

## Scrappers

By [Carol Howard Merritt](#)

November 15, 2011



“We’re Scrappers!” I proclaimed at a recent seminar on writing.

I looked up and saw the confused look on a woman’s face. “Are you talking about people who put together scrapbooks?”

“Um... no,” I said. After scanning the room, I noticed it was full of perplexed faces. So I began to explain.

I didn't say this exactly, but I was thinking of the woman who was denied a miracle by Jesus. Jesus called her a dog, but she didn't go away. Instead, she reminded Jesus that even the dogs get scraps.

I like that woman--the Scrapper's prototype.

A Scrapper is pragmatic. We are people who have learned to work outside of institutional structures in order to get stuff done. It doesn't always mean that we're anti-institutional. It just means that after facing years of rejected articles and diminishing job opportunities, we've learned to build our own unsteady platforms and live out our creative callings.

When we can't get published, we start blogs. When we don't get invited to speak for large audiences, we fire up a Twitter feed. When we're not allowed to use

amplification, we call on the people's mic. When we're not invited on radio shows, we start podcasts. When we cannot find pastorates, we plant churches. When we get tired of the same people at conferences, we stake out our [own venues](#). When the media does not cover our concerns, we find [ways to get the word out](#). We are usually under the age of fifty (aka, Gen X and Millennials), but not [exclusively](#).

We're Scrappers. We've learned to survive this way. The question is... how will we thrive?

It's hard to be a Scrapper sometimes, because we don't usually make a lot of money for the work we do and (as I said earlier) we've often been rejected by the established structures. We didn't cry or whine over that fact (at least not too much). Instead, we [DIYed](#) it. We worked really, really hard and created something else.

But then there's the question...after we've constructed it, what do we do when the establishment comes back to us, looking to support us?

How does this happen? Often it's in exciting and enterprising ways—like when [denominational structures](#) support [new communities](#), or [publishers](#) look to [web networks](#) for fresh voices.

These should be beautiful, fruitful relationships. Right?

Well, many times they are. But sometimes it's scary. Sometimes, we Scrappers have to swallow our pride in order to start working with the institution that turned us away. Often, Scrappers develop autonomy and a certain voice that we fear we'll lose if we move into partnership with an established organization. We worry that the institutions will steal our ideas and they'll have the money and power to pull them off—without us. (This is exciting when it happens the first few times. But after a while it can be annoying, especially if you're a person without stable employment. Then you begin to feel co-opted.)

What's an example of this concern? Think of the Occupy movement. They're worried over the fact that our current systems are increasing the gap between the rich and the poor. They want something different than the system that we have now. Some fear that if they begin to take money and support from particular PACs, then their message will be diluted and co-opted, they'll become an arm of the Democratic Party, and therefore strengthen the current system, rather than challenging it.

There are purists in all of this--people who reject the establishment altogether. But I guess I'm too pragmatic for that. I'm a loyal radical. I'm creating innovative projects while working with and in institutions. I'm trying to learn from the wisdom and traditions of earlier generations, so I don't act like Christopher Columbus, thinking I "discovered" lands that have been inhabited for generations.

There are a lot of us out here.

And so, I'm wondering, how can we make this work? Established structures need Scrappers. Boomers may never retire, but they're not immortal. If organizations don't look past Boomers and welcome innovation, they may not be around for very much longer.

Many Scrappers need existing structures. Generation X is getting old. And we're exhausted. We've been working hard, but many of us are just not sure how to ever get to the premium level of our [freemium](#) systems. Plus, we need to pay our underwater mortgages.

Not only that, many of us have a calling. We want our movements to have a lasting effect beyond our individual bluster, and we know that may not happen without some creative/substantial partnerships.

So tell me, what are your ideas in making this collaboration happen? Do you think it ought to happen?