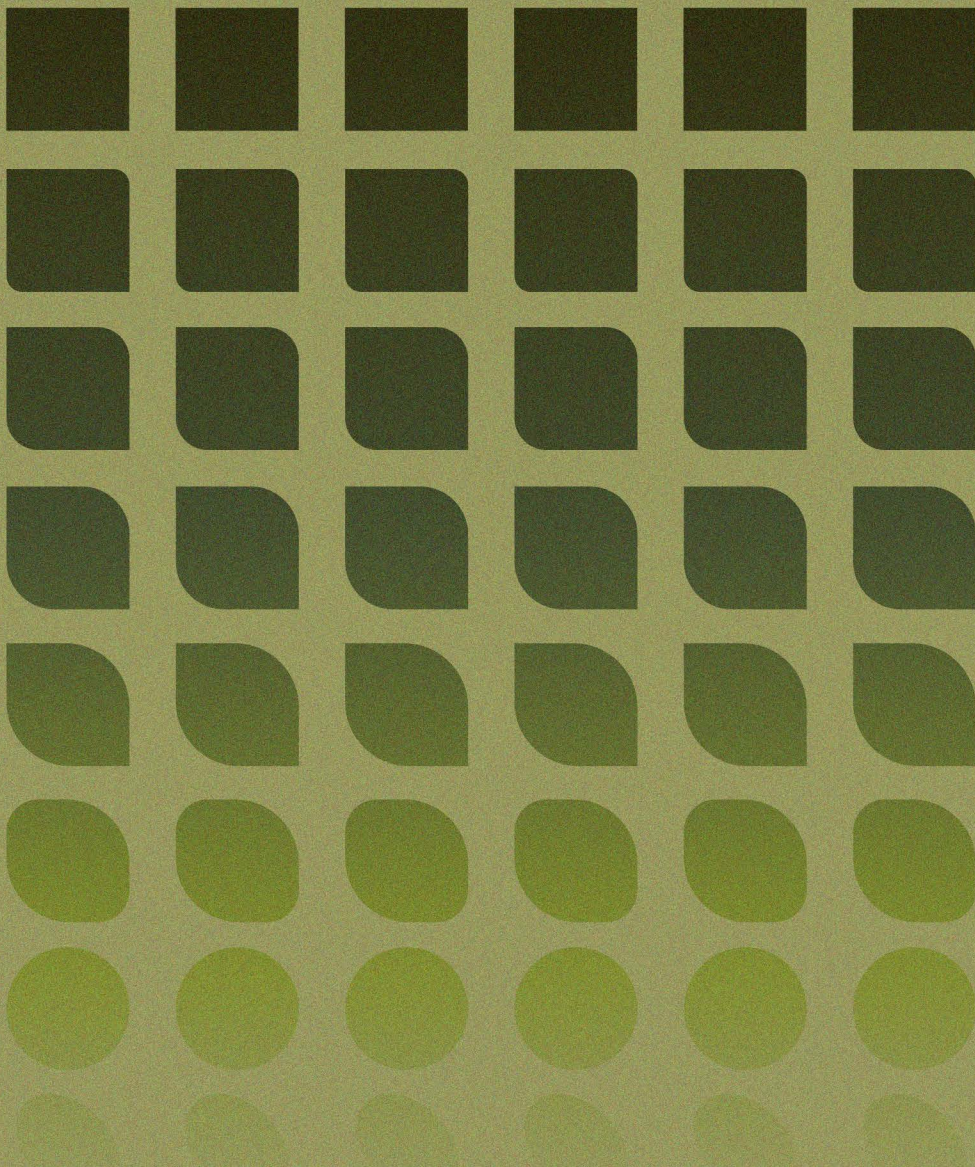


CRAFT CHAPS

**ON MANAGING ONESELF:
POETRY LESSONS FROM A FORMER
B-SCHOOL BASEMENT RESEARCH GOBLIN**

Stine An



**ON MANAGING ONESELF:
POETRY LESSONS FROM A FORMER
B-SCHOOL BASEMENT RESEARCH
GOBLIN**

STINE AN

Sundress Publications • Knoxville, TN

Copyright © 2026 Stine Su Yon An

ISBN: 978-1-951979-94-2

Published by Sundress Publications

www.sundresspublications.com

Editor: Sohini Basak

Series Editor: Hannah Olsson

Editorial Assistant: Kanika Lawton

Colophon: This book is set in Perpetua Titling MT and Centaur

Cover Image: Coral Black

Cover Design: Coral Black

Book Design: Hannah Olsson

After Peter F. Drucker

In my early twenties, I managed to find work as a research associate at a business school. It was initially a part-time job, but the role came with full-time benefits, adequate pay, and minimal supervision. I felt relieved to find a job that offered dental insurance and generous sick days while only requiring 20 hours of work each week.

My office, located in a gloomy node of labyrinthine basement hallways lined with Adam Smith quotes and *New Yorker* cartoons about the absurdities of corporate culture, was a lonely one. The room contained two large cubicles, and usually only one was occupied. I fulfilled my duties as an employee well enough, which were to collaborate closely with faculty to research, develop, and write case studies and instructional materials used to educate future leaders of the world. I would only emerge from the chthonic depths to grab lunch on the sunny surface with other associates who were scattered across the campus in differently lonely cubicles.

For a long time, I worked just enough to survive and learn to take care of myself and save for a rainier day because it was tough to imagine a brighter future. At the time, I drew and did stand-up comedy. Along the way, I also picked up transferable skills to sustain a competent daytime career in multiple work settings. I didn't excel, but I managed, or I learned to manage.

Today, I will share with you some secrets I learned while lurking in the basement of a business school for two years. I call these my research goblin years.

Every research associate, as a part of their orientation, receives a copy of Peter F. Drucker's essay *Managing Oneself*. Drucker is credited with shaping the foundations of modern management theory and coining the term "knowledge worker."

In his influential essay, Drucker lays out how true excellence in life comes from knowing yourself well and cultivating your strengths. To this end, he offers five questions, which I will revisit in this essay from the perspective of a performing poet. For each question, I will also offer a set of prompts for your poetry practice.

I. What are my strengths?

“Most people think they know what they are good at. They are usually wrong.”

Drucker argues that it’s far wiser to focus on your strengths than weaknesses. If you focus on your weaknesses, at best you’ll be mediocre, while if you focus on your strengths, you can be truly exceptional. He says that it’s still important to be aware of any weaknesses and bad habits that hinder you so that you can request support or accommodations.

I’ve found this framework freeing. It gives me permission to embrace what I’m good at and enjoy while also preventing me from dwelling too much on my shortcomings. If something is truly getting in the way, or competency is required, I can level up so that the weakness isn’t an issue, but I also don’t have to sweat it if I’m not good at it. If something is disproportionately draining, I’ll try to get a skill trade or pay someone to help me.

Sometimes it can be tough to identify our own strengths because they might come so easily to us or feel effortless. Let others help you see your strengths and help others see theirs. Be generous in helping others figure out what their strengths are.

Prompts:

- What are your strengths as a writer? What skills or knowledge could bring out your strengths further?
- What comes easily or naturally to you that other people view as your superpower? What do readers and audiences see as your strengths as a writer?
- What are your weaknesses and bad habits? Are they getting in your way? If so, where can you find help or support?

You can also apply these questions to a poem you’re working on:

- What are the strengths of the poem?

- What revisions can you make to develop the strengths of the poem?
- What distracts from the strengths of the poem?

2. How do I perform?

“Do not try to change yourself—you are unlikely to succeed.”

I’ve been haunted by this line from Drucker ever since I encountered it in the basement of a business school over 10 years ago. I’ve had a long obsession with Franz Kafka’s *The Metamorphosis*. It’s a story about change, and yet, I wonder if the morning Gregor Samsa woke up in his goblin-mode was when he finally showed up in the world as his true self. Could *The Metamorphosis* be a story about self-acceptance and showing up as you are in the world in your full, singular, monstrous glory? Is there a world in which Gregor could have flourished?

Drucker emphasizes the importance of understanding how you work best so that you can support your strengths.

Prompts:

- How do you like to write or read? What would make it easier, joyful, or more pleasurable for you to write or read?
- What level of stimulation do you need to stay engaged and present but not be overwhelmed?
- How do you like to encounter poetry? By reading? Talking to friends? Listening to recordings? Attending readings? Befriending poets? Building community? Working on publication projects? Editing? Translating?
- How do you best create poetry? Do you need to write on a schedule, or do you prefer writing more intermittently? Or do you like to turn voice memos into drafts of poems using transcription tools?

- Do you prefer working with constraints and form, or do you like to allow form to show up more organically in your work?

Once you identify your strengths, it's equally important to identify which environments, conditions, or modes will allow your strengths to shine.

3. What are my values?

“What one does well—even very well and successfully—may not fit with one’s value system.”

It took me a long time to realize that just because you are good at something doesn’t mean you have to do it or keep doing it.

In the context of creating poetry, a question about values becomes a question of poetics. Knowing what you value in your poetry can help you find the right collaborators to work with and opportunities to pursue.

You get to choose how and where you employ your strengths as a poet in the service of what matters to you.

- What do you value in your life and how is your poetry in conversation with those values?
- How would you like to publish (that is, make public) your poetry? Through performance? Through social media or recordings? Through handmade chapbooks? Through publication by presses that align with your poetics and politics?
- How might your values inform your day job, relationships, or how you show up in your community?
- What kind of impact do you want your poetry to have in the world?

Your values can evolve over time. For me, I value collaboration and solidarity over competition, and I’ve learned to value connection and friendship with other artists. In my own work, I value the poetics of disobedience.

4. Where do I belong?

“Successful careers are not planned. They develop when people are prepared for opportunities because they know their strengths, their method of work, and their values.”

Drucker says that it can take time to figure out where you belong. Once you know your strengths, understand how you perform, and have a good sense of your values, you're in a good spot to figure out where you belong.

- Which environments or people allow you to create with curiosity, ease, and joy?
- Who makes you feel excited to grow and try new things?
- Is there someone in your life who has been changing the course of your life for the better? For the worse?
- Where is the warmth in your life right now, and who has been inviting you in?
- What are the spaces and who are the people that bring out the parts of you that you want to get to know better?
- What is the path of least resistance that will help you move forward?
- When do you feel lit up?

Another way to phrase this question in a poetry context could be, who do you want to be in conversation with and what conversations do you want to be a part of? Whose work do you want to support? Who do you want to connect with? What poetics or art do you want your work to be in conversation with?

5. What should I contribute?

“What does the situation require? Given my strengths, my way of performing, and my values, how can I make the greatest contribution to what needs to be done? And finally, what results have to be achieved to make a difference?”

For many of us, poetry, writing, or art isn't how we make a living. On the flipside, it also means that we engage with poetry freely. I like to approach poetry and artmaking as a liberatory practice. One benefit is that we get to choose how we contribute through our art and work in our artistic communities.

Drucker emphasizes the importance of choosing contributions that are both meaningful and make a difference. Personally, I like to contribute in a way that creates a palpable change in the world. This might mean starting a collective with like-minded friends, hosting a regular gathering or reading, or finding a small way to meaningfully fill in a gap or to create new spaces in conversation or community.

- What are some strengths you'd be excited to share with your community?
- What's a light lift for you that could be impactful for someone else or the larger community?
- What's your favorite way to share your own work or share work that you admire?
- Is there a strength you want to explore or develop that dovetails with a need in your community?
- Is there someone or an organization or publication whose work you admire that you'd like to help with? In what way?

Conclusion

I wanted to share these secrets and questions from my basement research goblin days because they have stuck with me, and I've found them helpful to return to as I've navigated life inside and outside of poetry. If anything, they remind me that writing is a relational practice, and in relation, you must know yourself.

ADDITIONAL READING

I've listed resources that have helped me think through some of these questions more concretely. Take what you need and leave the rest.

Drucker, Peter F. "Managing Oneself." *Harvard Business Review*, January 2005.

Sethi, Ramit. *I Will Teach You to Be Rich*. New York: Workman Publishing, 2009.

Spade, Dean. *Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity During This Crisis (and the Next)*. London: Verso, 2020.

Spade, Dean. *Love in a Fucked-Up World: How to Build Relationships, Hook Up, and Raise Hell, Together*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2023.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Stine An is a poet, translator, and technical writer in New York City. Their poems and translations appear in Best Literary Translations 2024, Poem-a-Day, Best Experimental Writing 2018, Words Without Borders, Electric Literature, and elsewhere. She has a BA in Literature from Harvard College and an MFA in Literary Arts from Brown University and is the recipient of fellowships and grants from The Poetry Project, the PEN/Heim Translation Fund Grant, Yaddo, ALTA, the Daesan Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts. Stine is the author of [*S M M E R C R S H*](#) (Sarabande Books, 2025) and the translator of [*Today's Morning Vocabulary*](#) (Zephyr Press, 2025) and [*Winter Night Rabbit Worries*](#) (Ugly Duckling Presse, 2026) by South Korean poet Yoo Heekyung. Her debut poetry collection, [*B-Dragon Suite*](#), is forthcoming from Nightboat Books in September 2026. You can find them online [@gregorspamsa](#).

