

TODAY is GOING to BE AWESOME

On Working, A Lot

06/12/15

I LOVE
BEING BUSY.

DOLLY
PARTON

I am not going to beat around the bush: I'm busy. I write about busy-ness a lot on this blog, at first a few years ago proclaiming that I was *no longer* going to describe myself as busy, committing myself to *slowing down*, blah, blah, blah. And then eventually all of that became bullshit. Because I realized *I like to be busy*. I like to work. *I might even like to be a tiny bit stressed out*.

So, as you can imagine, because I am usually working on about 20 projects at one time, most of them with client or publisher deadlines attached, people on the Internets and at speaking engagements ask me, a lot: *how do you manage all of that work?* And one way to interpret that question is: how do you not lose your mind with stress and anxiety? And one of the things I tell them is that "I chose this," which I wrote about [here](#). Identifying your busy life as a choice (and reminding yourself of that daily) is a good way to stay out of the victim-based "I'm-so-stressed-out-my-life-sucks" perspective.

But what I also think people are asking is a more practical productivity-related question: how the hell do you get all that work *finished*?

I have some theories about artists who have a high level of productivity, and it doesn't necessarily include staying up all night, at least for those of us over 40. Here's why I think I manage to be so productive. And some of these may also shed some light on why I might actually *enjoy* being busy.

1) *I am motivated, and motivation matters*. I spent the first 16 years after I graduated from college with no real intrinsic motivation to work hard or be productive. I was mostly very lazy until I became an artist. And I'm not just motivated because I like to make art more than I liked to do the jobs I had before becoming a working artist (and that IS a big part of why I'm motivated). I'm also motivated because I, alone, am responsible for the success of my career. Much of our motivation as entrepreneurs comes from our own sense of responsibility for our success, which feels different from working to promote the success of another person or organization.

THE BLOG OF ARTIST



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2) *I am focused.* Until I found drawing and painting and designing, I didn't really know what hyper-focus was. When I am working, I get so lost in it that nothing else matters. Sometimes I even forget to eat. Sometimes my wife tries to talk to me, and I do not hear her, even though she is standing right next to me! Maybe some of you know what I am talking about. That focus helps us get things done.

3) *I get energy from my work,* as opposed to my work taking energy from me. It's sort of like physical exercise for me. When I swim or ride my bike in the morning, I have more energy for the rest of the day. Drawing, painting and designing give me energy. When I do occasionally work on a project that sucks my energy (and it happens), I know never to do anything like it again.

4) *I work full and often long days.* Now that my wife helps manage my business, I work fewer hours in a day than I did before. But even so, I still work at least nine hours a day, and sometimes I work more like 10 or 11. You can get a lot done in 9-11 hours if you are also focused. I am an advocate for taking care of yourself, though, so I also exercise six days a week, eat healthy meals, get eight hours of sleep night (yes, I sleep), and generally take weekends off. I also take vacations.

5) *I'm quick.* The more you do something, the better and faster you get at it. That's why I tell my students to practice, practice, practice. I have been a professional illustrator since 2007, working on multiple projects every day since about 2010, the year my career began to take off. I draw, paint and use Photoshop *a lot*. Think of this as similar to Malcolm Gladwell's "10,000 Hour Rule," in which he claims that the key to achieving expertise in any skill is, to a large extent, a matter of practicing for a total of around 10,000 hours. I am not sure how many hours I have put into being an artist exactly, and I am not sure I am an expert. But practicing has made me fast at what I do. Clients call, I can deliver quickly.

6) *I'm a proficient project manager.* Those 10 years I worked as a project manager before becoming an artist? They were *not* a waste of time. I know how to organize my workflow, prioritize projects, break things down into manageable steps and create to-do lists that work for me (and we all know that crossing things off our lists is the best feeling). I enjoy organizing my work, and that helps, too.

7) *I love what I do.* I don't just sort of love it. *I really, really love it.* I don't just love drawing and painting; I also love the creative process. I want to do it all the time, even during my free time (which is why I am always drawing in my sketchbook late at night as a way to relax). Maybe I am just making up for all the years I didn't make art (I didn't start drawing or painting till I was 31 years old). So far I haven't gotten bored, either.

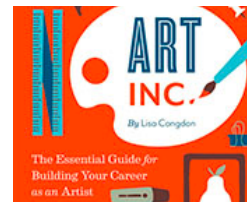
I also want to add here that I don't have children, and I have an extremely supportive partner, who now co-owns my business and who is also invested in my ability to work hard. That said, I know many artists who have kids and/or relatively uninvested partners who are also enormously productive. A lot of this is about the choices we make about how we spend our time — and owning and embracing those choices, whatever they are.

That's it from me today. Have a great weekend, friends!

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