

What would you consider your motto?



What's my motto? Hmm... good one. I know I always wanted a motto. Kind of like the way I always wanted a nickname. But that never worked out.

I mean, over the years, friends and family have often shortened my name from Damian to Dame or Dami, or even D. That doesn't really feel like a nickname though...

On special occasions, my name has been combined with another rhyming word to create somewhat of a nickname. Say my older brother takes "Damian" plus "Flamer" and gets "Flamian". Or, he takes "Damian" plus "Lame" and now I am called "Lamian".

But I digress.

When I was about 18, I wanted a nickname. Badly. Something cool like "Duke" or "Shadow". I don't know. How do people get

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nicknames anyhow? Most nicknames I recall growing up were just more efficient ways of pointing fun at a person's most embarrassing physical features. But again, I digress.

Where was I... oh yes, my nickname. I decided I really wanted to be called "Scooby". You know, like short for Scooby-Doo. I mean, who's cooler than a dog who can solve crimes? He's the life of the party and he can eat a six-foot sub in one bite.

I, on the other hand, possessed none of those qualities. That's probably why "Scooby" never stuck. Side note, I have since been called "Lamian" by different people at different stages of my life.

When I was writing partners with Dave Rogers he used to call me "Baby" (short for "Baby Genius"). Which is how Dave described me in the writer's bio he sent to some Hollywood agents for us. I liked that nickname.

What was the question any way? Oh yes, my motto...

Well, I can answer that one best with a story about a guy who did in fact have a pretty cool nickname: Spook Handy. That had to be a nickname, right? Can't imagine anyone naming a child "Spook". Doesn't seem legal.

The year was circa 2002. I am working for Kaplan Test Prep. Probably the only real "job-job" I'll ever have. This is during my

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first tour of duty as a teacher/trainer. I would later serve two more tours of duty. All lasting about three years each time, and full of good memories working with great people. But inevitably all ending due to my longing to pursue my true passions...

During this first tour of duty, I am working in New Brunswick, NJ. My old stomping grounds from my days at Rutgers. What does that even mean, “stomping grounds”? I guess it’s supposed to mean where a person once walked and left some big, impressionable footprints. Kinda like kicking butt and taking names.

Well, then I guess New Brunswick is “technically” not my stomping grounds. Because all I did during college was eat sweet potatoes and study in my room alone. It was a quiet and methodical endeavor. Little to no stomping.

I love my time at Kaplan in New Brunswick. I am well paid. I win a bunch of awards and they love me.

In fact, they call me “the Butcher”. Because before I take over, everyone and anyone who starts their new teacher training automatically graduates and becomes a teacher.

Because the prior trainer is a big softy and doesn’t have the heart to ever cut anyone. He sees the best in everyone and is just too sweet. This is Spook.

And well, all that changes when they give me the keys...

I cut and I cut hard. Trainees are intimidated from day one. The teaching staff is terrified when I show up to observe and evaluate them.

The result? Our teachers, and my graduates, achieve the highest ratings in the region. Our center wins a bunch of awards. All because of my work as “the Butcher”. So maybe I did get a nickname after all. Although nobody calls me it to my face. Not that I would have minded. Guess they hadn’t considered I’d take it as a compliment.

After graduating from Rutgers, I had decide to work for Kaplan (instead of taking the accounting route or trying to climb the corporate ladder) because I want to be a screenwriter. But that’s a story for another time...

For now, Kaplan is the perfect way to work just a handful of hours a day and make good money at the time.

After three years of writing by day and teaching by night, I am at a point where I feel like I need to take that existential leap and go all in...

People warn you not to put all your eggs in one basket. Legendary tycoon, Charles Schwab, disagrees. He says when you’re trying to build wealth - “Put all your eggs into one basket

and watch it closely.”

At that moment in my life, I don’t know if I feel any closer to achieving my screenwriting dreams than when I first began... nevertheless I feel like if I will ever have a shot at my Hollywood dream I need to give it everything I have...

So I quit.

It isn’t an easy decision. I mean I have a dream job. I call the shots. Make great money. And it all comes naturally to me. But, it’s time to leap and see if that net will appear...

I give my boss Cheryl plenty of notice. Word spreads around the office I am leaving. The teachers who know me are all shocked and wonder why. Spook is one of those teachers.

I tell Spook about my screenwriting dream and wanting to give it everything I got. Spook is dumbfounded I am leaving. It makes no sense to him. I have it all at Kaplan. Why give up good money, a great reputation and a job I clearly enjoy?

Spook also has a dream. He is an aspiring folk singer. Kaplan is the perfect non-full-time commitment job to fund his folky lifestyle while he works on becoming famous. (Much more attractive than becoming an aspiring “homeless” folk singer.)

Spook has also built an exceptional reputation for himself at Kaplan and over a far longer period of time than I had. So it just

doesn't compute. Why not keep riding that fence? Why burn the insurance ticket?

So as I sit behind the counter at the Kaplan student center, that same counter where I would often report back about how this month's training had ended several weeks early because I cut every last trainee... I share my dream with Spook. He listens and then very directly asks me the BIG question...

"So, what's your plan B?"

I don't hesitate. Not for a moment. I have not planned my answer, but it comes nonetheless as naturally as if Spook had asked me my name.

"There is no plan B."

Five years later I'm at JFK airport.

Charlene and I are married. And we are on a connecting flight from Italy to Costa Rica. I just made another "there is no plan B" decision. I quit my job at Kaplan (again), this time to start my own online business. With roughly three months savings in the bank and zero income. Success is the only option.

Once again, there is no net.

Anyhow, who do I run into at the airport terminal... none other than Spook Handy!

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I can't believe it. That unmistakable bearded grin and shaggy DIY haircut. We immediately recognize one another and greet with wide and warm smiles.

Of course I remember his name and I shout, "Spook!"

He shouts back, "It's the guy with no plan B!"

I am immediately flattered.

As we catch up Spook tells me how impacted he was by that final conversation we had at the Kaplan center. How he couldn't stop thinking about the way I had chosen to put all my chips on the line and go for it.

In fact, it is my unorthodox decision that recently inspired Spook quit Kaplan himself to pursue his folky dreams full-time. He is traveling between festivals when our paths cross in that New York City airport.

We chat for a few minutes before it is time for each of us to continue on our own existential journeys.

Funny because even in that short conversation it becomes pretty apparent that while Spook remembers me, he has totally forgotten my name. No clue whatsoever. Did I mind? Not at all.

Because he remembered something more important about me.

He remembered who I am... the guy with no plan B.