECAUSE YOU CAN'T FIX THAT KINK IN YOUR PLOT. RELAX. IT'LL COME. THE WORLD NEEDS YOUR CREATION. YOU NEED YOUR CREATION. A LITTLE CHALLENGE CAN'T STOP YOU.**

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Laura Thomas is an in-demand editor, writing coach, and writer. She founded Next Level Story to help writers tell more powerful, authentic, and captivating stories.

Her proven developmental editing process combines heart-centered coaching tools with proven writing strategies honed through a lifetime of writing, speaking, and performing.

Laura has worked with dozens of authors and entrepreneurs. Her coaching and editing has helped them write stories the world needs to hear.

In high school, Laura was a two-time state champion in storytelling, and a semi-finalist at Nationals. Laura earned a degree in psychology, has studied yoga and meditation for over six years, and dedicates her own writing to helping others explore core human questions about love, grief, and purpose.



WHAT OTHERS ARE SAYING

" I interviewed 15 different editors before bumping into Laura Thomas, and I'm so grateful that I did. It was important to me as I completed my manuscript to have someone who was going to take on my work with the same amount of love and patience that I put into it. After having my initial consultation with Laura, my decision was made and I knew I had made the right decision. **She took my manuscript to a place that I could not even fathom. The way that she is able to provide clarity to deepen one's language is amazing.** NOW, I'm working on my second book and will make her my permanent editor for future works AND connect her with my network of upcoming authors. Look no further than Laura Thomas!"

-Tony Shavers, author of *Is Your Dream Really Worth It?*

"I have been working with Laura for about 9 months and have found her to be nothing short of stellar. She is brilliant, witty, kind, and a wicked good writer. I am very slow to invite people into my universe, but with Laura, it has been easy. **She has a rich set of skills that is only matched by her warm energy and compassionate approach to serving as a partner and amplifier for your work.**

In my last project, she edited a 14,000 word monograph that will soon be released for nearly 500 Fortune 100 companies, and more than 15,000 affiliates of a leadership organization that contracted me to produce a new thought leadership report. **Laura did an excellent job, not only tightening the manuscript, but also ghost writing in a couple of places that I needed to have a different type of writing style, to pull the story together.** She is a true joy."

-Dr. Damon A. Williams, Leader in Diversity and Inclusion

"She is a quick study who quickly comprehended the general purpose of my manuscript. Her editing included the basic of cleaning up grammar and spelling etc., **but it is her instincts for developmental editing that sets her apart.**

She simultaneously places herself in the position of the reader and within the heart of the author. From that rare vantage point she asked questions and gave advice that helped reveal the deeper purpose of the manuscript -- the soul of the future book.

I would work with Laura again in a heartbeat and recommend her to anyone looking for an editor who cares deeply about her clients."

- Bill Grace, Leadership Consultant and Author

ARE YOU READY TO FINISH YOUR DAMN BOOK?

In the following pages you'll find simple strategies that have helped hundreds of authors overcome the inevitable plateaus in the writing process.

I say “simple” because the best answers are never complicated. Blockages are like a house of cards. Pull one, and down they come.

I hope you're ready to cross the finish line.

STRATEGY 1: REIMAGINE YOUR WRITING PROCES

Everyone has the power to be an author. All you need is a process.

Stop romanticizing your favorite author. Yes, Hemingway had a knack for words, but you needn't hole up in Havana to tell your story.

There is no one “right” way to write a book. Every author has a completely different process.

Award-winning short story writer Nathan Englander turns off his devices to eliminate distractions, and even wears earplugs in his already-silent house.

Barbara Kingsolver wakes up at four in the morning with sentences knocking on her brain, demanding to be recorded.

A.J. Jacobs starts with outlines, increasing their detail until he has a book. All while walking on a treadmill.

The secret is that each of these bestselling authors worked to reimagine their writing process until they found one that worked for them.

A process is a series of actions taken in order to achieve a particular outcome.

WITH THAT IN MIND, THERE'S ONLY ONE METRIC THAT SHOULD MATTER IN YOUR WRITING PROCESS: WORDS WRITTEN.

Find a process that helps you write. Then keep writing.

Don't worry if it's Nobel Prize worthy. Don't even worry if it's good. Just find a way to get words onto paper, or into your Scrivener document.

Here are some tools you can try to write more words:

- + *Write one sentence every morning.*
- + *Write about something that pisses you off.*
- + *Take a notebook into the forest.*
- + *Buy a waterproof notebook for your shower.*
- + *Hit record on your Voice Memo app and tell your friend to ask you questions.*
- + *Outline with sticky notes on the wall, then move them around until you like it.*
- + *Make a pot of tea and write until its empty.*
- + *Read your favorite author for 15 minutes, then start writing.*

After you've tried several tactics, take a moment to reflect:

- + *Which one helped you write with ease?*
- + *Which activity felt the most natural?*
- + *Which one are you excited to do again?*

Your writing process is like your favorite pair of pants. You've searched your whole life to find them, but somehow they found you.

So, write. Write a lot. Your reimagined writing process will find you.

STRATEGY 2: BEFRIEND DISCIPLINE (SHE'S NOT WHO YOU THINK SHE IS)

The key to writing your damn book is discipline. But discipline is not who you think she is.

If an image of Dwayne Johnson, a.k.a. WWF star The Rock, pumping iron for two hours at 5 o'clock every morning popped into your head when you thought of discipline, let that shit go.

Discipline ≠ Pain

Discipline is simply remembering what you want.

Take a moment to write down why you're writing your book.
Make it real, not some pretend Oscar speech.

Because you want to feel alive.
Because you want to heal.

Because you want to share your expertise with the world.
Because you've never finished anything this big and you're going to prove everyone wrong.

This is your WHY.

Write it on a big piece of paper and tape it above your desk.

Tape it to your bathroom mirror.

Ask your partner to text it to you everyday at noon.

While writing my latest book, *Shit My Zen Teacher Says*, I had the cover designed early in the process. I printed it and taped it over another book so I could feel what it was like to hold the final product. When I walked into my office each day, I saw the mockup and remembered why I decided to write this book: to help people live better lives.

That simple act was enough to drop my butt into that ridiculously uncomfortable chair and start.

If you are struggling with writing, it's not because you're not "disciplined."

You just forgot what you want most.

Find a way to remember your WHY. Remember what you want and go after it.

Your book deserves it.

**DISCIPLINE IS
SIMPLY
REMEMBERING
WHAT YOU WANT.**

STRATEGY 3: BUILD A BULLETPROOF WRITING SCHEDULE

Not all writing schedules are created equal. Building a bulletproof writing schedule can help you go from misfires to real writing in no time.

Here's how to create a bulletproof writing schedule:

1. Leave the guilt at the door. Once your schedule is created, it's your time, and yours alone. Feeling guilty that you should be doing something else is only holding you back. In fact, stop shoulding on yourself all together.

If you struggle with guilt, here's a prompt I'd like you to journal about: What is the root cause of my guilt?

When you decide to write a book, there's no space for guilt. It's time to find out where it's coming from, name it, and set it aside.

2. Find out if you're a Daily Writer or a Burst Writer. Many writers, myself included, swear by writing every day. This could mean one sentence to get you going, a 300-word target, or 60 minutes of door-locked, butt-in-chair writing.

Other writers like Cheryl Strayed, bestselling author of *Wild*, write in bursts. She goes to a hotel for a few days at a time to write, condensing her goals and limiting distractions.

3. Schedule it! If you have a doctor's appointment on your schedule, do you hem and haw beforehand, wondering if you should really go? No! You show up 10 minutes early, palms sweaty, ready to fill out paperwork.

Put your writing schedule in your calendar, iCal, Google Calendar, or your extra snazzy Bullet Journal.

4. Make a TO-DO list. When I coach writers and entrepreneurs, I make sure they have a TO-DO list before going into a scheduled writing session. Why?

The writing process is so complex that it's easy to get overwhelmed. Do I work on dialogue today? Rework my outline? Focus on Chapter 6? Add depth to that character? Look up the latest social psychology findings and add them to my cache?

When you know exactly what you need to do today, you can sit down and start working without wasting mental energy on remembering where you are in the process, then deciding what to do.

**BULLETPROOFING YOUR WRITING
SCHEDULE IS SIMPLE AND ONLY TAKES
A FEW EXTRA MINUTES, BUT IT'LL KEEP
YOUR TRAIN ON THE TRACKS AND
CHUGGING ALONG STRONG.**

STRATEGY 4: PROVEN TOOLS FOR GETTING UNSTUCK

Just like dog-earing your thesaurus on words you tend to repeat, getting stuck is a quintessential part of the writing process.

Getting *unstuck* can mean the difference between finishing your book or watching your dreams tumble like giant Jenga played on uneven ground after a few drinks.

The top three reasons authors get stuck are:

- Doubt has settled in (see earlier: “Is anyone going to read this?”).
- You’re trapped in the minutiae of your book.
- You’re simply burned out.

After years of writing and coaching, I’ve seen it all. But I’ve also seen people walk out of their stuck-ness, one step at a time.

HERE ARE 7 TIME-TESTED STRATEGIES FOR GETTING UNSTUCK

1. Take a break. It’s hard to solve thinking problems by thinking. Get outside. Go on a hike. Writing a book is like having a relationship. Sometimes, the best course of action is walking away to clear your head. Did you know that getting out of your head and into your body is scientifically proven to help you problem-solve? Do something that causes you to stop thinking. Move your body. Run up a steep hill. Play with your child.

Trust that answers will come to you, without having to hunt them down.

2. Explore new ideas. Write something you know you won't use. This technique helps you see your book from a new perspective. Write a chapter of your memoir in third person. Explore a peripheral character's backstory. (Patrick Rothfuss, a bestselling fantasy author, wrote an entire experimental, dialogue-less book about Auri, a mysterious character from his thousand-paged series, *The Kingkiller Chronicles*.)

What new ideas can help you reconnect with your story and reignite your writing journey?

3. Create a time constraint. Writing your book takes intrinsic motivation. If you don't have an external deadline, like a writing coach or editor or publisher breathing down your neck, it can

be hard to stay on task. With too much time on your hands, projects can start to drift apart, or fall to the background in the face of other priorities. Create your own deadlines, and find someone to be your accountability partner. Tell them your schedule. Tell them you'll email them on certain days. Confirm if you did or did not meet your goal.

**I OFTEN HAVE MY CLIENTS
EMAIL ME THEIR WORK
FROM THE WEEK EVERY
FRIDAY.**

This adds a level of importance that's hard to achieve on your own.



4. GIVE UP

Seeking perfection, that is.

Eliminate high expectations. If you're already planning your launch party, or what stories you'll tell Oprah on Super Soul Sunday, take a step back.

Pressure is the death of creativity.

Your story wants room to explore, to grow, to surprise you. If you're looking over its shoulder like a stern parent, it'll resent the journey. A diamond isn't perfect when it's first cut from rock. Relax and focus on the process of grinding and polishing.

5. When in doubt, read good books. Some writers don't like reading their genre while writing because they don't want to be influenced. Whether you take this stance or not, read good writing. Even seemingly opposite genres can help spark ideas you never considered, inspiring you out of your rut.

6. Play. Don't forget: you chose this because it was supposed to bring you joy. You love writing. And telling stories. If it's no longer fun, find a way to play. Read your story out loud. Perform it as a play. Storyboard it with stick figures clockwise around your room. Play = fun. Fun = better work.

7. Hire an editor. If you're really stuck, consider hiring an editor or writing coach. A good developmental editor can assess where you are, discuss where you want to go, and offer practical tools for getting there. After years of writing, I realized that engaging in editing and coaching together can often help authors take their writing to the next level, compared to editing or coaching alone.

This article explains how a good developmental editor can help you get unstuck.

ARTICLE: SUPERHEROS & SIDEKICKS - WHAT IS DEVELOPMENTAL EDITING?

The simple act of inviting an accountability partner into the process often injects fresh energy into a stale project.

If you know you're stuck, pick a strategy above and try it. Remember—getting unstuck is an active process. Take it one step at a time.

STRATEGY 5:

LEVERAGE YOUR NATURAL TENDENCY

“Know thyself,” said some really wise person.

“Really helpful,” someone else quipped sarcastically.

I’ve spent more time with myself than, well, anyone, but sometimes I feel like there’s an alien staring at me in the mirror.

When it comes to knowing yourself, you need more than flippant adages like “Know thyself.”

You need a framework.

Gretchen Rubin, author of *The Happiness Project*, famously defined four different personality types in her book *The Four Tendencies*. You can use these four tendencies to understand you’re motivation.

I’ve included suggestions that will motivate each personality type to finish their damn book.

OBLIGER

Obligers find it easier to meet other people’s expectations rather than their own. They’re the typical “people-pleaser.”

BOOK FINISHING HACK

If your an Obliger, create an accountability schedule with someone you trust. Use your desire to please them to accomplish your personal project.

QUESTIONER

Questioners commit to something they’ve thoroughly vetted and determined to be a good course of action. If you’re a questioner, you likely thought long and hard about whether or not your book would add value to the world, then assessed how you’d go about doing it.

BOOK FINISHING HACK

If you’re stuck, remind yourself of your sound reasoning for walking this path in the first place. Reconnect with your “why.”

REBEL

The rebel is the opposite of the obliger—if someone tells them to do something, they resist. Rebels also love proving people wrong.

BOOK FINISHING HACK

If you're a rebel, make completing your book a challenge. Maybe you want to get it done in record time; maybe you want to finish it before someone else in your field gets the upper hand. Print out a picture of someone who said you couldn't do it and tape it to the target, er, wall above your desk. Find a challenge and pursue it.

UPHOLDER

Upholders keep promises they make both to themselves and others.

BOOK FINISHING HACK

If you're an upholder, routines and schedules are your golden ticket. Make sure to include writing in your schedule. If time is tight, consider rearranging your priorities to accommodate and stay healthy. Say “no” more than you say “yes.” Protect your time.

Okay, my alien reflection looks a little more recognizable now.

**NOW THAT
YOU KNOW
HOW YOUR
PERSONALITY
TYPE IS
MOTIVATED,
PUT IT INTO
ACTION.**

STRATEGY 6:

HARNESS ACCOUNTABILITY, AND YOUR SOCIAL NATURE

Let's be honest—writing is a lonely journey at times. Even for those of us who like the solitude, when we spend days on end shut off from the world, the world can start to look a little off-kilter.

It's time to harness accountability. If you can no longer stand being locked in a room with your own brain (again), find other writers. It could be a writing group or other entrepreneurial friends. When you connect with people (or dogs) who are going through a similar journey, they can often empathize with your ups and downs.

If you can't find a writing group, start one. Or find one online. Or hire that writing coach with the unicorn horn.

Even solitary activities aren't meant to be done alone. We're social creatures. A community will not only offer you empathy and accountability, it just might return your sanity.

CASE STUDY:

BARON GRANT, SPEAKER, COACH, AUTHOR OF DO IT ANYWAY



When Baron reached out to me, he was already a successful speaker, executive coach, and entrepreneur. He also had a story inside he wanted to tell.

His wife fell deathly ill with a rare tick-borne disease, his business was suffering, and they were raising five children.

I worked with Baron to help him structure his powerful story so that it could connect with his audience, including many of his deepest, rawest emotions and the lessons that transpired from these challenges.

Baron had a story inside, it only took some accountability, gentle questions, and his social nature of sharing the story with me to unlock *Do It Anyway*. After a final editing pass, Baron was ready to publish his first book and share his story with thousands.

FINAL POINTS

Finishing your damn book is worth it.

You deserve to share your book with the world, and the world deserves your story.

But your book won't finish itself.

The strategies in this book have been time-tested and proven by famous authors and dozens of my writing clients alike.

It's not rocket science.

Choose a strategy that fits your needs and act on it.

I've created this book for you because I want to see your story in the world.

I fill with joy when one of my clients texts me a photo of their book in their hands, hot off the press.

For those of you ready to take your story to the next level with extra support, you can reach out to me for a discovery call at www.NextLevelStory.com/contact.

I can't wait to hear your story.

With love,
Laura Thomas



FURTHER READING

How to Write Like a Badass

A 6-part series with over 2,000 readers about, well, I think the title says it all.

Superheroes and Sidekicks

An overview of developmental editing and what a great developmental editor should do for you.

**THE WORLD DESERVES
YOUR STORY.**

YOU DESERVE TO SHARE IT.