

You Get to Make the Rules

It's weird how easy it is to forget that you can do what you want.

When I got my driver's license at 16, I remember going in to pay at the gas station (back when you had to go inside to pay) and looking longingly at a Snickers bar. Then it hit me. I'm driving, I have my own money, I am free to buy a Snickers bar any time I want. This kind of epiphany of autonomy happened frequently for several years after my newfound independence. After so many years of tagging along with a parent as a kid, asking if I could come in, or if she'd buy me something, the control I had over my life and its rules came as a perpetual surprise. I needed to remind myself often.

This still happens, though not with gas station candy. When I read *Anything You Want*, a delightful little book by Derek Sivers, it hit me again. He talked about building a business from nothing. At first, it's pretty easy to make up the rules. But as you get successful, you start to unconsciously slip into behavior patterns you've observed elsewhere and you begin to believe you have to operate that way. Sivers described several moments when he realized, "Wait a minute. This is my company. I can do whatever I want." He ignore people who told him he *had to* have a boring legalese Terms of Service on his website. He did totally odd, unscalable things like order pizza for a customer who requested it. Why not? It's his company, and he thought it sounded fun.

I get hit with this epiphany often in business. Usually when in torturous deliberation between two decisions which seem the only options because they're both defined, standard businessy ways of doing things, it will dawn on me that I can just make it up as I go and do something without precedent. Why not? Isn't that the point of building something new?

It's a rush when you remember your agency. It's also a weight of responsibility. Most of the time, most things are efficiently outsourced to common practice. But when it's not working or doesn't feel right, don't forget you can do whatever the heck you want.