Career Development for Artists

A short guide to making the most out of your career as an artist.

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**Finding Meaningful Work**

Finding purpose in a career is the first step to having both a successful and satisfying professional life. It allows us to bridge the work we do in our jobs with meaning beyond ourselves. This type of meaningful work involves helping others, cultivating genuine relationships, and finding intrinsic motivation. There are essential components to building a meaningful career which involve understanding your interest, abilities, and values.

*Interests*

Our interests can be used as a guide to help us pinpoint activities that we would enjoy doing in our careers. Since our interests are usually activities that we choose to do in our free time, incorporating them into a job can ensure that we will remain engaged and inspired in our professional lives.

Questions to consider:

* Which of your interests would you like to incorporate into your career?
* What classes have you enjoyed the most? What subjects interest you the most?
* If you had more free time, what would you do with it?
* What are your hobbies and personal interests?
* Out of all the jobs you have had, which have been the most fun? What made them fun?
* What have you liked about the extracurricular activities you participate in?

*Abilities*

Our abilities can give us an edge in the careers we choose to pursue. Choosing a career that showcases our abilities can be extremely rewarding and can give us the confidence we need to perform well. Good performance in a career can lead to increased satisfaction in the work that we do.

Questions to consider:

* What abilities do you have that you would want to use in your career?
* What do you consider to be your personal strengths?
* What have friends and family said you are good at?
* What do other people ask you for help with?
* What are your greatest accomplishments, and what skills did you use to achieve those things?
* What skill do you feel most proud of having?

*Values*

Our values are a set of standards that we live our lives by. We often think of our values as a guide to our personal lives, but we can also use them to discover what matters to us in our professional lives. By recognizing what we value in a career, we can understand what is important to us.

Questions to consider:

* What are non-negotiables in your career? What attributes must your career have?
* If you could have the “perfect” job, what would it look like?
* What principles or rules do you live your life by?
* What behaviors, tasks, and actions align with your values?

**Activity: Discover Your Values**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Connection | Achievement | Creativity | Knowledge |
| Belonging  Acceptance  Family  Friendship  Relationships  Teamwork  Loyalty  Understanding  Communication | Accomplishment  Growth  Performance  Mastery  Success  Productivity  Improvement | Variety  Spontaneity  Creation  Innovativeness  Individuality  Originality  Imagination  Authenticity  Uniqueness  Inspiration  Visionary | Curiosity  Wisdom  Learning  Cleverness  Inquisitiveness |

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Comfort and Stability | Flexibility | Discipline and Organization | Amusement and Experience |
| Peace of mind  Patience  Reliability  Convenience  Ease  Balance  Calmness  Security | Varity  Spontaneity  Adaptability  Inspiration  Open-mindedness | Motivation  Hard work  Order  Planning  Accountability  Determination  Perseverance | Travel  Adventure  Risk-taking  Excitement  Fun  Enjoyment  Enthusiasm |

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Integrity | Attitudes and Mindsets | Kindness | Generosity |
| Honesty  Sincerity  Fairness | Contentment  Optimism  Gratitude | Compassion  Understanding  Acceptance | Charity  Giving  Service  Hospitality  Making a difference |

Directions: Go through the list of values above and fill in the three columns with the values that are very important to you, important to you, and not important to you. After you do this, reflect on the values you wrote in the “Very Important to Me” column and think of ways that you can incorporate these values into making career decisions that are meaningful to you. Even though the second column of values are still important, it can be helpful to start with the “very important” category to understand what you value the most.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Very Important to Me | Important to Me | Not Important to Me |
|  |  |  |

**Section Summary**

* Finding purpose in your career can lead to a more satisfying professional experience
* Discovering your interests, abilities, and values are the first step in choosing a meaningful career

**Cultivating Creativity**

**Stumbling Blocks**

*Fear*

Because of the personal nature of creating art, it is natural to worry about what others will think of your finished product. Having anxiety about the acceptance of your art is a sign that it is important to you. The key is recognizing that it is possible to acknowledge your fear without letting it get in the way of your ability to create.

*Perfectionism*

Perfectionism is the enemy of creating consistent and quality artwork. Perfectionism often leads to an emphasis on outcome driven goals that can slow the creative process down. While there is nothing wrong with spending lots of time on a project, constantly agonizing over perfecting every step of the process is a quick way to ensure that you will never finish what you start.

*Comparison*

Comparing your work to others can lead to doubts about whether your work is original or creative enough. Just because your idea has already been done before doesn’t mean that it is not worth doing. Instead of focusing on what others are doing with their art, ask yourself what you can contribute that brings a different perspective to what already has been done.

*Attaching your art to your self-worth*

It is easy to view our artwork as meaningful achievements and contributions to society. However, it is important to not let these accomplishments, or the lack thereof affect how we perceive ourselves. When we associate the amount of success we have had as artists with our personal self-worth, it makes us feel that there is something inherently wrong with us when we are unable to deliver the expectations that we have set for ourselves. The reality is that all artists experience setbacks and challenges. Instead of viewing them as a personal fault, view them as something that is a normal part of being an artist.

*Reactivity*

There is a common misconception that artists must wait for inspiration in order to create meaningful work. However, this concept of waiting to be inspired to create is likely to lead to periods where you aren’t creating any art at all. When this happens, it is hard to get back on track. Instead of being reactive and waiting for moments when you feel inspired to create, try to incorporate a few consistent blocks of time into your routine that allow you to work on your art, even if you don’t feel particularly inspired to be creative.

*Outcome Orientation*

Focusing too much on the products of our creative endeavors can create pressure on the creative process itself. Even though artists are expected to create finished products, the pressure to finish a project can stifle creative thinking and the desire to work on the project in the first place. Switching from a focus on the end product to a focus on the process itself can prevent overwhelm and burnout caused by thinking too much about all the tasks that need to be accomplished. Focusing on the process allows for concentration on the task at hand and can make the project seem more manageable.

Questions to consider:

* What creativity blocks do you notice yourself experiencing the most?
* What changes can you make to your environment or routines in the next week or month to remove these creative blocks?

**Preventing Burnout**

Burnout is common among artists, but it can be avoided. By becoming aware of the draining activities and responsibilities that are a part of your daily life, you can work to minimize them and add things into your routine that help you recharge.

Questions to consider:

* What are things that drain you? What are things that give you energy?
* In your ideal life where does you time and energy go?
* What are things in your life that you would like to be doing less of? What are things that you would like to be doing more of?
* Can you outsource any of the responsibilities that drain you?

**Creating Consistency**

As artists, it is important that we have routines in place so that we can consistently create. Routines help us stay on track with our goals and make tangible progress.

Questions to consider:

* What time of the day are you most productive?
* What about your environment can you change to make it more conducive for working?
* What daily habits can you implement to make it easier to get to work?

**Activity: Most Creative Self**

Part 1: Write down phrases or words that describe your current behaviors, thoughts, feelings that surround your artistic career and creative process.

|  |
| --- |
| Current Me |

Part 2: Write down words or phrases that describe your aspirations surrounding your artistic career and creative process. Visualize what you want your life to look like in the next 5-10 years. What will your ideal artistic practice look like? What will you be doing with your art?

|  |
| --- |
| Future Me |

Part 3: After you have completed both the current and future you brainstorming, what steps can you take to achieve your “future you”? What should you be working on? What goals should you be striving for?

**Section Summary**

* There are six common blocks to creativity
  + Fear
  + Perfectionism
  + Comparison
  + Attaching your art to your self-worth
  + Reactivity
  + Outcome orientation
* Preventing burnout and creating consistency can lead to a more fulfilling creative practice

**Arts Entrepreneurship**

**Innovation**

*Creating a Business Plan*

A business plan is a plan for how your business is going to work, and it includes the steps you will take to be successful. If you plan on turning your freelance work in a business, then a business plan is essential. Business plans are commonly used to start a new business and apply for business loans, but they are also used to create a strategic plan for a business. This includes goal setting, sales targets, and the potential for new investments or loans.

Key elements:

* Executive summary: A summary with the key highlights from your plan
* Company description: A brief overview of your business’s goals and purpose
* Market analysis: This involves doing research on your target market. Who do you want to sell your product to? Who will want to buy it? This section also addresses the possible competition that your business may have, as well as market growth and market trends.
* Service or product: Explain the problem that your product/service is trying to solve. What is the purpose of your product? This is a good place to include any intellectual property that you may have.
* Marketing and Sales: Include the strategies you will use to sell your product/service to your target market. Other information to cover in this section is how you will price your product/service and how you will promote you product/service.
* Financial Plan: Typically includes sales forecasts, profit and loss statements, cash flow statements, and balance sheets

*Design Thinking*

Design thinking, also known as applied ethnography or user experience research, is a process of understanding the user (or the customer/client), challenging assumptions, and redefining a problem to find new and innovative solutions and methods of doing things. The goal of design thinking is to develop a clear understanding of the customer’s habits and behaviors, as well their reasons for using a particular product or service. This human-centered approach helps organizations, companies, and even individuals create better services that meet the needs of their customers. It also helps to identity existing gaps and unmet needs in current services.

Phases of the design thinking process:

1. Empathize: This is the first step in understanding the customer. There are many ways to do this, including the creation of empathy maps and design personas.
2. Define: The problem or need that you customer has
3. Ideate: Challenge assumptions and brainstorm ideas to create innovation solutions
4. Prototype: Start to create the solutions that you brainstormed
5. Test: This is where you test the solutions that you came up with

**Public Art**

*Art in the City*

Creative Placemaking: The National Endowment for the Arts defines creative placemaking as the formation of partnerships between public, private, nonprofit, and community sectors to shape the physical and social character of neighborhoods, cities, and regions with art and cultural activities. The goal of creative placemaking is to improve the quality of life for community members by focusing on the existing characteristics of a place that make it unique and special.

Arts Economic Development: The arts drive economic development in neighborhoods, cities, and regions through the local recirculation of resident income, repurposing of vacant buildings, expansion of the ranks of entrepreneurs and artists, creation of jobs in construction, local business, cultural activity, training of the next generation of cultural workers, and the retention of non-arts related businesses and skills.

*Cultural Policy*

Cultural policy is created through cultural planning. Cultural planning involves a formal process of assessing the current culture of a community in order to create a plan to meet the community’s vision. This is done through assessing the existing cultural resources in a community to discover its cultural needs. Cultural plans are usually created by local government departments with collaboration from important stakeholders and feedback from community members. Most cultural plans focus on the needs of artists and cultural organizations, but cultural planning is also used to address broader community issues.

*Social Change and Civic Engagement*

Tactical Urbanism and Pop-ups: A form of temporary public art that involves low cost changes to the built environment to improve neighborhoods and city gathering spaces. Even though the products of pop-up art are temporary, the goal is to inspire long term change in public space improvement.

Examples: parklets, temporary public art installations

**Marketing**

Steps for creating an effective marketing strategy:

1. Conduct market research: This is how you will begin to understand your customer’s thinking and buying patterns. It also helps to monitor how others in your industry are interacting with their consumers.
2. Profile your target markets: Learn how your target audience interacts with the services you provide. Why do they use your service or buy your products?
3. Identify your unique selling proposition: What makes your service/product unique?
4. Develop your brand: Your brand is more than a logo. It should encompass who you are and why you are doing the work you are doing.
5. Choose your marketing avenues: Consider what media channels your target audience uses.
6. Set your goals and budget: Set benchmarks for your marketing plan. How will you measure if your marketing is successful?
7. Nurture loyal customers: Your marketing strategy should first address the customers you already have. How will you continue to provide services/products that address your customer’s needs?

**Finance and Fundraising**

*Budgeting*

Whether you are a freelancer or looking to start your own commercial arts entity or arts nonprofit, budgeting is essential to managing your finances.

Common types:

* Zero-based Budget: Just like how it sounds, this type of budgeting involves starting from scratch. It is great to use when there is a need to cut back on expenses.
* Incremental Budget: Involves taking the previous year’s budget and adding or subtracting a percentage to get the current year’s budget. This method of budgeting is the easiest, but it can lead to inefficiencies in your budget.

*Financial Statements*

* Income statement
* Balance sheet
* Statement of cash flows

*Commercial Finance*

Short-term commercial finance:

* Trade credit
* Business credit cards

Medium-term commercial finance:

* Crowdfunding
* Bridging finance business loans

Long-term commercial finance:

* Asset based lending
* Invoice factoring
* Invoice discounting
* Overdrafts
* Commercial mortgages

*Nonprofit Finance*

* Donor support: this is a process that involves multiple steps
  + Identification and research: Who is most likely to donate?
  + Cultivation: Build relationships with potential donors
  + Solicit: Make the ask for money
  + Stewardship: Thank and maintain a relationship with the donor
* Commercial sponsorship
* Fundraisers/events
* Grant writing
* Crowdfunding

**Section Summary**

* Steps to creating a good business plan
  + Executive summary
  + Market analysis
  + Service or product
  + Marketing and sales
  + Financial plan
* Phases of the design thinking process
  + Empathize
  + Define
  + Ideate
  + Prototype
  + Test
* Public art provides many ways for artists to get engaged in their communities and advocate for social change. Ways that public art appears in a community:
  + Creative placemaking
  + Cultural policy
  + Pop-ups and tactical urbanism
* Steps to effective marketing
  + Conduct market research
  + Profile your target markets
  + Identify your unique selling proposition
  + Develop your brand
  + Choose your marketing avenues
  + Set your goals and budget
  + Nurture loyal customers
* Commercial and nonprofit arts organizations have different methods of acquiring funds. Here are the main differences:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Commercial Arts** | **Both** | **Nonprofit Arts** |
| * Exist to make a profit * Profits are created through the selling of a service or product | * Use balance sheets, income statements, and cash flow statements | * Mission driven * Rely on funds from outside sources (donors, grants, etc.) |

**Career Planning**

**Step 1: Discovering Your Identity**

We started this step in the Meaningful Work section of this workbook. Discovering your interests, abilities, and values is the first step in planning for your career. These aspects of your identity provide a starting point to explore possible career options.

**Step 2: Discover Your Options**

There are many resources available to explore different types of careers and job market information that meet the criteria you established in step 1.

*Web Resources*

* Career Information Databases: These databases provide information about different career occupations. They are a great place learn specific information about a career title, including job projection statistics, salaries, and more.
  + [Onet](https://www.onetonline.org/)
  + [Career OneStop](https://www.careeronestop.org/)
  + [The Occupational Outlook Handbook](https://www.bls.gov/ooh/)
* [Idaho Career Information Systems](https://portal.idcis.intocareers.org/): Great if you want to work in Idaho.
* [What Can I Do With This Major?](https://www.boisestate.edu/career/what-can-i-do-with-this-major/): Explore classes and academic programs that help prepare you for the careers that you are interested in.
* [Vault](https://www.vault.com/): Provides industry specific information and employer profiles

*Networking*

After doing online research about your career options, it is important to make connections with those who work in your industry and hold specific job positions that you are interested in.

* Informational interviews: Get real perspectives from professionals and learn about employment opportunities within specific organizations and communities
* Networking events: Find others who are working on similar projects. Networking events can be a great way to start a collaboration project.
* Professional organization websites: Becoming a member of a professional organization can help you network, learn professional skills, and find employment opportunities.

Questions to consider:

* What careers are available to me?
* What careers would I like to know more about? Who can I talk with to get this information?
* What connections do I want to have? What type of person/organization would I want to collaborate with and what would that project look like?

**Step 3: How Will You Get There?**

*Skills*

There are 8 skills that are determined by the National Association of Colleges and Employers that are necessary to be ready for a career. They also apply to self-employed individuals.

* Critical Thinking/Problem Solving
* Oral/Written Communications
* Teamwork/Collaboration
* Digital Technology
* Leadership
* Professionalism/Work Ethic
* Career Management
* Global/Intercultural Fluency

*Experiences*

Employers expect new hires to have experiences in addition to academic and professional skills. Even if you are planning on becoming self-employed, it is still important to have experiences that you can show to clients, stakeholders, or other artists in future collaborations.

There are several ways to gain experience:

* Internships
* Service learning
* Volunteering
* Student extracurriculars
* Class projects

*Practicality vs Passion*

An ideal career should have elements of practicality and passion. Creative careers are often based heavily on passion, but the most successful creative careers also include elements of practicality. Including elements of practicality do not make you less creative. In fact, it can help you think of new ways to apply your artistic skills and interests to different professional settings. This makes you more adaptable to different opportunities that come your way.

Ways to incorporate practicality:

* Diversify your skill set
* Research the job market for different careers in the creative industry
* Be willing to compromise and adapt to the changes in your industry
* Identify skills that are transferable to multiple jobs

Questions to consider:

* What classes and experiences will provide you with the necessary skills?
* What are employer expectations in your field? If you plan to be self-employed, what expectations do you plan to set for yourself?

**Activity: Career Plan**

Part 1: Fill out the chart with skills and experiences that you have, in addition to skills and experiences that you would like to have in order to prepare you for your career.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Skills** | **Experiences** |
| **What I have** |  |  |
| **What I need** |  |  |

Part 2: Now, think about how and when you are going to acquire the skills and experiences that you wrote in the what you need boxes. Create a plan with specific dates that you will achieve these goals.

**Section Summary**

* Discovering your career options will make you more knowledgeable about the careers that you will be successful in
* Having the right skills and experiences are essential for a successful career
* Balance your career path with passion and practicality

**Resource List**

[Art Prof](https://artprof.org/professional-development/): An all-purpose guide to artist professional development. Includes information on studio practices, handling creativity blocks, teaching art, art wellness, and much more.

[Arts Marketing](https://www.americansforthearts.org/by-program/services-and-training/training-professional-development/arts-marketing): An in-depth resource with specific guidance and tools for arts marketing.

[Boise State Career Services](https://www.boisestate.edu/career/): A one stop shop for all of your career needs.

[City of Boise Arts History Department](https://www.boiseartsandhistory.org/opportunities/calls-opportunities/): Great for grant funding opportunities and general resources for artists.

[Design Thinking Personas](https://www.interaction-design.org/literature/article/personas-why-and-how-you-should-use-them): Learn how to empathize with your audience through the design concept of a persona. Personas are a great way to familiarize yourself with the needs of your clients/audience.

[Design Thinking Empathy Maps](https://www.uxpin.com/studio/blog/the-practical-guide-to-empathy-maps-creating-a-10-minute-persona/): Empathy maps provide a great baseline for understanding how your art impacts your audience how it makes them feel. This guide will go through a step by step process of creating an empathy map.

[Entrepreneurship](https://sites.psu.edu/entrepreneurshiplaw/2019/03/12/art-repreneurs-the-business-side-of-selling-art/): A guide to different types of artistic business ventures.

[Fine Art Careers](https://www.thebalancecareers.com/fine-art-careers-4161777): A job search engine specifically designed for artists with access to career development resources and career path exploration activities.

[Springboard for the Arts](https://springboardforthearts.org/toolkits/professional-development/): An easy platform to discover grant funding, artist residencies, and other job opportunities.

[Write Your Business Plan](https://www.sba.gov/business-guide/plan-your-business/write-your-business-plan): This guide provides a through step by step process for writing a compelling business plan.