



Los Angeles

May 9, 2014

What's the Most Common Mistake Artists Make?

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ARTS SHRINK is a bi-weekly column designed to answer questions from artists and arts groups related to their arts business and practice. The Arts Shrink brings two decades of experience as an arts consultant, teacher, and mentor to the table as she responds your questions.

Question: What's the most common mistake artists make?

-L.A. Theatre Artist

Dear L.A. TA,

Your question has set my head spinning. There are so many possibilities. So many mistakes that artists make -- like not taking the business side of art seriously or only taking it seriously in the middle of a crisis when, as I mentioned in my last post, it is too late. Or romanticizing

the "starving artist" notion. Or allowing themselves to become resentful of other artists' success. I could go on.

That said there is one whopper of a mistake that I see over and over again. A mistake so egregious, so heinous, so, so, stupid that it makes my blood boil.

Here it is: Artists frequently forget to acknowledge the people who help them. Simply said, artists of all disciplines have stopped saying thank you!

No big deal you may be thinking, but to the contrary, it is a huge deal. Because so many artists are forgetting to express their gratitude, arts supporters are becoming highly sensitive to the oversight and many are withdrawing support as a result.

Now, there are a variety of reasons that generous people are willing to assist artists. While the reasons for their generosity may vary from person to person, the one thing that virtually everyone wants is a heartfelt thank you. On the other hand, arts supporters feel that their efforts on your behalf are inadequate when no appreciation is shown. Arts supporters are then likely to move on to find another artist or arts organization that *will* appreciate their efforts. That leaves you, dear L.A. TA, high and dry. And honestly, you can't blame them for jumping ship if you are unable or unwilling to match their generosity with simple appreciation.

If you dedicate yourself to regularly incorporating gratitude into your artistic practice, you will distinguish yourself to patrons, donors, audience members, and volunteers and reap the rewards throughout your career. Say thank you for everything that is given to you no matter how seemingly incidental. And don't stop there, say thank you for the things you don't get too! Imagine that you are denied that Creative Capital grant you worked so hard to submit. Now imagine writing a note to the selection panel thanking them for the time they spent reading and considering your application. Imagine how surprised they would be to get a letter of that nature. How good it will make them feel and how they will remember you the next time you submit an application!

Think creatively about gratitude. Think about how you can make it especially meaningful. Create special cards or stationary. Carefully select the words you use. Steer clear of email unless it's a last resort. Thank your supporters privately and also thank them publically by putting their name in programs, in newsletters, and on your website.

Saying thank you is simple and practically free so why are so few artists doing it?? There are so many difficult things artists are required to do like making work or raising money or marketing themselves -- but saying thank you? Really? You can't say thank you?

So, my dear L.A. TA, please bring gratitude back. You'll thank me for it later.

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<http://www.kcet.org/arts/artbound/counties/los-angeles/what-is-the-most-common-mistake-artists-make.html#intro>

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