

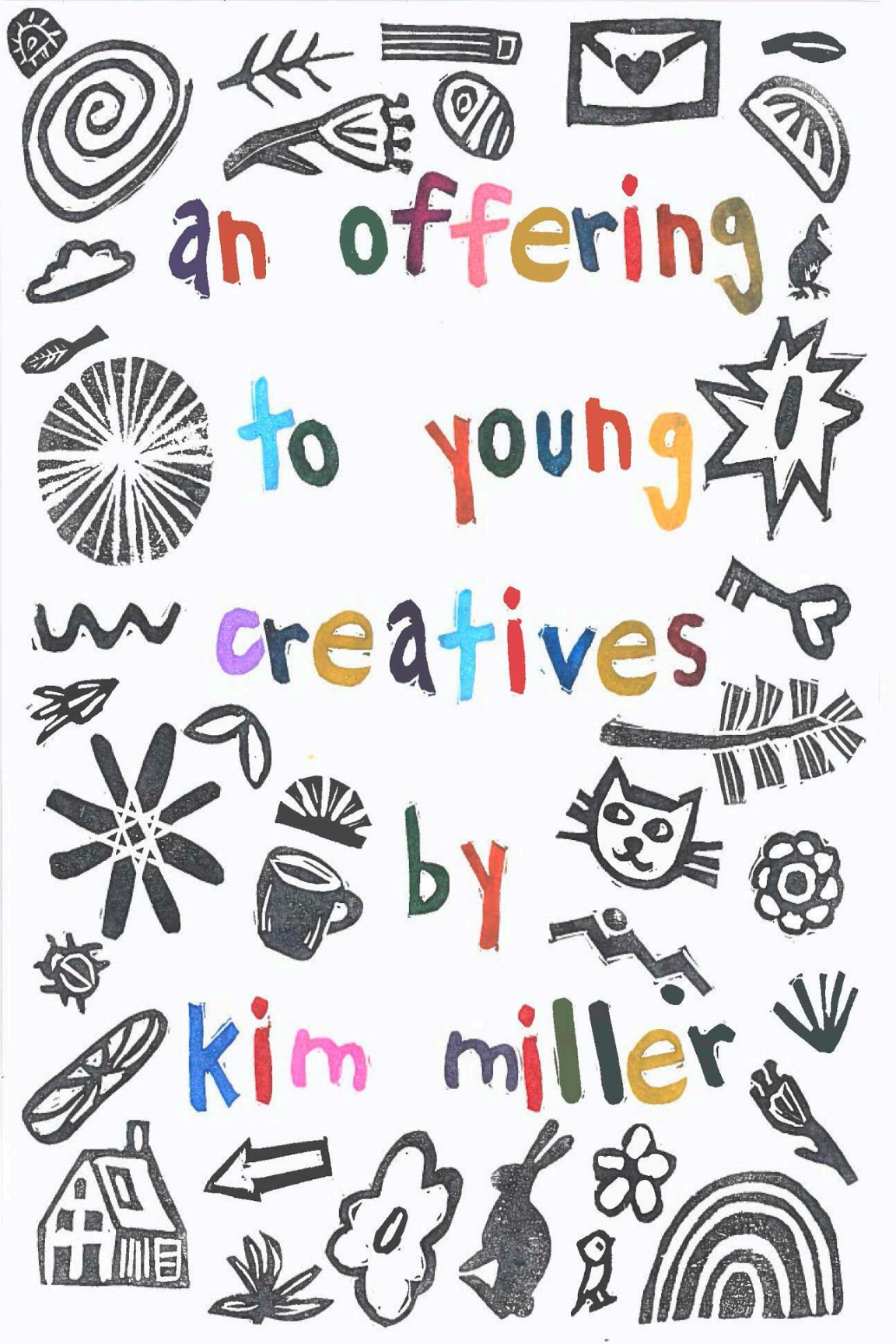
an offering

to young

creatives

by

kim miller





KIM MILLER

An Offering to Young Creatives

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*First edition*

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# Preface

I wrote this book for my younger self and all of the people I met along the way who were trying to figure out who they were creatively while also dealing with the very real administrative framework of being a human person.

It's hard when you want to write a play, install a large scale artwork, travel with a band or design something new when you're also trying to figure out for the first time how to pay your rent, how to interact with all these fun and cool new professional connections, how to get your cavity filled, and still be true to yourself.

This book is meant for folks who are between 17-30 (or between 17-30 at heart) to offer reflections and advice during what can be a very slippery life chapter.

Feel free to skip around - you don't have to read this in order if you don't want to! If one chapter doesn't resonate with you, move on.

My hope is that there will be something in here that you might need and you'll feel less alone.

xoxox,

Kim



## **A NOTE ABOUT THE ARTWORK IN THIS BOOK**

All the shapes, images, and icons that you see in this book are hand carved stamps made by me - even the letters! The watercolor lines you see are also by me. I wanted to include a few pictures of the process along the way for you as well.

When you get to Chapter VIII (*Non Monetary Creative Practice*) you'll see why I wanted to do this. Enjoy!

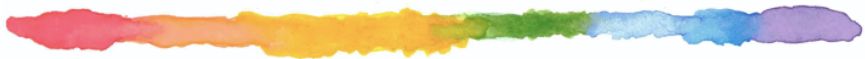
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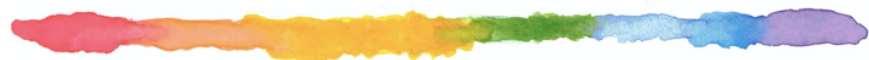
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# Acknowledgments

I could not have made this book without the help and generosity of so many people.

Thank you to the folks who were willing to let me interview them for this project. Hearing from each of you was inspiring and reminded me of how much I look up to the people I have known throughout my career.

Thank you to my family. To my partner, my daughter, my parents, my in-laws, my siblings and my extended family. Your encouragement, humor, childcare, patience and kindness made this possible.

Thank you to my friends. Thank you for asking me how the book was coming along these past few years - and thank you for not asking when I looked like a deer in headlights. You make me better daily, each of you.

Thank you to my colleagues. To the folks I work with currently, the folks I've freelanced alongside, the folks I've traveled with, the people I've made art and theatre with over the years - thank you.

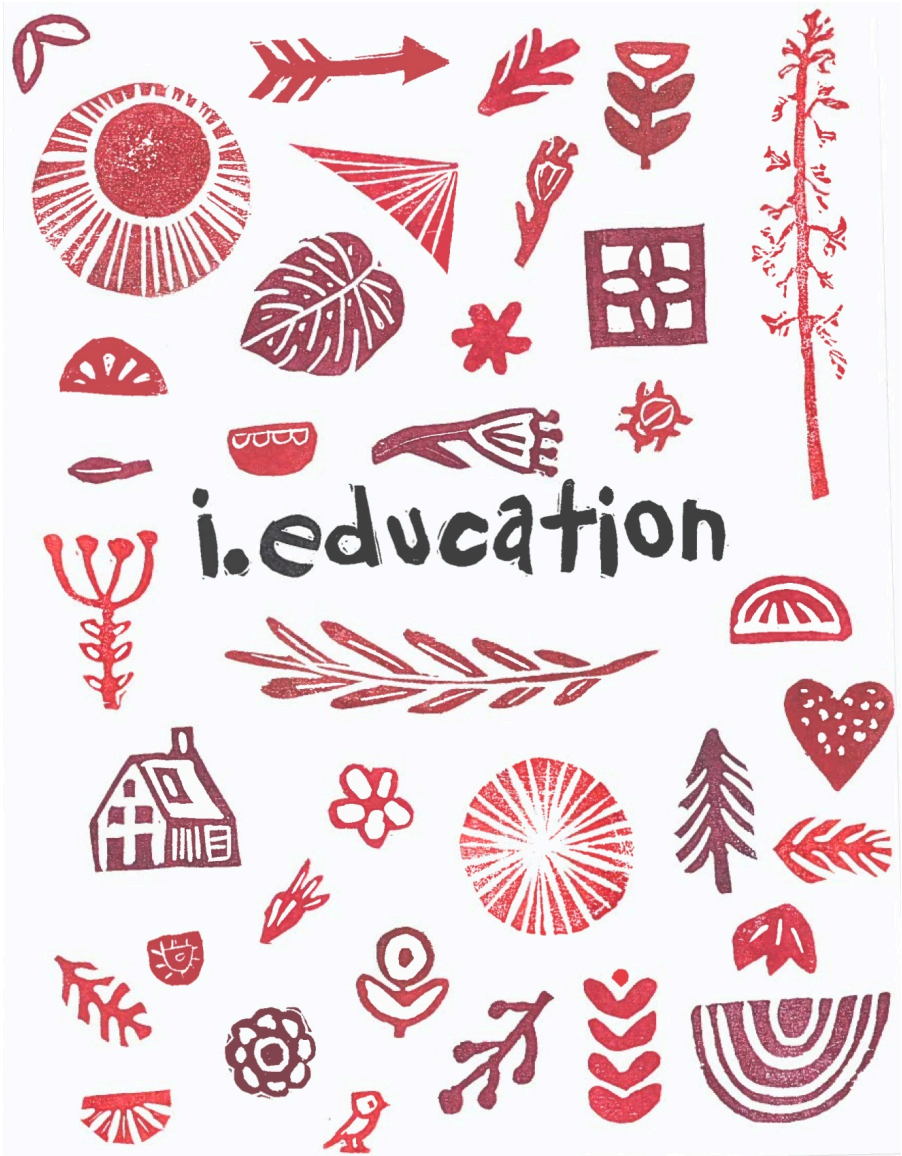
Thank you to the students I've had the honor of serving. Your open hearts and minds keep me hopeful for the future of the arts.

Thank you to The Mindfulness Collaboratory at Pratt Institute. Without this program and the guidance of the leadership on this team I would not have gotten this project finished.

Thank you to Power & Light Press. The final push for this project was made possible by the space provided in their Golden Hour Residency. The town of Silver City gave me the magic I needed to finally put all the bits and bites together to make this thing real.

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## I. EDUCATION



I work as an academic advisor for creative students. I spend most of my days talking with people like you - young and smart - but maybe struggling to find their path at a University. Many question *why* they've decided to pursue and

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pay for a degree in the arts given the financial cost of a degree.

A degree can allow you time to learn about yourself, to develop your strengths, and to acknowledge your weaknesses without an employer recording your mistakes in an annual evaluation. A degree creates entry points to positions that you may not have known existed, much less known that you'd be interested in.

And the truth is some careers can have an expiration date. I'm not saying this in some shitty ageist way – I believe there is work for creatives of all ages and disciplines – but I'm saying this in a very real health related way. You may have no problem working nights for the first 10 or 15 years of your career – but what if you throw out your back? Or find out that you have a degenerative disease? Become a parent? Fall in love with someone who works early mornings? Or just realize that you don't find pleasure in your chosen creative path anymore and want to try something else? Having a degree opens those pathways for you.

To be clear – your degree does not even have to be in something like business or engineering unless you like those things – great! A degree can be in just about anything. A degree shows that you can finish what you started despite the setbacks many people experience during school. If you decide not to pursue a degree – whatever the reason – that's okay too. This book is still going to offer a lot of useful advice to you. However, if you have decided to pursue a degree in a creative field I want to offer a few practical tips on choosing a school and succeeding while you're there.

The long term effects of taking out loans can be serious and have lasting impact, that's why I want you to feel confident that you'll find a school that fits the creative growth you want to experience over the next 4-6 years of courses. Sometimes students think that the 'right' college is the 'best' college. I could not disagree more! An Ivy League school may look great on paper (and of course it's an honor to be accepted) but some of the most important reasons

for choosing which school to attend have to do with what *you* want to get out of your college experience.

Just because it's 'the best school' does not mean it's the best school for YOU.

Things to consider when you are choosing a school (*no, you don't need to answer all of these! But they're to get you thinking*):

- Where will you live?
- On campus?
- If near your home - will you live with your folks?
- Will you have roommates?
- What transport will you have access to?
- Is there public transit?
- Can you walk to class?
- Will you need a car?
- What scholarships or financial aid are offered?
- If you attend in state, would more aid be offered?
- If you attend out of state how will you pay the difference?
- Do you need to keep your grades above a certain GPA to maintain the scholarship?
- What is the professor to student ratio?
- Are there only 5-6 tenured professors in the program but hundreds of majors?
- Or is it a small program with many full time professors and under 100 majors in your area of study?
- Who are the successful alumni from the program?
- How does the program define success?
- Are the alumni involved with the program still?
- How flexible is the program if you want to change your course of study?
- What if you get to campus and fall in love with a different major or program - how hard is it to change courses once you are at this school?
- Are there other people like you there?

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- Would you feel safe on this campus?
- Would you feel part of a community on this campus?
- Are there other people different from you there?
- Will there be people who can challenge you to think differently at this school?
- Or is everyone who is there similar to you?
- Do you want to live in a big city or would you rather have a close knit community on a smaller campus?
- Do you want to be near nature?
- Or are you more inspired by a metropolitan area?
- Do you want to be able to focus on getting good grades and learning your craft, or do you want to be able to explore a larger cultural community?
- Do you want to be at a big school with lots of different kinds of plans of study - or would you rather be somewhere smaller that allows you to get to know everyone in your program?
- And finally....can you afford it?

Before I even touch this last question let me say for the record it's disgraceful that our country under funds education and in an ideal world everyone who wants to pursue higher ed *would* have access to it.

At 17 when I chose to attend a small out of state private college instead of a local state college and take out subsidized as well as unsubsidized private loans - that choice has impacted my finances to this day. I didn't understand that I would have to start paying back the loans a few months after I graduated from college – and that my loans had been accruing interest the whole time I'd been in school. It was a shock to me when I looked at the balance and I owed MORE than what I'd initially taken out as a loan. At the time I was just so excited that an exclusive theatre program wanted me at their school.

*Me! A weird kid from a small town in Nevada who had never seen a Broadway show! Accepted into an elitist theatrical program!?*

My teenage self did not understand that taking out large loans would mean that I could not accept low paying artistic opportunities after I graduated. All I could think about when I read the acceptance letter my senior year was how *special* it was that this program had accepted me.

Looking back I wish I'd considered something more affordable. I'm not saying don't go into *any* debt. But consider how much money you will realistically be making after school and how much your cost of living will be.

*Quick Example:* Let's say you want to move to NYC after you graduate from wherever you're considering going to school. And let's say you were like me – you weren't able to call parents for money to cover bills.

Your monthly cost of living may look something like this (and this is a lower end budget):

- Rent (Your portion – which will likely be a shared roommate situation): \$1000
- MTA Pass (to ride the subway to work): \$127
- Cell Phone: \$120
- Internet (Your portion – split with roommates): \$50
- Health Insurance (You may or may not have this provided by a job): \$250
- Food: \$400

Before you even get to your student loans – you need to come up with at least \$1,947 a month. And then: Student Loans: \$200–\$600

Depending on how much you owe, your monthly payment can vary dramatically. I've met people whose loans are as little as \$150 a month all the way up to folks paying over \$1,000 a month back for student loans.

I promise I'm not sharing this exercise to make you feel discouraged. I'm sharing this to empower you to make good decisions about where you go to

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school, because it can affect what creative opportunities you can take later down the line.

*Budget Examples:* Let's take a look at the average take home pay for a few professions early in their career - before taxes and/or union dues:

- Theatre Actor - \$365/week ([Guest Artist Tier I, AEA, 2021-2023 rates](#))
- Dancer - \$751.20/week ([BLS, 2021](#))
- Graphic Designer - \$50,710 per year or \$975/week ([BLS, 2021](#))
- Landscape Architect - \$67,950 per year or \$1306/week ([BLS, 2021](#))
- Prop Designer - \$45,638 per year or \$877/week ([Ziprecruiter, 2022](#))
- Dramaturg - \$53,997 per year or \$1038/week ([Salary.com, 2023](#))
- Broadcast, Sound, and/or Video Technician - \$48,790 per year or \$938/week ([BLS, 2021](#))
- Museum Archivist - \$50,120 per year or \$963/week ([BLS, 2021](#))

Once you've applied to your school(s) run the numbers. Colleges are *REQUIRED* to put a tuition calculator on their website.

- How much is tuition, room and board?
- How much financial aid are you receiving?
- How much scholarship money are you getting?
- And how much is left to cover?

Let's say:

- Tuition/Room/Board at your chosen school out of state is \$25,000 each year.
- Your financial aid is \$10,000 a year and your program is giving you a \$7500 scholarship each year.
- That sounds like a lot! \$17,500 free money! HELL YAY!

But that's still \$7500 a year you need to come up with (or \$30,000 over 4

years) – and that doesn't cover incidentals that you may need during school like clothing, personal care items, additional transportation if needed, or plane tickets home.

That \$30,000 will also accrue interest when you are in school. So when you graduate you'll actually have closer to \$40,000 depending on your interest rates.

Really consider if it's worth it. And you may come to the conclusion I came to when I went to school – that it was worth it! But just know that come the fall after your spring graduation you'll need to be pulling in enough money to cover at least \$2,500 of monthly expenses.

In this example scenario it would mean you'd need to be taking home about \$600 a week – and *actually* you'd need to be making more than that because... ..taxes. Which means you'd need to be making at least \$45,000 a year.

Take a deep breath – I can hear you panicking. I know. *I know*. **I KNOW**. It's overwhelming. Reading this you may be thinking, “What is the point?! The system is rigged! I will never be able to work professionally in my creative field of choice...”

However – what if we tried this option:

Let's say instead of going out of state you decide to attend an in-state college. In-state tuition is \$10,000 a year and you can live with a family member. You receive \$6,000 annually in financial aid each year. That means you have \$4,000 to cover each year – either with a student loan or a part time job. At the end of your time that's \$16,000 (plus some interest).

That number might still be daunting – but it's much more manageable. You could realistically pay that off in 5 years if you pay a little under \$300 a month. And if you work during summers while living with a family member rent free

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(if this is a privilege you have access to) you can save up for a move to another city or for a year of savings to supplement your income while you take that low paying printmaking or costuming apprenticeship.

I bring this up because I want you to start thinking about finances as part of your creative journey. Having comfort talking about and thinking about your budget is going to give you freedom to do all of the things you really want to do!



- **Your Name:** *Jack Tamburri*
- **Your Pronouns:** *he/him*
- **How do you identify yourself professionally (ie. your job title):** *Professor and theatre director*
- **How do you identify yourself creatively (if that's different than your professional title):** *Theatremaker, writer, and educator*

**Where did you graduate from and with what/which degree(s)?**

University of Chicago with AB (their pretentious way of saying BA) in English Language & Literature; Yale School of Drama with MFA in Directing

**What do you remember most about how you chose your college(s) or university(ies)?**

Elite status was important to me at both times, would be less so now. At U of C, I remember visiting and feeling kinship with the intellectual and social

culture of the students in the dorm. At Yale, I had no choice. I had applied 2 places and the other one rejected me in the first round. But had I a choice I still would have chosen Yale because: financially it was a decent deal compared to others (nowadays it's a great deal), it had the most elite reputation of any training program in my field, and I adored the professors I met through the interview process.

**What, if anything, do you wish you had known when you were applying for schools?**

How little institutional status matters after graduation unless you are graduating from one of three very specific places.

**How did you pay for school(s)?**

My parents paid for my undergraduate education, which was costly. As soon as my sister and I had moved away for college, my parents moved to a low-cost-of-living city where my father found a high-paying job so they could pay for our education. They lived in a place they did not want to live, away from the community and lives they had built with their family, for 8 years. They were lucky to be able to do so and I am very fortunate that they chose to.

For graduate school I had a \$10,000 loan and the rest was grants and work-study. That was very doable.

**How did you handle debt following school, if applicable?**

I was able to defer my loan repayment until I had a full-time job, which was six years after I graduated. During that year, the loan freeze hit, so I lucked out. I paid my loan in full in under two years, without really noticing the cost.

**Are there any things your school program or school community was lacking that you wish you'd thought about before going?**

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My undergraduate institution introduced me to every kind of rich person in the world. There were a few other people there, too.

My graduate school community consisted of achievement-oriented folks who were not genuinely interested in exploration or experimentation because they were unwilling to risk failure. I don't know that knowing this in advance would have changed my decision to go to Yale, but I would have shown up with a different energy if I'd expected this. The program at Yale is entirely oriented around the American non-profit regional theater's new-play-development model of production and contains almost no curriculum in experimental theater or devising. Again, I don't know that understanding that as such would have changed my decision, but I should have thought about it.

**How did you manage your time during school? And would you do it differently if you went back?**

As a highly verbal good-student-type in high school, I entered college accustomed to completing work breezily and bullshitting a lot. I had no time management skills to speak of and was incapable of committing myself to difficult tasks that did not immediately interest me. I wasted a LOT of time in college on early facebook, Snood, naps, and bar nights. Now I teach college and it breaks my heart when the students I teach do not recognize the opportunity they have to commit their time to intensive exploration of topics and skills that they love. I wish I had internalized how brief my time in college would be, and how different everything afterward would feel, so that I would have felt compelled to make the most of every second.

In graduate school I spent a lot of time managing anxiety and depression – in part as a result of having moved back into proximity to a difficult family situation and in part because I was not succeeding artistically or socially in my new community. Had I the opportunity to do it again, I would care a lot less about “succeeding” and a lot more about learning, and about finding the like-minded artists with whom to build lasting collaborative relationships.

**What are some things you feel really good about from your time at school?**

The work I did see through in college changed how I read, write, and think, all for the better. I made deep friendships that last to this day. My eyes were opened to aspects of the world and of human society that I had no idea about and would never have seen if I hadn't been in that place at that time.

In graduate school I learned what I was there to learn: fundamental practical rehearsal methodology and the basics of actor process. I had had no formal training before graduate school in the practice of directing a play, I was just winging it. I needed that training in order to move forward, and the training I got was excellent.



*Write and reflect on the below.*

**If you're applying to colleges or universities right now - what is your BIGGEST factor that will determine where you go?**

**How much will your first, second, and third choice schools cost each year? Don't forget to include housing, meal plans, student fees, books, and if you're moving out of state - incidentals like travel home.**

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**What are the ways you are going to pay for your education?**

**Is it important for you to have a small close knit program or a large campus with access to lots of different types of opportunities?**

**Will you need a car on campus or is the campus friendly to walking/biking/public transit?**

**Are there people who you would feel comfortable around on this campus? I.e. would you be able to find your folks here and a sense of belonging?**



If you feel safe doing so - I'd recommend talking through some of these questions and answers with a parent, teacher, or adult in your life that you feel supported by and who understands what it's like to do something new

and scary. If they've gone to college in the US - that's great. If not - that's okay too. It should just be someone you know who is a little older than you and who is kind, thoughtful, asks good questions, and who encourages you to try new things.

Here are a few questions for you to think about to *after* you talk through the above with your other person(s):

- Did the person you share this with have any questions that surprised you
- Was there anything that made you nervous as you were saying it out loud?
- Did this person ask anything that you had not yet thought about?
- Was there anything that made you feel empowered and excited as you shared it?

I think it's good for you to reflect on the questions above because sometimes we learn about ourselves when we share information with other people in our lives. By talking through your plans with someone you trust you can find the parts that are going to work and the parts that you need to flush out the details on a little more. We're going to talk now with a working creative professional a little bit about their experience in choosing a college, paying for college, and looking back on college now that they've been working in artistic industries professionally for over a decade.



- **Your Name:** *Taylor Chase Bailey*
- **Your Pronouns:** *He, Him*
- **How you identify yourself professionally (ie. your job title):** *Producer*

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- **How you identify yourself creatively (if that's different than your professional title):** *Artist*

### **Where did you graduate from and with what degree?**

University of Evansville (Indiana) with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Theatre Performance, Graduated 2009. I also hold a certificate in Executive Arts and Culture Strategy from University of Pennsylvania and National Arts Strategies.

### **What do you remember most about how you chose your college or university?**

The theatre program at my high school had developed a legacy of sending students to the University of Evansville, department of theatre, for many years. Interestingly, this created a bit of an early bit of competition, as it became a sign of your talent in my high school if you were accepted into Evansville. And so, when I was accepted into the program at Evansville, I wasn't going to say no! I already knew so many people there, many of my friends who graduated ahead of me were already there.

I had seen plays produced by the university that had absolutely blown my teenage heart away. And I had been told I was good enough to join the fun. Being accepted was a form of acceptance by my peers, and of my ability.

I went to college to make theatre and to be with my friends and had little to no interest in academic pursuits and have very little memory of the world outside of the theatre department in my time there. Sometimes I regret this, and sometimes I don't.

### **What, if anything, do you wish you had known when you were applying for schools?**

Honestly, my entire focus was on Evansville - as mentioned above. I wonder what it would have been like had I not had one program looming so large. This

one dream school was so much the focus that I honestly, today, cannot recall what other programs I was accepted into. I'm also finding it a little hard to answer because...2023 Taylor, yeah - there's so much I could have known going into it. But are the things I think 2005 Taylor would have really listened to? I'm not so sure.

### **How did you pay for school?**

My father passed away a few months into my freshman year of high school, which significantly changed the financial element of this, so forgive the complexity. When I was still a senior in high school, the plan was to use the \$36,000 scholarship I had received from the University as well as some small scholarships I had won in my home state of Texas (none of them academic at all, my meager academic performance/interest began in high school.) After that, my father was going to pay a sum each month and the rest we would handle with a combination of loans - parent loan, federal loans, private loans.

After my father died, we did not receive any life insurance payout because my father died by suicide, and he was still within the two-year clause in his policy that denied coverage in the chance that you were feeling Willy Loman-esque. I suppose you could argue that...if you were planning to scam your life insurance by killing yourself...wouldn't you wait the remaining 6 months until the clause ran out? But I digress. He did have a good amount in his retirement fund, which was diverted through my grandmother to my sister and I. This paid for a chunk of school each semester, but not nearly enough.

My loans went all cattywampus because he died, so we had to do a lot of work moving the loans around and getting my mother on board my own loans. My mother had always felt like the university was too expensive, so the fact that she was now signing on board to help make it happen was a sign of a lot of love and tenderness for me, she never held it over me.

The only deal we made was that I wouldn't study abroad, both for financial

reasons and because she was afraid if I got a few thousand miles away from my problems I might not come back! I honestly don't think she was wrong there.

### **How did you handle debt following school?**

Oh, horribly of course. One thing a lot of folks don't know about me is that I have ADHD, and of the inattentive variety.

Which means that things that don't hold my interest have an exceptionally hard time breaking through. And this especially includes repetitive, domestic habits like routine hair cuts, medications, grooming, all forms of self care and yes, of course, paying bills. I would do great for many payments, and then it would completely leave my brain. Even notifications on my phone just went ignored. Then I would get it together and apply for forbearance backdated to when I just stopped paying them. And go through that cycle again.

Until eventually in 2017, as I was struggling with a terrible depressive season, it fell off my radar altogether and I managed to default on my loans. I worked extremely hard to get myself out of default - I had alarms and notifications and emails I scheduled to send. And I did manage to make the 15 on time payments I had to make to get out of default. And I did it all alone - because the spiral of dread and shame that surrounded it all made me feel too embarrassed to tell anyone.

I still didn't understand my ADHD at the time, and went with the same narrative I'd always told myself forever about my inability to see things through - that it was just laziness. That I was inherently lazy, or selfish or "too smart for my own good" or any of the other things I had heard my whole life.

I was so convinced that I was just deeply flawed and had brought it all upon myself. But today, of course, I see it all so much more clearly. I think back to all

of these things and think “why would I have \*wanted\* to fall into a financial mess?” “why would I have wanted to disappoint my teachers and make bad grades?” “why would I have wanted to not finish my medications and get healthier?”.

On top of all of this, nobody ever really talked to us about all of this. What this was going to be like. But then I think now...did they though? Weren't there some kinda seminars you could take? Wasn't I encouraged to sit down with someone from the financial aid department and talk through things? I had no interest.

I remember that when I went into the world I felt so totally hoodwinked, I felt so betrayed by the adults in my life who didn't warn me how hard it was going to actually be. I visited campus and found some current senior friends of mine and I sat down with them and I tried to tell them. I tried to explain how hard it was and how unprepared I felt and they all just...smiled and affirmed what I was saying with “Oh yeah, I know! It's gonna be rough out there!” with no real concern in their voices.

I think about that moment a lot because I thought, “oh - oh right. That was me too, huh? I just couldn't hear it.” I don't think that's a criticism of youth, perhaps more a criticism of how much we were all encouraged not to worry about the money part. I was told so young that I couldn't let money stand in my way. And I believed that whole-heartedly, that despite not having any wealth I should just charge ahead.

**Is there anything you wish you would have done differently during your time at school?**

My father's unexpected suicide really threw my entire college experience off course. It also colors my four years so thoroughly that I can't really separate my first four years of grief from my four years of college.

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If you had asked me this question three or four years ago, I think I would have said everything. That I would have done everything differently and I wished I could have had a normal college experience.

I wish that I could have gone through college without fighting through the most challenging years of my life. Maybe I would have made different choices, not partied quite so hard, not blown off quite so many classes. But then again... maybe I would have done all of those things had my father lived as well. But yeah, to do it all without the heavy weight of grief, that would be nice.

But right now in my life - I'm not living with so much regret. I'm glad that everything unfolded the way it did. I'm not glad for the awful losses, or the lowest moments. But the life I've lived around those things I wouldn't take back.

Yes, I can imagine the version where I and the people around me understood my ADHD better, that I could have been in treatment for that and had an easier time staying focused and committed to my General Education classes. And where my father didn't die and throw my whole world into a tailspin, making my college experience just the backdrop of a challenging time in my life. But I'm not sure that that person...turns out to be who I am today. If he's out there existing in a parallel universe I am jealous of any peace he has that I don't - but mostly I just wish him well and hope he enjoys it.

**Are there any things your school program or school community was lacking that you wish you'd thought about before going?**

Diversity. But honestly, I am not sure how I feel about the ethics of recruiting young people of color to come live in Southern Indiana in a place that largely hasn't grappled with it's own history in regards to race. Same goes for faculty members. Are there systems in place to actually support these humans? What about the relationships with local law enforcement? How do we shape the world we want to live in while also acknowledging the very real dangers of the

world we actually do live in?

Without a doubt I know I would have benefited greatly from a program where there was more diversity amongst the students, faculty as well as the art that we were producing. A more culturally expansive education would have better prepared me for making art in the real world.

**How did you manage your time during school? And would you do it differently if you went back?**

My knee jerk response was to say “oh, terribly!”. But then...I think about it and I think well, I guess I did get everything done one way or another despite doing a million different things in college. So maybe...I didn't do as badly as I thought I did?

Despite my poor academic performance, I think I did embody the “work hard, play hard” mentality that I know some folks see as unhealthy. And I agree, it certainly isn't sustainable once you're outside of a college setting. But every hour of my life was so full, and despite some of that being really hard shit and some of that being choices I cringe at today - I think I lived those years how I needed to? Maybe.

**What are some things you feel really good about from your time at school?**

You are catching me at such an interesting moment in my thinking about all of this, which is partially why it has taken me a while to finish this! I've been so deeply self-critical for so long, and held so much blame for anything I perceived as examples of my inability to stay with things, to keep focused on the things I think I was supposed to be focused on.

I'm trying to neutralize all of that and have more self-compassion these days. The understanding of my ADHD has really helped tremendously with all of that.

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I think I succeeded in college at all of the other things you get from school other than your academic achievements. I succeeded socially, I succeeded in learning to understand people, to have relationships with others, to create together. How to listen and how to encourage others. How to let people take care of me sometimes when I needed it.

Learning to still feel the deep empathy I had always felt with others, despite going through something far more challenging than most of my peers at that age. Grace. And security. And how to walk into a room and say my name with confidence.

I think I learned and honed so many of the soft skills that have become the most important tools in my belt as a producer, as an artist, as an adult human in this awful world. Maybe I had the college experience I needed to have? Is there another setting that would have afforded me so much safety in an extremely vulnerable time? I honestly can't imagine what it would be.

But I do find myself wondering what it would be like to go back to school today, to pursue coursework that I find genuinely intriguing and would want to read more about. I haven't decided if that's a real desire...or if it's just that same self-critical asshole in my head, glamorizing things that I think I should be good at but struggle with, trying to convince me that I should just (still...again...) try a little harder this time.



### **SUCCEEDING AT COLLEGE AND/OR UNIVERSITY**

- You're paying for your classes - attend them. Every class you miss is hundreds if not thousands of dollars you might as well throw out.
- Find somewhere that isn't your room to study. I know your room might

be cozy or pleasant – but you need to separate work and rest.

- Creative types are going to have the same kind of demands on their time as athletes – lots of rehearsals, studio time, design time, writing. You need to find a time management system that works for you. Experiment with paper planners, google calendar, asana, to do lists, bullet journaling – and any other time or calendar management software you can get your hands on for free. The biggest thing is it has to be something that you will use.
- Go to stuff. All kinds of stuff. Stuff you think you’ll like – stuff you’ve never been to before – go to stuff alone and go with friends. This is how you’ll start to learn about what your likes and dislikes are and meeting people who enjoy the same things as you!
- Use campus resources like the health center, mental health support, food halls, gyms, computer labs, tutoring services, career services, academic advising, etc. You’re already paying for these things with your student fees and it’s a total waste if you don’t use them at least once during your time at school.
- Don’t be afraid to change directions. Let’s say you went to school for acting but get there and realize you have a passion for graphic design. It’s okay if it adds an extra year on to your studies! You’ll regret it if you don’t do it now and you’re only getting older from here on out – don’t let worrying about what other people will think stop you from going a new direction.
- Support your peers. Show up for them – when they have a concert, play, performance, exhibition – show up for them and cheer them on. And invite them to your stuff too so that they can do the same for you!
- Go to your professors’ open office hours. This is FREE face to face time with someone who is a working professional in the field that you want to go into. Ask them how they got into this line of work. Ask them what they’d wished they’d know when they were younger. Ask them what they recommend to people trying to accomplish the goals you are working towards. Don’t be afraid – you are not bugging them! As long as you are going during the office hours they list in the syllabus that is time set aside to help students like you!

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- You're not a failure if it takes you longer than 4 years to graduate. Many many many MANY schools have 6 year graduation rates and if you're a student who is working part time (or full time) and are not able to get it finished in 4 years it doesn't mean that you're not committed or not going to succeed in the long run.
- Unless you're going to grad school, you probably do not need straight A's. No one has ever asked me what my grade was in my college "science with a lab" course. Ever. The one caveat is if you have scholarships you'll want to make sure you keep your grades up so you can keep them - and you'll also want to check your schools rules on probation (usually it's a 2.0 or higher), but seriously - don't sweat trying to get a 4.0. What matters is that you stay healthy, mentally balanced, and creatively inspired while making connections and learning about yourself.

And finally....

- Give yourself some grace. College is a time when many young creatives may be living away from home for the first time - or taking on more responsibilities with family - or working and trying to study. It's a big adjustment. As for help when you feel overwhelmed because the people who work at your school WANT to see you succeed!

As you get settled into school you'll find that each semester is going to be a little different. In high school you had teachers for an entire year - college moves more quickly and your first year will be over before you know it!

If you're picking up this book however because you're nearing the end of your time in school and trying to figure out what's next, don't worry, I've got you. You've got some different questions to start asking yourself maybe in the last year or two of your studies.



## exercises



Just when you start to get comfortable at college and know your way around and feel like you know what to expect - it'll be time to leave. Here are a few things I think are important for students to think about as they're getting ready to graduate.

Take a few minutes (I recommend the timer method again!) and write a few thoughts down on each question below. This is NOT about having every right answer - this is about giving yourself time to brainstorm.

Don't feel like you have to answer all of these questions perfectly either. These are questions designed to help you think through things you may not have yet considered and prepare you to develop the skill of working through big life decisions that have lots of moving parts. I want to also encourage you to come back to questions in this chapter. Sometimes our answers to questions can change - and sometimes our goals can even change!

*Write and reflect on the below.*

**Where do I want to live? What cities employ people who do what I do?**

**If applicable, what is my plan to start paying back my student loans?**

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**Who is my support system when I leave school? Is it friends, family, chosen family?**


**What resources do I have? This can be professional contacts, skills, friends, couches you can crash on...think outside the box!**

**If my family isn't financially able to help me when I strike out on my own - are there other things they can help support me with? (Maybe living with them for the summer after graduation to save up for a big move, use of a car, friends in an industry, etc)**

**If I am not close with my family - who can I lean on when times are hard? Mentors, other creative friends, etc.**

**If you're moving to a city you haven't lived in before - can you get a sense of how much it costs to live there? Will you need a car? Who will you live with? Are there lots of different types of opportunities or just one place that offers what you like to do? (Example some smaller cities only have one museum or one equity theatre)**

**Does the community I'm considering moving to have healthcare that I need? This is especially important for young creatives who may need gender affirming healthcare, queer healthcare, and/or folks with disabilities that need specialized support.**



Continue to talk to your trusted community members - friends, parents, aunts, uncles, teachers, school counselors. And after talking with them, sit and think about the questions in this chapter. Take time to work through your payment options. Work through what it would *really* look like to live/work/study at a particular school.

Work through the why behind you want to go to college - it should be more than just a piece of paper. I'm excited to see how these reflections, exercises and questions help you find the right path.



  **community perspectives**  

- **Your Name:** *Krystal Ramírez*
- **Your Pronouns:** She/Her
- **How do you identify yourself professionally (ie. your job title):** Educator
- **How do you identify yourself creatively (if that's different than your**

**professional title):** Artist

**So where did you graduate from and with which or what degrees?**

I got a B.F.A. with a concentration in photography from University of Nevada, Las Vegas and then I got a M.F.A. from Stanford.

**What do you remember most about, like how you chose your college or like how you chose what you were going to study?**

I literally chose the only one that I had available, which was UNLV because I planned on staying living at home. Or I didn't really choose? The thing is, I didn't really do any research. I just said, "Oh, I guess I'm going to UNLV now?!"

I remember thinking about wanting to go to UCLA and then looking up that it cost like \$20,000 - \$30,000 a year and just thinking, well, that's never going to happen, you know? And in Nevada we have the Millennium Scholarship, which provides \$10,000 for in-state tuition. And at the time that paid for all four years of school. So I just went to where it was gonna be free.

**How did that differ with how you chose your graduate program?**

I wanted a competitive college. I wanted somewhere where it was not necessarily prestigious. I wasn't looking for prestige, but I was looking for a free program. I was looking for a good name somewhere that was going to have an impact on my future...my future applications and my future opportunities and had a recognizable name.

**What if anything, do you wish you had known when you were applying for schools, either for undergraduate or graduate school?**

I wish I would have known more of the process of applying to schools in

undergrad because I might have gone somewhere else. I might have gone out of state because I could have looked for scholarships. You know, I could have looked for full rides, but I never once did. I didn't go to a high school that really prepped people for college because it was a vocational school. So it really prepped you for work after high school directly after high school. So there was not a lot of college prep. But also, I'm fine with the decision I made (for undergraduate).

And I don't think you have to go to the most prestigious undergrad school to make something happen for yourself. After going to Stanford and coming across all the undergrads that got into Stanford and they immediately have things going on right after graduating. There's so many more opportunities for them than I had graduating from undergrad. I mean, it took me three years to get into Stanford for graduate school. I guess I could have gotten in sooner, but that's just not the way it happened for me.

Also in both situations (apply for undergrad and graduate school), having writing skills are important. I did hire an editor so I had somebody who was helping me with my writing. Everything that I wasn't aware of enough to do in high school - I tried to do and at the graduate school level.

### **How did you pay for both of your degrees?**

For undergrad I was able to pay with the Millennium Scholarship. And then for grad school, whatever I wasn't able to pay from the fully funded tuition and the housing stipend - I did have to take out a small loan to pay for art supplies. Making art isn't cheap - especially not the art I like to make.

### **So how have you handled that debt following school? Like, are you paying it off slowly? Were you able to pay it off in a lump sum? How did that work?**

No, I still have the debt. You're able to defer for two years after you graduate, and right now I'm on an income-based repayment plan. And so my payment

is still zero because I make so little teaching. But it's accruing interest.

Thankfully, I only owe like \$15,000, which is the lowest that I was able, I was like, what is the smallest amount that I can take out just to pay for art supplies? And that was the smallest amount I could take out so that's what I took out, but it's slowly accruing interest. So it's just slowly climbing. I do have to figure out a payment plan eventually, even though I'm on an income repayment plan.

**What are some things you feel really good about from your time at school?**

The thing I feel the best about is all the relationships I've built. I think that the most important thing that I got both out of undergrad and grad school is the friends that I made for the rest of my life.



**Where You Go Is Not Who You'll Be** by Frank Bruni

*Over the last few decades, Americans have turned college admissions into a terrifying and occasionally devastating process, preceded by test prep, tutors, all sorts of stratagems, all kinds of rankings, and a conviction among too many young people that their futures will be determined and their worth established by which schools say yes and which say no. In *Where You Go is Not Who You'll Be*, Frank Bruni explains why this mindset is wrong, giving students and their parents a new perspective on this brutal, deeply flawed competition and a path out of the anxiety that it provokes.*

*Bruni, a bestselling author and a columnist for the New York Times, shows that*

*the Ivy League has no monopoly on corner offices, governors' mansions, or the most prestigious academic and scientific grants. Through statistics, surveys, and the stories of hugely successful people, he demonstrates that many kinds of colleges serve as ideal springboards. And he illuminates how to make the most of them. What matters in the end are students' efforts in and out of the classroom, not the name on their diploma.*

**College Match: A Blueprint for Choosing the Best School for You** by D. Steven R. Antonoff (Author) + Milan Glosic (Illustrator)

*Celebrating over 30 years in print, College Match is the leading guide for finding a “good fit” college. From Stress to Success! Used as a college counseling textbook in public and private high schools! By combining easy-to-use worksheets with loads of practical advice, College Match gives students control of the entire college admission process. With College Match, you will find the best school for you!*

**What LGBTQIA+ Students Should Know When Choosing a College** by Kat Castagnoli

- <https://insightintoacademia.com/choosing-a-college/>

*College is a big step—and for LGBTQIA+ students, it can come with added layers of complexity. These days, higher education isn't just about academics; it's also about navigating a political and campus climate that can affect your safety, sense of belonging, and access to resources.*

*Ironically, this is happening at a time when there are more queer students on campus than ever before. A 2020 Association of American Universities (AAU) Campus Climate Survey of over 180,000 students across U.S. universities found that nearly 1 in 5 identified as part of the LGBTQIA+ community. That's real progress in visibility—but feeling seen doesn't always mean feeling supported.*

**How to College: What to Know Before You Go (and When You're There)** by

## I. EDUCATION

Andrea Malkin Brenner + Lara Hope Schwartz

*The transition from high school—and home—to college can be stressful. Students and parents often arrive on campus unprepared for what college is really like. Academic standards and expectations are different from high school; families aren't present to serve as "scaffolding" for students; and first-years have to do what they call "adulting." Nothing in the college admissions process prepares students for these new realities.*

*As a result, first-year college students report higher stress, more mental health issues, and lower completion rates than in the past. In fact, up to one third of first-year college students will not return for their second year—and colleges are reporting an increase in underprepared first-year students. How to College is here to help. Professors Andrea Malkin Brenner and Lara Schwartz guide first-year students and their families through the transition process, during the summer after high school graduation and throughout the school year, preparing students to succeed and thrive as they transition and adapt to college.*



2

## II. SOCIAL CONNECTIONS



Throughout your career you will work with many types of creative people. Some will inspire you, respect you, and ultimately enrich your life. You're also going to work with people who you don't like, who are not thoughtful about your ideas, or who you just don't connect with.

Both types of folks will be your teachers. And, I can tell you from personal experience, the person who you like working with the *least* will pop up in your life over and over again on different projects and it will likely be out of your control when they do.

So, you're going to have to learn to communicate with and work alongside people who interact with the world differently from you. Unlike in high school or college - when you start working you'll have people of different ages, backgrounds, and experience levels that you'll be working alongside, and it's important to understand the varied types of relationships you'll have in your circle.

I have found it helpful to learn different words to describe these relationships. When I first began working professionally, I really only had the word 'friend' to describe people I knew.

Over the years some of the relationships I've come to appreciate are:

- **Colleagues or Coworkers:** These are people that you work with or alongside.
- **Classmates:** Sometimes in college this is called your 'cohort' but it's the people who you attend school with.
- **Acquaintance:** Someone you've met a few times, either formally or informally, but don't know a ton about and haven't shared many experiences with.
- **Friend:** Someone who you want to spend time with, consider close enough to ask for a favor, to share a secret with, to offer help towards and that you feel you can be yourself around - and they feel the same about you.
- **Collaborator:** More than a coworker or colleague this is someone you share creative DNA with who you trust. Sometimes folks have long time collaborators and sometimes you collaborate for a short time. Either way - it's someone who you feel mutual respect from and create something together.

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Maybe you're thinking, "Why are you talking about all these different kinds of people? Isn't it easier to just refer to everyone as my friend?!"

Sure, you *could* do that. But doing that can get you into trouble. Mistaking a colleague for a friend and dumping all kinds of personal information onto them can result in you losing a gig if they share with someone that you were unprofessional and didn't understand the boundaries of your professional relationship.

Treating a classmate unkindly because they're still figuring out who they are can come back to bite you later in your career when they end up managing the theatre you want to work at. They remember that you were kind of an asshole and they take one look at your application and reject it.

I want to make sure that you know how to appropriately interact with each of these types of connections so you can succeed.



### \* community perspectives \*

- **Your Name:** *Nate DuFort*
- **Your Pronouns:** *he/him*
- **How do you identify yourself professionally (ie. your job title):** *Creative Director, Voice Actor*
- **How do you identify yourself creatively (if that's different than your professional title):** *A father and an artist developing artists*

**How do your work relationships differ from your friendships - even if some of the people overlap?**

Here's the simplest way I can put it is this: in friendship, the relationship is the point. In work, the work is the point. That doesn't mean work relationships are cold or simply transactional. Some of the people I've made things with are people I love deeply. But when we're collaborating, the project has to come first. Deadlines come first. Clarity comes first. The audience comes first. Improvisation shaped that for me. Improv feels loose and fun from the outside, but it's actually very disciplined. You protect the scene. You serve the scene. You don't protect your ego. That's true in professional relationships too. When I'm working with someone, I'm less concerned with being liked and more concerned with whether we're aligned. In friendship, I can be messy. In work, I need to be clear. And when the two overlap, that clarity becomes even more important.

**What is your advice to people who want to collaborate with their friends?**

Do it! It's one of the great joys of a creative life. Making things with people you care about is incredible. But don't assume that because you have chemistry, that you have alignment. When I was younger, I thought shared taste was enough. It's not. You need shared expectations. What does success look like? Who's doing what? Who has final say? Is this a passion project or a business? What happens if money shows up? The conversations that feel slightly awkward at the beginning are the ones that save you later. If you can't talk openly about credit, money, roles, and responsibilities the project will eventually force that conversation and what could have been an easy chat could now totally suuuuuck. The goal isn't to be rigid, it's to avoid preventable resentment and protect the relationship.

**How do you set boundaries with people that you work with, even if you really like them?**

I used to confuse being collaborative with being endlessly available. Especially in comedy and theatre, there's a culture of hanging, of being game, of saying yes. It feels generous. And sometimes it is. But over time, I learned that clarity

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is kinder than availability. If something isn't realistic for me, I try to say that early. If a project doesn't have a defined scope, I'll ask for one. If I can't respond immediately, I don't apologize for having a life or other priorities. Boundaries don't have to be dramatic. They can be simple. "I'm not able to take that on," "I'd need x to make that work," "Let's put it in writing." When I'm grounded in what I can actually offer, I'm a better collaborator. When I overcommit, I get resentful. And resentment can be poison in creative spaces.

### **When you were younger did you have a hard time distinguishing between friends, acquaintances, colleagues, and collaborators?**

Ummm YES. Completely. When you're in a theatre company or touring or building something cool together, it feels like family. You rehearse together, travel together, drink together, whine together, celebrate together. Lines blur fast. But proximity isn't the same as intimacy. There were people I spent every night with who weren't actually my friends. They were colleagues or collaborators - and that's not a lesser thing - it's just different. I had to learn that someone can respect your talent without caring about your well-being. Someone can enjoy working with you and still not show up for you personally. That doesn't make them villains, it just means the relationship has a different purpose. It took time and more than a few disappointments to really understand that and I'm the first to admit that I still stumble.

### **Is there anything you wish you'd done differently when you were younger or known about the different kinds of social connections creatives have?**

I wish I'd understood power dynamics sooner. Creative spaces love to pretend they're egalitarian. And improv especially has this vibe of "we're all equal in the scene." But once you step into producing, directing, casting or developing talent, you're holding influence whether you mean to or not. That changes the room. It changes how people relate to you. It changes what jokes land and who laughs. I also wish I'd understood that not every relationship needs to become *everything*. Some people are perfect as collaborators, some are great

acquaintances, and very few become lifelong friends.

And practically speaking? I wish I'd documented agreements more clearly. Memory is not a contract. Optimism is not a contract. Talent is not a contract. Friendship is not a contract. Get it all, every fucking bit of it, in writing.

**What's something you're still working on in your relationships and boundaries with your professional and social connections?**

I'm still working on not overextending myself in the name of being collaborative. Collaboration is at the core of who I am. I genuinely love building things with people. I love helping. I love connecting dots. But there's a fine line between generosity and avoidance. Sometimes saying yes is easier than sitting with the discomfort of saying no. I'm learning that protecting my time and focus isn't selfish. It's how I preserve the ability to show up fully for the projects and people that matter most. Choosing where to invest my energy and reserving the right to say "no" - yeah, that's something I'm still working on.



**COWORKERS + COLLEAGUES**

Simply put - you know each other because you are paid to spend time together. I am not saying that friendships can't grow out of these spaces or that coworkers are not an important part of our lives. Of course they are, but I offer this perspective because even in a creative industry you and a coworker occupy the same space because you are being paid to do so and have not necessarily chosen to be together.

Be thoughtful about the non-work related things you share with your work-

## II. SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

ers. They're often, like you, working on a task with a deadline. And if you ask a coworker for a favor, you'll likely owe them one later. With a friend – there isn't necessarily a scorecard in this way. But at the workplace there can be.

If you ask something of a co-worker like a letter of recommendation or help on a project not on their list of to do's, be aware that you need to acknowledge their labor. Thank them! And offer to return the favor when you can. These are not the people you should be dumping your personal problems on – even when it feels like you really get along or connecting.

When I was younger I specifically remember at a job where I worked in a high profile theatrical production company and I told a coworker I didn't know very well about some medical issues I was having. I was junior to this person, they were a manager and I was not, and it put them in an uncomfortable position.

They were not *my* supervisor (who sometimes you will have to share basic information with if you need to take time off), they were just a fellow coworker and now they had a bunch of very personal information about my health.

I made the mistake of confusing a co-worker for a friend, and it wasn't fair to them. They were just trying to get their work done and I gave them way more personal information about myself than they needed.

And on a darker note – sometimes people get competitive or have to make hard budgetary decisions. I've seen co-workers use 'friendship' type information to throw others under the bus in order to get ahead. I've seen company supervisors use 'friendship' type information about their employees when deciding who to lay off and who to keep on staff.

Rule of thumb: don't share personal information with a co-worker you would not want EVERY other person in the office to know.


## CLASSMATES

Much like co-workers, these are people you're around for a specific reason – you're both attending the same school. Whether high school, college, or an apprenticeship, these are people who have a task at hand they are working to complete. Whether you're both pursuing a degree, certificate, or internship together you're in the same room because you have to be.

This doesn't mean you won't form friendships with your classmates – you will! But be thoughtful that the people in your classes have their own agendas and are trying, like you, to get through the program you are both in. Treat your classmates with kindness and curiosity.

If you're in a group critique – treat them with fairness and acknowledge their work. Don't talk shit about your classmates unless you're okay with it getting back to them. Because IT WILL. And guess what? In 10 years that may be the person that you have to ask for a job. You'll be surprised how many times hierarchies will change in a lifetime of creative work. The person everyone thought was going to be famous when you were all in your college years? They may transition out of their field and into something completely unrelated. The person that was quiet and a little strange? They'll go on to be the program director at a museum you've dreamt of working at.

Unless someone is actively being unkind to you – assume that you're going to have to collaborate at some point further down the line. When in doubt, be kind.



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### ACQUAINTANCES

Remember that script supervisor you met at a few different gigs over the years and are Instagram friends with that you *just* found out is working on a hot new TV show? It's not cool to DM them and ask them to connect you with the star of that show because you're a big fan. Please, please, please don't do this.

People who you've met once or twice should only be asked a favor under specific circumstances – and you should be prepared for them to either not respond or say no – and to not be hurt when they do. These are people who do not owe you anything.

One of my first jobs out of school was assisting a writer/director/producer who had worked on some REALLY big sitcoms in the 90's. I watched people who were barely acquaintances with this person ask for favors, donations, connections to fame, and jobs. Someone he'd met at an event would send an email asking if he could connect them with one of the stars he'd worked with so that they could perform at their kids' school fundraiser. And he was a really good person but it always put him in an incredibly uncomfortable position. He got these requests regularly and it just wasn't possible for him to say yes to all of them. He had his own kids that if he ever *did* need to ask a favor for, it would be for them!

If you ask an acquaintance for anything, it should be something low stakes because they don't know you very well and you don't know them very well.

Got an upcoming job interview somewhere that an acquaintance works? Instead of asking them to put in a good word for you at their company, ask them about the company culture. You have no idea how they're perceived where they work, and a connection to them could even hurt you.

What if that hypothetical script supervisor we talked about earlier recommends you to work on that hot new show– and it turns out everyone hates them –

and you *don't* get the job because of it? Use acquaintances very sparingly for favors.



## FRIENDS

One of the best things about your chosen path are all of the wonderfully artistic, kind, and interesting people who are going to come into your life. Many of them may start as acquaintances, coworkers, or classmates but over time become friends.

You leave a job and that one coworker you always got along with becomes someone you like to go to gallery openings with. A classmate you spent four years working with in the scenic shop after you graduate becomes a roommate and you come to rely on each other. That person you keep seeing at the art house cinema have a long conversation after a film and meet up again for coffee, planning your next viewing.

These are people you can start to rely on as you build your community. It may seem simple – but to have good friends be a good friend.

- Show up at their openings.
- Read their projects.
- Recommend music, movies, books, films, shows that you think they'll love.
- Ask them for *their* recommendations.
- Connect them with other creatives they may get along with.
- And most importantly - celebrate their wins!

When they ask you to look at a project of theirs, be thoughtful. Ask them if

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they want you to give detailed feedback or if they just need you to look out for incorrect grammar.

Make sure they get home from the bar safe. Share your art with them. Encourage them to keep writing when they feel stuck. Ask for their support when you feel like you need an extra push. Check in on them when you haven't heard from them in awhile – and ask how they are. How their family is. What they're doing lately that's bringing them joy. What they're passionate about.

Don't compete with them. When your friend finds success it means you've found success too. A scarcity mindset doesn't help anyone.

One thing to keep in mind when you have friends that work in the same field as you is to acknowledge your friends' weaknesses if and when you give them a professional recommendation.

I had a friend who was perpetually late that I recommended for a very big gig – and my hope was that by landing the gig it would somehow cure this habit. Spoiler: it didn't. It strained my relationship with both the friend who I'd recommended and the friend who'd given them the gig. Of course I wanted my friends to succeed! But I should have told them that I was putting my reputation on the line with the recommendation and asked them if it was *really* a good fit.

If I'm being honest, I know I've done this to friends as well. In a state of desperation and panic I asked a friend for a recommendation for a job that I didn't *really* want but financially needed. I did not do very well in the position and it put her in a weird spot because she'd given me such a strong recommendation – only for me to get the job and leave after a short time.

There have also been times that I've had the honor of collaborating with and/or working with friends and it's been magical. But it was because we were clear about expectations, deadlines, and duties. And everyone honored

their agreements and timelines and allowed space to be honest about things that weren't working so we could move forward.

Be a tireless cheerleader for your friends but thoughtful when they ask you for professional favors.



## **COLLABORATORS**

Collaborators often overlap with other kinds of social connections - they may start as acquaintances, friends, or co-workers. Collaborators are people that you want to create with, oftentimes, over and over again. They are the folks you share your writing with, your art with, your designs with, your choreography with, your weird ideas with.

A collaborator can be someone with whom you engage with paid creative work together - and they can also be a trusted fellow creative that you bounce ideas off of. Collaborators can take the shape of writing partners. They can be the person who you always ask to photograph your artwork. They can be the lighting designer you know will always make your dancers look perfect.

When I was living and working in Chicago I had a group of collaborators in a small alternative theatre company. In Chicago these types of companies are called 'store front' theatre and it is often a group of individuals who write, direct, act, and produce shows together.

In this group of collaborators there was a core group of 8-10 members who took on both large and small producing projects together over about a decade. Sometimes we had other people join us on a performance, show, or event and sometimes it was just our core group working together.



 community perspectives

- **Your Name:** *Quindo Miller*
- **Your Pronouns:** *they/them*
- **How do you identify yourself professionally (ie. your job title):** *welder/project manager*
- **How do you identify yourself creatively (if that's different than your professional title):** *interdisciplinary artist*

**What is your advice to people who want to collaborate with their friends?**

Be clear about what you can deliver and what you are capable of. Be clear about the amount of work you'll be able to put in, and ask in return what your collaborators are capable of because no one wants to be put in a situation where they feel like they're doing all the work.

**How do you set boundaries with people that you work with, even if you really like them?**

This is hard actually. Because I tend to always do more for my friends than I often do for myself. So this is where I have to force myself to be selfish. I think about my time often and I try my best to prioritize my time first above all.

**Is there anything you wish you'd done differently when you were younger or known about the different kinds of social connections creatives have?**

Yes. I wish I had spent more time with people who were doing things I also deeply cared about. I wish I volunteered with more projects that felt important to me. Because I've realized that working together, the people you spend

a tedious amount of time with together is the fastest way to form lasting connections. Nothing bonds people faster than shared arduous tasks. And that's so important because the kinds of people you surround yourself with, is going to dictate your whole life.

**What's something you're still working on in your relationships and boundaries with your professional and social connections?**

To this day, I am learning to delineate what's appropriate to say and how much to reveal about myself to certain people. I'm still learning to be careful of exposing myself too much to people who don't need to know certain details about what I can do because I'm trying to be protective of my own energy and my time.

To this day, I'm also trying to remember what is important about certain connections and how to actually use that to help in collaborative efforts or future projects. Something simple like, remembering people's names and actually remembering to use those connections to help with my own projects is so important and it's still hard to get that right.



In my years working with people I like or who are also friends, a few lessons have emerged:

- **Pull your weight:** Just because you like the people that you are working and creating alongside doesn't mean you can be lazy. If anything, bring your 'a-game' every time you get together. These should be the folks you give you all to. When you do, remarkable things can happen. So take time to prepare before meetings, rehearsals, design sessions, writing sessions, or classes and don't leave your collaborators having to pick up the slack

## II. SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

where you left off.

- **Check in on each other:** One of the most crucial things I learned working with this group of collaborators was to have a talk after a project was finished called a “Post Mortem.” We would administer an online survey anonymously where we’d ask folks questions (both members of the core group and those who were temporarily joining on the project) for their feedback. We’d ask if the schedule had worked, if the project had succeeded in certain areas such as finances or audience attendance, and we’d ask folks if they were glad they’d participated. We’d also ask what we could do better. This gave everyone a chance to give feedback in a safe space and it allowed us to get a temperature check on the group as a whole. We could tell if we’d missed the mark, not only on our creative goals but also in the way we’d taken care of our people.
- **Don’t be an asshole:** Seriously. Please don’t be an asshole.

So what happens if you’ve been collaborating with someone and it is time for the collaboration to come to an end? You may have been collaborating with someone or a group and it feels like your creative paths are veering in different directions. That’s okay! And in fact, it’s natural.

If you start to feel like your time creating with someone is coming to close – be honest. The worst thing that you can do to someone that you care about is lie to them. Be sure to fulfill your obligations (see the “Don’t be an asshole” rule above) and if things are ending on a positive note – leave the proverbial door open for there to be more collaboration in the future.

You never know where or when your paths might cross again – and it’s always better to leave things in an open place if you worked well together.



 \* community perspectives \* 

- **Your Name:** *Sapira Cheuk*
- **Your Pronouns:** *she, her, hers*
- **How do you identify yourself professionally (ie. your job title):** *Artist and Arts Administrator*
- **How do you identify yourself creatively (if that's different than your professional title):** *Artist*

**What types of social connections do you have in your life, both personal and professional?**

For the life of an artist, our relationships are often interwoven. I meet a lot of folks through art events, projects, or those who are in the same communities. Since these spaces are more communal, leisurely rather than professional, there's a sense that one is there to meet friends. However, when this is also your job, those relationships become slippery. Many of my friendships started as co-workers, or folks I've met in the field, and I have developed many strong bonds with my colleagues.

**How do your work relationships differ from your friendships - even if some of the people overlap?**

Work can sometimes be indistinguishable from my personal sphere, and art is a thread that weaved through many parts of my life. I try my best to act from a place of respect, trust, and care. While those values are the same, they might just show up in different ways between personal and professional relationships.

For example:

- Respect my friends by not forcing them to do something you want, but

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- they don't want / Respect my colleagues by honoring their privacy
- Care for my colleagues by valuing their personal time and honoring their well-being/ Care for my friends by checking in and offering support when appropriate.
- Trust your friends to make the best decisions for themselves/ Create trust for my colleagues by not engaging in gossip and delivering promises

### **What is your advice to people who want to collaborate with their friends?**

I value my friendships and am very considerate when considering collaborations. There are many things I would consider before embarking on a project.

Here are some of them:

- What are both of your communication styles? Would you be able to communicate clearly to address issues that arise, especially when emotions are high?
- What are both of your work styles and habits (is one of you type A and the other waits till the very last minute)? Do you foresee an issue?
- If the project were a failure (or a success), how would it impact your current relationship?
- Will you be able to agree on clear and defined goals, project parameters (such as timelines), and assigned work?
- Lastly, does this person also have a good understanding of these concerns?

### **How do you set boundaries with people that you work with, even if you really like them?**

This was difficult for me when I was a much less experienced artist. I want to be liked, and I want to please, often at a cost to me. Over time, I came to understand what I'm willing to tolerate and set my boundaries. In the previous answer, I had stated I try to act from a place of respect, trust, and care (RTC), and that includes how I ask to be treated. If my friend-colleague/project-

buddy isn't coming from the same space, I would then offer my "no" and explain from the place of RTC.

**When you were younger, did you have a hard time distinguishing between friends, acquaintances, colleagues, and collaborators?**

Of course! Many of our initial friendships stem from our schoolmates and classmates, with whom we often collaborate on projects and lessons together. Those initial relationships create an assumption that the folks we work with are our friends, especially in the arts. We've all experienced the frustrations of group projects where someone was not fulfilling their part of the work or 'pulling their weight'.

Over time, I started to understand that I need to treat folks differently in different situations. While this is something that requires experience, one can avoid a lot of headaches and heartaches by being aware.

**Is there anything you wish you'd done differently when you were younger, or known about the different kinds of social connections creatives have?**

Personally, I would not have pleased people as much as I had. I had an upbringing that did not allow disagreement, and when I reached adulthood, it was a skill that I needed to learn. Having the understanding that 'no' is acceptable wasn't something I embodied until my mid-twenties.

**What's something you're still working on in your relationships and boundaries with your professional and social connections?**

Saying no is still hard, since not participating in an offered opportunity feels like I'm disappointing someone or that they might not work with me again. I participated in a show just this year that I did not really have time for. Because I didn't have time to really develop the work, the work was shitty! I ended up producing disappointing work after all. The other thing I'm working on

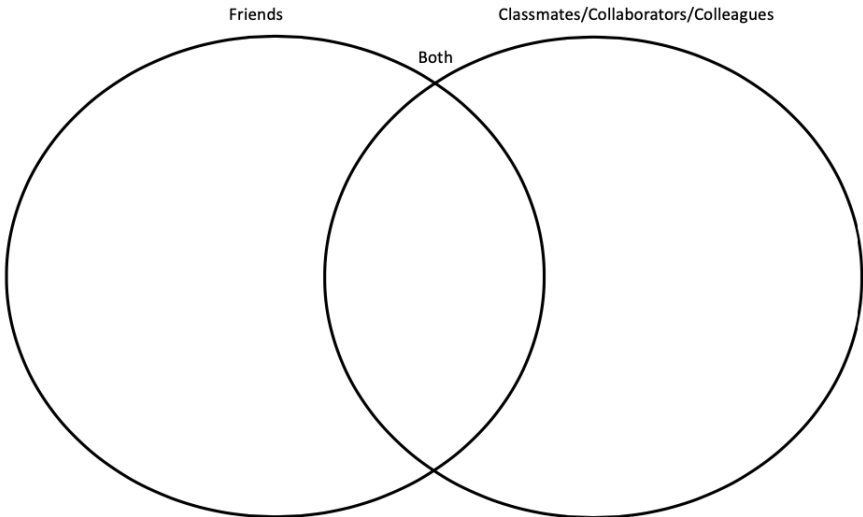
## II. SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

is maintaining relationships; there are so many folks I would like to connect with that the 24 hours a day just doesn't allow. It needs to be more of a priority for me in the future.



### exercises

Below on the left list the people who are your friends outside of work, on the right the people who you work with/go to school with, and in the center list the folks who fall into the more murky space.



**For the folks in the center, are there boundaries you want to work on setting so you can keep collaborating while also fostering friendships?**

**For your classmates/colleagues/collaborators - what are the ways you can build trust without oversharing or overstepping boundaries?**

**Thinking about your friends, how can you continue to show up for them and support them?**

**What is a project you've worked on with someone in the center that turned out really well?**

**Is there a project with someone (either listed here or not) that went off track?  
What do you wish you had done differently when you look back?**



 community perspectives

- **Your Name:** *Krystal Ramirez*
- **Your Pronouns:** *She/Her*
- **How do you identify yourself professionally (ie. your job title):** *Educator*
- **How do you identify yourself creatively (if that's different than your professional title):** *Artist*

**What types of social connections do you have in your life, both personal and professional?**

I have a hard time discerning between the two sometimes, because I always feel like my professional connections are people that I could still be friends with. So sometimes I have a hard time as a professional recognizing that some might just be professional relationships. I'm a friendly person and I treat my professional connections in a very friendly way, but I think I do have to realize sometimes it's important to make professional connections and that it's OK to keep them just as professional connections.

**What is your advice to people who want to collaborate professionally with their friends?**

Just do it! I mean, you need to have friends that are willing to also be professional with you. You can hang out and you can be friendly and you can shoot the shit, as they say - but then you have to sit down and be professional with them and figure things out.

I have friends that are like me who are aggressively motivated and competitive. We can turn it on and turn it off where we're being playful and then we get

into professional mode. We've had professional disagreements before and we've had arguments before, but if the friendship's strong, you'll get through these disagreements. And if it doesn't, then it wasn't a strong friendship to begin with. That's why I say, just do it!

**How do you set boundaries with people that you work with, even if you really like them?**

You just have to be very decisive. When setting boundaries, you just set a boundary. It's very simple. It's like, how do you know if you want to work professionally with a friend? You just do it!

You do it and you set it and you have to stick to your guns. You have to trust yourself and you have to not be shy about it. I guess it can feel intimidating or it can feel like you don't want to step on anybody's toes, but you can't think about that.

**What's something you're still working on in your relationships and boundaries with your professional and social connections?**

I think...networking. I love my friends. I love people. But just talking to people. I can seem very extroverted, but I really feel like I relate to liking to be alone and in my own space and being more introverted.

And so it's difficult for me sometimes. It's exhausting for me too, even when I *want* to go to an opening because sometimes I feel like I *have* to go. Understanding that you have to keep those relationships and build them and maintain them with the people in your community. It shouldn't feel like a chore, but sometimes it can feel exhausting.

For me it drains my battery. And so that can feel daunting. And so it's always something that I'm working on that I feel like it's never ending because it's always an interior battle that I'm going through of like not wanting to leave

## II. SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

my house, because I would rather just like be alone and watch an episode of some reality TV or work in my studio while knowing that I should get out. And I *should* nurture the relationships that I have with my community members.



### exercises

Choose one of the below exercises to do in the next month.

- Pick a friend who has been working on a creative project and reach out to them to ask about it. Write an email, schedule a phone call, even send an *actual* letter telling them you're thinking about them and that you want to hear more about their project and support them.
- Reflect on a recent group project you worked on. Ask the members of the group if they'd want to get together to talk through how it went. Before you get together, set some guidelines and have folks come with prepared thoughts so the conversation doesn't go awry. Decide on the areas you'll discuss - both positive and negative - and keep the post mortem timely. Decide ahead of getting together how long you'll talk so things don't get bogged down in one area.
- Think about a colleague you work with that you'd like to get to know better. Ask them if they'd be willing to talk with you a little bit about their work history and any advice they'd offer to someone early in their career.
- Consider your acquaintances - is there someone that comes to mind that you'd like to get to know better? The next time you run into them, ask them a bit about anything that's inspiring them. It can be something they're working on currently or even a piece of art or culture they've watched/visited/attended that really resonated with them.



  further learning  

**Set Boundaries, Find Peace: A Guide to Reclaiming Yourself** by Nedra Glover Tawwab

*Healthy boundaries. We all know we should have them—in order to achieve work/life balance, cope with toxic people, and enjoy rewarding relationships with partners, friends, and family. But what do “healthy boundaries” really mean—and how can we successfully express our needs, say “no,” and be assertive without offending others?*

*Licensed counselor, sought-after relationship expert, and one of the most influential therapists on Instagram Nedra Glover Tawwab demystifies this complex topic for today’s world. In a relatable and inclusive tone, Set Boundaries, Find Peace presents simple-yet-powerful ways to establish healthy boundaries in all aspects of life. Rooted in the latest research and best practices used in cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), these techniques help us identify and express our needs clearly and without apology—and unravel a root problem behind codependency, power struggles, anxiety, depression, burnout, and more.*

**Loving Corrections** by adrienne maree brown

*This selection of prescient, compassionate essays explores patterns we engage in that are rooted in limited thinking. Through a lens of “loving correction” rather than mere critique, author adrienne maree brown helps us reimagine how to hold ourselves, our loved ones, and our communities accountable by setting clear boundaries, engaging in reflection, and nurturing honest relationships.*

**The Social Profit Handbook: The Essential Guide to Setting Goals,**

**Assessing Outcomes, and Achieving Success for Mission-Driven Organizations**

by David Grant

*The Social Profit Handbook offers those who lead, govern, and support mission-driven organizations and businesses new ways to assess their impact in order to improve future work rather than merely judge past performance. The Social Profit Handbook presents assessment and evaluation not as ends in themselves but as the path toward achieving what matters most in the social sector. The result: more benefits to society and stronger, more unified, more effective organizations prepared to make the world a better place. For-profit institutions measure their success primarily by monetary gains. But nonprofit institutions are different; they aim for social profit. How do you measure the success of these social profit institutions, where missions are focused on the well-being of people, place, and planet?*

*Drawing upon decades of leadership in schools and the foundation and nonprofit worlds, author David Grant offers strategies—from creating mission time to planning backwards to constructing qualitative assessment rubrics—that help organizations take assessment back into their own hands, and improve their work as a result. His insights, illustrated by numerous case studies, make this book a unique organizational development tool for a wide range of nonprofit organizations, as well as emerging mission-based social venture businesses, such as low-profit corporations and B Corps.*

**Networking & Collaboration is Key to Success:** <https://www.artiststhive.org/post/networking-collaboration-is-key-to-success>

*Painter and printmaker Briseida Ochoa connects with other artists digitally and in person, supporting each other and sharing techniques. She has access to a shared workspace that holds workshops and provides access to technology.*

**Collaboration must benefit everyone:** <https://www.artiststhive.org/post/collaboration-must-benefit-everyone>

*Vicente Yeppez turned down an opportunity to write the script for an independent film because, even though there was some overlap with his projects, he decided to prioritize his own work. Collaboration needs to be a mutual opportunity for creative growth.*



3

### III. JOBS + WORK/LIFE BALANCE



*anything* less than full time employment in the artistic discipline that you studied during college translated to complete and total failure. This has so many negative mental and emotional implications for those of us who come from financially unstable backgrounds, those of us not connected to our chosen industry through family, or those of us outside of societal binaries.

The truth is many creative people have a ‘day job.’

It may not necessarily be during the day - but almost everyone I know who has a creative practice has also worked outside of their chosen industry at some point or another. So, unless you come from wealth or have family connections (and the longer you work in creative industries the more you will realize how many people who have found artistic success *come from wealth or have family connections...or have both...*) you’re going to have to find employment at some point that may not be directly related to your degree, your passion, your craft, or your creative self.

Here are some things to consider when looking for a job to pay the bills:

- Does this pay enough for me to cover my cost of living?
- Does this job leave me with enough time at the end of the day/week to work on my creative projects?
- Does this opportunity give me any skills that can translate to my artistic pursuits?
- Will this job break my soul? (Yes, I quoted Renaissance. Deal with it.)

I’ve had times in my life where I really liked a day job I was working. I enjoyed the people, I felt happy with the commute, and the work itself was interesting. But some of them couldn’t pay me enough hours to cover my bills.

I’ve also had jobs that paid me way more than I ever imagined I would make - but I hated them and they left me feeling empty at the end of the day. So empty in fact that I didn’t create theatre or art for almost the entire time I was

working in these positions.

I have heard some creatives warn, “Don’t take any job that’s unrelated to your dream,” but the truth is many of us don’t have that luxury. So how do you find a halfway point? You might not like the answer...but the truth is it’s often through trial and error.

I want you to know that it’s common for people to have many, many, *many* jobs in their lifetime. I know I have. Off the top of my head I could list ten or fifteen jobs I’ve had over the years.



- **Your Name:** *Zully Mejía*
- **Your Pronouns:** *she/her*
- **How do you identify yourself professionally (ie. your job title):** *Artist and Gallery Worker*
- **How do you identify yourself creatively (if that’s different than your professional title):**
  - *Multidisciplinary artist, predominantly a painter*

**What have been some of the things you’ve considered when you’ve worked a job that wasn’t related to your creative projects?**

Does this job allow me to support myself and pay for the costs that come with being an artist? Is the work draining to the point that it keeps me from being able to create? Do I like the people I work with? Does it introduce networking opportunities (i.e. is it in a gallery)? What do I want out of this job?

**How do you make time for creative projects even when you're working a 9-5?**

It's hard, and there's no way around that really. Unfortunately we live in a society that makes being an artist quite challenging unless you come from a financially privileged background. I would say it's really important to know yourself and your body. Know when to push through tiredness and when you need to rest so that you don't burn out.

**How often do you "log off" from work related responsibilities? For example - do you stop answering emails at a certain time? Or set aside days where you rest from your work?**

I usually play it by ear depending on what projects I have going on and various deadlines. In terms of days of complete rest, they're rare if I'm honest. Maybe once every couple of weeks.

**How do you make time for friends and/or family when you've got deadlines to meet?**

Family and friends are incredibly important to me, so I make them a priority. With any relationship, it's important to have good communication. If there are periods when I am less available to meet or catch up, I let them know, and the same is true for them.

**Are there habits or goals you're still working on related to balance?**

Yes, I experience balance as fluid and something that requires regular attention as my priorities shift. I regularly discover things or meet people that I choose to prioritize at different periods of my life. Self-care is non-negotiable for me when it comes to creating the capacity to balance multiple responsibilities.




 \* **exercises** \* 

*Take a few minutes writing and reflecting on the below.*

**What are some public perceptions that you have heard about the arts or creative fields - whether or not they are true?**

**Where do you think the idea of a day job being 'failure' comes from?**

**Do you think there are some jobs that might be able to pay your bills while also allowing time for your creative work? What would they look like?**



Over time I've learned to recognize a few red flags as you're looking for a position that can support your artistic life and also pay your rent:

### III. JOBS + WORK/LIFE BALANCE

- How do they talk about the person who used to have your position? Do they call them an idiot? Do they talk about how stupid and bad at the job they were? If you've just met them and they're sharing this information – it's not because you are a really special person they can confide in. It's probably because they talk about most people at the company this way.
- What is their time off policy? If you're an artistic person you will likely need some flexibility in time off for auditions, writers retreats, design conferences – etc. And you don't want to have to fake illness every time you need to take time off. Find a place that will work with you.
- Does it seem like the people there like what they are doing here? Would you be allowed to talk to other employees in the company outside of the person interviewing you to learn about the company culture?
- What and when do they pay? Do they pay every week, every two weeks, every month? If they're not direct or clear with you about this beware.
- What benefits are available? This doesn't always have to be health insurance or dental – some companies might have space you could use for rehearsals or access to materials you could use for your artwork or studio space. Some places even offer discount bus passes or free therapy/counseling.
- How do they ensure employee safety? If this is a job where you're painting outside, is there shade provided? If you're doing performance how do they ensure your body is kept safe? Do they have a process for reporting incidents to HR?
- Do people take lunch breaks? Sounds silly – but this is a good indicator . People should be treated as people and small indicators – like if people feel comfortable stepping away from their desk to eat – can tell you so much about how employees are treated.
- Is there anything that happens on the job that might derail your artistic pursuits? Example – are you required to work nights and weekends? If you're a performer this could pose a problem because typically you'll need your nights and weekends for your own shows. Another example is travel – maybe this would be great for you to be able to see new museums and buildings (if you work in Architecture) but if you're trying to collaborate

in a musical ensemble it can make your work impossible.

- Finally - if it sounds too good to be true it probably is.

You may not have to ask *all* of these during your interview. Some of them you can find online in job review sites or even the company's webpage. But - these are important aspects to consider because they can impact your relationship with your creative work as well as your mental health.



- **Your Name:** *Quindo Miller*
- **Your Pronouns:** *they/them*
- **How do you identify yourself professionally (ie. your job title):** *welder/project manager*
- **How do you identify yourself creatively (if that's different than your professional title):** *interdisciplinary artist*

**What have been some of the things you've considered when you've worked a job that wasn't related to your creative projects?**

In whatever profession that I'm looking at, I ask myself if it's interesting, am I comfortable doing this job, and if there is something to learn from. If it's boring, this is actually interesting, because you could consolidate "boring time" into something creative. If it's comfortable, meaning the pay is right for what the task is, and if it's not morally conflicting, I could probably do it.

I once worked as a club promoter that had no hourly pay yet was all commission based. I could work for 5 hours standing around hustling people and make

no money, or stand around for 30 minutes and make \$300. It ended up being too much of a gamble every night. The losses and rejection added up and eventually broke me emotionally to quit. Yet there was still something to learn from that job. It was the confidence to talk to strangers on the street that made me bold at a time when I needed it to video intimate close-ups of strangers' eyes for an artwork I was already thinking about.

**How do you make time for creative projects even when you're working a 9-5?**

This is a hard question to answer. But I've taken some advice from a book called *The Artist Way*, and it's not just about blocking out time, but to take 15 minutes or 5, to think about your processes, and discover something about your work that you could do. Any minute of the day is an opportunity to think creatively, look up something quickly or jot down a thought. Then you can block out the actual time on the weekend to make the work later.

**How often do you "log off" from work related responsibilities? For example - do you stop answering emails at a certain time? Or set aside days where you rest from your work?**

I take this by feel. Being an artist often feels like I have two jobs: My survival job, and my own personal work. When I feel tired and still have to work, I work slowly. If I'm off the clock, I will definitely take time to rest if I feel exhausted and refuse to work. And by rest, I mean, sleep. Sleep for as long as you can.

**If someone isn't able afford to freelance in their chosen profession full time - what do you recommend for them to keep their creative projects going?**

The next best thing is to find a profession that will match your artist needs. Work for someone who has a studio or the equipment you could use/borrow to fulfill your projects ends. As an installation artist, it's hard to find the right equipment or tools. The most expensive part of building anything are the

materials and tools. Or sometimes it's the reverse and you find a job, and then discover something about that job that will work for you in a way that benefits your ideas.

For example: I used to work retail at a clothing store. I used a lot of the materials that were used in display windows as materials for artwork as they were often thrown away after the season ended.

**How do you make time for friends and/or family when you've got deadlines to meet?**

I always keep my messages open, or the group chats active. Even if I'm busy, there is always time for a joke or a meme to send. If I see something funny, I will share it with someone no matter what. I try to stay positive and family and friends are important to keep that mental stimulation going. We don't have to spend hours on the phone talking about our days, just a quick meme to show we're alive and thinking of someone who has the same humor level with suffice.

**Are there habits or goals you're still working on related to balance?**

The notion of balance under a capitalist system is an illusion. Unfortunately, there are only sacrifices and trade-offs. Time is a finite resource. Time, to me, is the most important resource and from time, there is only experience that will matter. I try my best to quell my habitual anxiety about time. I'm trying to build forgiveness for myself from the limitations capitalism has set.



If you're not making enough money to eat, you're not going to be wanting to paint. If you are working full time but don't get health insurance it can be

hard to want to dance on the weekends because if you're injured you can't go to the doctor.

If you loathe going into your job day in and day out it can become much harder to write your poetry when you're not at work because you'll just want to decompress and veg out when you get home to try and numb the frustration of your day to day work life.

If you're able to (and I realize there are going to be times that you are NOT able to) take time to consider all of the above before you take the job. In reality you might have to take a terrible job for a few months because you moved to a new city to pursue your artistic goals and you don't have a ton of money saved and no one to call to help pay your rent. It happens.

If you find yourself in that position and need to take the first job that comes along - don't panic. Instead make a plan of how you are going to get out of this job suck of a job and make yourself work to find another path.



- **Your Name:** *Lizzy Welsh*
- **Your Pronouns:** *she/her*
- **How do you identify yourself professionally (ie. your job title):** *Musician/Academic*
- **How do you identify yourself creatively (if that's different than your professional title):** *Musician*

**What have been some of the things you've considered when you've worked**

### **a job that wasn't related to your creative projects?**

One of my main priorities when taking on non-creative work is always, how will it affect my ability to continue with creative work? This can create issues both with physical/mental strain, and also with time, and is something many young creatives struggle with, particularly those from working/middle-class backgrounds.

At various times in my life, I've worked in hospitality, but found that restaurant work put a lot of pressure on my forearms and wrists. My main instrument is the violin, which also demands a lot of physical strength from these body parts, and I was often too tired after a shift to be able to practice without risking injury.

It feels as though I've spent a lot of time grappling with the question of, if I take this shift in a non-creative workplace, do I have any flexibility to take on a last-minute offer of creative work? This one is much more difficult to solve, particularly for people in a situation where they have to earn a certain amount each week to get by.

### **How do you make time for creative projects even when you're working a 9-5?**

Trying to spend even 20 minutes a day on creative practice is incredibly valuable. If it's possible to fit in a little time for creativity before heading to the 9-5 job, all the better. It will ensure you actually achieve some creativity and improve your mental health all at once.

### **How often do you "log off" from work related responsibilities? For example - do you stop answering emails at a certain time? Or set aside days where you rest from your work?**

I have not traditionally been very good at "logging off" from work-related

responsibilities, and was particularly bad at this in my early career. I'm improving slowly with age! I try to schedule days of no email checking, at least once every couple of weeks, but this can be much more difficult to manage with phone communication - I tend to look at my phone many times a day, and, as a sole-trader, I use my personal phone as my work phone. Sometimes, if I'm feeling good about not working, I will just leave a work-related message as unread until the next day.

**If someone isn't able afford to freelance in their chosen profession full time - what do you recommend for them to keep their creative projects going?**

If it's possible to allocate some time each day/week to creative projects, then absolutely prioritise that. It can be helpful to keep space for creativity at the same time in the day/week so it's part of a routine. Even 20 minutes of practice a day can do wonders for creation and mental health.

**How do you make time for friends and/or family when you've got deadlines to meet?**

In many instances, particularly early in my career when I was chasing gigs more, I sadly didn't always make time for friends and family. I often felt pressured in my early career to take a gig at all personal costs, and looking back, I'm not sure if that pressure came from within or externally.

To an extent, I think there are benefits to being available as a freelancer, but I sometimes remind myself that, while my career is important to me, I'm not going to be lying on my deathbed wishing I could give another concert rather than spending more time with my family. There are some dream creative projects that are maybe worth missing a birthday party for, but most of them aren't!

**Are there habits or goals you're still working on related to balance?**

I try to have weekends, or a day off, at least twice a month. It doesn't always work out that way, but it's a start!



Once you do find a job that allows you to balance your creative pursuits and pay the bills, here are a few things to remember:

- Be on time. If you can't get there on time, communicate with your boss. Learning this skill is going to help you in your creative life as well - it will train you to be on time for meetings with design clients, directors, and curators. When you are working creatively you're going to be meeting with professionals that don't have time for you to be 20 minutes late - by training yourself to be on time for a day job that you feel luke warm about you're going to be a pro when you need to be on time for a meeting that could make or break your artistic career.
- Colleagues are not the same as friends. As we talked about in Chapter II (Social Connections) remember that these folks are not to be your emotional dumping ground. You never know who you're going to need to write you a letter of recommendation some day - keep the door open and keep your emotional baggage between you and your friends and/or you and your therapist.
- Don't let the job take over your life.



- **Your Name:** *Emily Champlin*
- **Your Pronouns:** *She/her*
- **How do you identify yourself professionally (ie. your job title):** *Professional Development Specialist / Early childhood educator*
- **How do you identify yourself creatively** (if that's different than your professional title): *A creative. Or a creative play enthusiast. For me, it feels playful to write, craft, make art, travel, etc. For me art and creativity is about engaging in a playful way that makes life more rich and full and cultivates curiosity and connection.*

**What have been some of the things you've considered when you've worked a job that wasn't related to your creative projects?**

I've had the best outcomes when I have considered how stable the job and benefits and how flexible the schedule is and how much I enjoy the work itself. It's been important to me to consider, will this will meet my basic needs and relieve my stress? Because I can't be creative if I am mired in stress. It's been incredibly helpful to consider how much of my brainspace the non-creative paid work takes up. If I feel good at the work and it's not stressful, then I find I can be successful at my job and still free up my mind to think of other ways to be creative and do things beyond my paid, full time job.

**How do you make time for creative projects even when you're working a 9-5?**

I try to set boundaries with the 9-5 so that I protect some time for the creative projects. The biggest win was finding a job that had some flexibility in the schedule. Some days are longer than 9-5 at my role, but other days are far less demanding and I have a good deal of flexibility to decide how to spend the time. This offers a nice balance where I can sometimes focus on my "jobs" work and get a break from focusing on a creative idea or project, then when I have the open spaces in time, and I am excited and grateful to jump in.

**How often do you “log off” from work related responsibilities? For example - do you stop answering emails at a certain time? Or set aside days where you rest from your work?**

This one is challenging and I am not sure that I have found the perfect balance. Because my job requires travel and my schedule varies and changes time zones, I am not always able to set boundaries based on specific times of day etc. However, I do set aside days/times and activities that will be just for me to feel connected to my creativity.

For example, when I travel for work, I will try to plan enough time to visit a local art museum, gallery, bookstore, coffee shop or community space and I will take some time to be curious and present in that place. I could just as easily only work on these trips, fly in and fly out without ever taking time to do these things, but these moments of exploration are extremely important to me. They balance the work trip, they add to my sense of balance, they feed my need for curiosity and wonder and they make me feel happier. I think the experiences help me perform better at my job too, honestly. I feel more connected to the spaces and people that I work with in those places when I take the time to explore.

**If someone isn't able afford to freelance in their chosen profession full time - what do you recommend for them to keep their creative projects going?**

I recommend finding small projects that are meaningful to you and that keep you connected to the things you love. Even if it's one project a month, or a quarter, that you make time for and don't always hold it to the expectation of selling it, sharing it or having it come out perfectly. Just seek to stay connected to the simplest form of the art, the part that brings you joy.

**How do you make time for friends and/or family when you've got deadlines to meet?**

If I am very honest, I am still working on this one and I will sometimes overextend myself, even when I have work and deadlines. That being said, I nearly always feel that time spent with friends and family is well invested. It usually helps me feel happy, supported, and connected. I think it helps to communicate with friends and family and openly admit when it's hard and ask for help! It can be something simple like saying, "I really miss you and I want to see you. I am feeling so swamped and overwhelmed at work, but I was wondering if you wanted to come to lunch at my house tomorrow?" And then I try to stick to the time/plans I've made without feeling guilt and then jump back in.

At times, it's very necessary to just let people in my life know that I won't have time for a while and just find less time consuming ways to still connect and communicate love, such as a text message. Maybe even one that can be funny or light but connecting such as, "Hello from the depths of this crazy project! I am so excited that there's a light at the end of the tunnel and I can't wait to make some plans when I'm back above ground."

**Are there habits or goals you're still working on related to balance?**

Oh, yes. I think there are many goals I am working on related to balance. It's hard for me to stay on top of "chores" and "errands" often times. I actually have an easier time staying on top of either work or play. It's getting a handle on all the mundane but essential tasks of life that are challenging. I have to really remind myself that dentist appointments are important, and you really do have to clean the bathtub and all the sheets fairly often. Those are the hardest things. I feel drawn to and still put much more weight on either my work or my creative and social play time.



As you're reflecting on everything so far, I want to offer a few reasons why it's useful to start to think about this balance. I believe it's always beneficial to know the *why* behind personal growth and all the ways that this type of self work can ultimately benefit you.

Obviously, there's your personal health, both physical and mental. Sometimes the obvious reasons are easy to forget. Working long hours, taking on projects that you dread, collaborating with folks who do not respect your boundaries - all of these can take a toll on you. You could start to have panic attacks, develop trouble sleeping, jeopardize relationships that matter to you, and in extreme situations find yourself diagnosed with a chronic disease or illness.

And when your physical or mental health is off balance it starts to affect your creative practice. Many creatives find it harder to connect to their expressive selves when they're battling mental health or physical health issues. I know, I know...but what about the tortured artist archetype!? Sure, that's doable for short spats. But most of those folks were privileged single cis white men and most of them burned brightly and then burned out in a blaze of sadness. I promise you - it doesn't have to be that way.

If the above reasons aren't convincing enough to make you care about creating sustainable balance in your work and life - one thing to consider is your professional credibility. People notice when you miss deadlines. They notice when your work is subpar. And they notice when you send them a panicked email at 3am asking a question they've already answered for you but you forgot because you're stressed out and haven't slept for a few nights and trying finish the project that you're working on for them at the last minute.

They not only notice - they talk. Many creative communities are actually pretty small and most people who have been in those communities for some time know each other. And they talk. If you're up and coming and someone in your community takes a chance to hire you and they find your work to be erratic, they'll likely say as much to their peers and you may have a problem

getting another gig in the future.

Because of this it's better to set boundaries, deadlines, and clarify details ahead of time - and to accept work only when you have a clear scope of what the gig will entail.



- **Your Name:** *Claire Wentzel*
- **Your Pronouns:** *she/her*
- **How do you identify yourself professionally (ie. your job title):** *Brand Strategist*
- **How do you identify yourself creatively (if that's different than your professional title):** *Mixed Media Artist / Artist-in-Residence*

**What have been some of the things you've considered when you've worked a job that wasn't related to your creative projects?**

From high school on, I have taken jobs either to earn money or to have a professional activity, or both. The main considerations I had were: Did it seem interesting? Was the pay worth the time? Did the schedule have enough flexibility to accommodate my personal life commitments? Would the experience teach me new skills to support my creative practice and help me make it a more viable business?

Most of the jobs I've taken have come through personal connections, though some were right out of the classified ads, like pizza delivery and working in a newspaper. I found my job at a real estate company that way, too, but in that

case, I responded to the ad because I recognized the contact's name as that of a friend's mother.

Most of my jobs have included creative elements within the scope of work, usually in the form of design or writing. And all of my jobs have involved interacting with people, always as part of an internal team, and often with public, client, or vendor interaction, which is essential to my enjoyment of the work.

**How do you make time for creative projects even when you're working a 9-5?**

I've only had a few years of my life when I worked a traditional 9-5 or full-time schedule, or as part of a single entity. My spouse has had a focused and demanding career, which required 15 interstate and international moves over 23 years. To support this kind of work, as partners we prioritize maintaining flexibility in my career and creative projects. However, the same principles I applied during my full-time work periods have been equally applicable when I have had more diverse and fractional professional commitments, as they don't always afford any additional "free" time to create. In fact, at times it has felt like less.

The first time I worked full-time was the year between finishing high school and starting college. I worked at an architectural design firm where external creative practices were encouraged and celebrated, and at times bled into the workday. The pinnacle of this was an elaborate office-wide Halloween decorating contest, which in my case turned into more of an immersive installation. During this time, I also made greeting cards featuring prints of my photography to sell, sent collaged postcards and custom-designed holiday greetings to friends and family, and traveled to participate in street-painting festivals on long weekends. I worked on paintings in my apartment and kept a sketchbook whenever I went to museums or galleries. Many of these projects weren't formal or deeply focused, but they set the tone for an ongoing practice

of exploration of whatever materials, techniques, and subjects were most inspiring to me in the moment.

The next two times I was full-time were relatively short-term assignments. Both of those jobs, a newspaper copy editor/layout artist and marketing coordinator, were design-heavy assignments that employed most of my creative energy. My paints stayed in moving boxes, but I still found myself gardening and cooking as alternative and functional outlets for free creative expression. I also still traveled to make street paintings.

**If someone isn't able to do the freelance thing—what do you recommend for them to keep their creative projects going?**

Create bite-sized assignments you are confident you can complete within your schedule. This can be either a small thing done many times over as a series, like a daily 30-minute piece or a weekly studio night, or other event-based, time-bound projects (residencies, workshops, intensives) that you can schedule in advance during your holidays and vacation time.

Also, look for artist organizations you can join to create community, conversation and accountability around your work, like a local guild in your discipline, or a cohort program like [pollinator.coop](http://pollinator.coop).

And while especially valuable for artists working full-time in their primary medium, I think the practice offered Julia Cameron's "The Artist's Way" is an amazing foundation for those also working in other professions. Daily Morning Pages and Artist Dates are the two habits I continue to find most grounding in maintaining the ebb and flow of my personal creative work.

**How did these answers change when you became a parent?**

Parenting adds a layer of fragmentation to everything in your life. Interruption becomes the foundation for the flow. Even though I was already used to

the frequent disruptions of relocating throughout my pre-parent days, the physical and emotional energy outflow to support new humans is challenging to predict or quantify. I've had to reassess and rebuild my operational structures, and iterate often to address my kids' developmental needs at every stage, while finding different ways to recharge my own creative batteries. As they are currently school-aged, this is still very much a work in progress, as I will discuss below.

**Are there habits or goals you're still working on related to balance?**

Definitely. Right now, I am working on addressing a tendency to overcommit across all areas of my life, because it leads to stress, distracted effort, and missed deadlines (like this one!), which can negatively impact others and undermine my self-trust. With this, I am developing more discipline in how I prioritize my time, plan for rest, and maintain follow-through and communication with everyone in my sphere of connection. The hardest part is learning how and when to say no. My mind is abundant with possibilities, so accepting that not all my ideas are feasible in the moment becomes a process of allowing for grief and release.

I am becoming more discerning about what external support I can elicit for what I am doing, and effecting the environmental changes within my control that will form a firmer foundation for success as a routine in all my endeavors.

I am also working on incorporating more thorough and intentional documentation into my creative and professional processes. Too often, I throw all my time and energy into just the creative meat of the project, forgetting I have different constraints now than when I was younger! Planning to reflect and gather insights as I go creates opportunities for the meaning of the work to live beyond the moment in ways that are more accessible to others. This also allows me to pause and re-enter a project more readily, because inevitably, and especially as a parent, there are always emergent priorities that can interrupt the flow of creative expression.

Lastly, I have found that work/life “balance” isn’t an end state you magically arrive at and stay in. It’s a constant adjustment to find harmony between what you must do to survive and what makes you feel like you are thriving. Accepting that this push and pull is normal, and that balance, in this context, is a verb, not a noun, also removes a lot of the pressure to achieve impossible perfection. The real goal is simply to expand your ability to enjoy the delightful work of experiencing life—challenge and triumph alike.



### **TIME**

Depending on your chosen creative field – committing to a project can take vastly different amounts of time. Understanding the scope of a gig can help you to properly manage your time and to also (as we’ll talk about later in this chapter) ensure that you’re being compensated properly.

One of the first skills I want you to begin to develop is communicating your availability. When you agree to do a design gig with a client or to develop a script or choreograph a show or compose a theme song – your team may have different expectations on timelines and response time than you do and unfortunately the quickest way to find out is to ask directly. Do not assume ANYTHING.

Here are some good things to talk about related to your time when you take on a gig:

- What is the deadline for the final project?
- Who is approving your work and if it’s a team – how quick are turnarounds for edits from them?
- What are the expectations for email and phone communication?

- What are considered 'working hours' if you're working with a team?
- Are there meetings outside of the work you're responsible for that you'd need to attend?
- How do edits and revisions work? (For those of you writing/designing/creating a product that is not performative in nature and/or are working outside of a union)

I'd also recommend doing the following to cover yourself:

- Communicate your normal working hours (do you not check email at night/weekends? Are you a night owl and often don't respond until later in the day? Etc.)
- Clarify the method of communication you'll be using – some clients/companies/creative groups use different methods- chat groups, discord, apps, etc
- Make sure to put an autoreply on your email if you'll be out of touch for a period of time
- Use your email signature as a place to communicate your availability
- Get in writing ALL agreed upon deadlines
- Send a summary email following phone calls where important details are agreed upon



- **Your Name:** *John Hartman*
- **Your Pronouns:** *He/Him*
- **How do you identify yourself professionally (ie. your job title):** *Ac-*

*tor/Writer*

- **How do you identify yourself creatively (if that's different than your professional title):** *I use the same*

**What have been some of the things you've considered when you've worked a job that wasn't related to your creative projects?**

In the past, I've always wanted to remain clear to myself that even if the job I was doing wasn't creative, I was still an artist and a creative person first and foremost. Being an actor is one of the only jobs you can just "say" you are and people have to accept it without proof (i.e. you can't just say "I'm a doctor" and have it be true). So in the spirit of that, I just let myself know that all I was doing in the current non-creative job was making it feasible and affordable for me to do the creative parts.

It's almost part of the creative's job - you must often do other jobs to make it possible for you to do the creative work. If you think of it as part of the job description, it's much easier to justify it as part of your lifestyle. Also, if I had to find another job, preferably I tried to find one that was - if not related to my industry - it was at least tangential or touched it. For example, if I couldn't act, I could teach improv and acting for the camera, or I could do corporate workshops, as opposed to doing something like waiting tables (which if of course totally fine, but you feel less removed from the creative world that way).

**How do you make time for creative projects even when you're working a 9-5?**

It can be very exhausting to work a 9-5 and then hop into a whole separate creative endeavor in the evening, but if you're passionate about it, I find that you can make the time. I prioritize rest, so that I'm not up wildly late and then in turn, tired for the 9-5 - because then, you won't want to work on a creative project that night. Compartmentalize if you have to - i.e. I do my 9-5 and then

when that's over, it's OVER. It is no longer with you when you go home - leave it at work, and then your home - or a separate room if you work from home - is your creative space, completely divorced from the day job.

**How often do you “log off” from work related responsibilities? For example - do you stop answering emails at a certain time? Or set aside days where you rest from your work?**

Similarly to the last answer, I like to separate the two spaces physically. so that work stays at work and at home is for you. Also, when it comes to writing or creating, I like to turn other devices off (so a work phone should be off when you're creating, so you're not glancing at it), and for writing specifically, I often like to turn the wifi access off, so I'm not tempted to browse (you can give yourself a time limit for this too, like 30 minutes or an hour of no internet).

**If someone isn't able afford to freelance in their chosen profession full time - what do you recommend for them to keep their creative projects going?**

It's important to remember that most creatives don't get to do their exact favorite creative work full-time. Academy Award-winning director Sean Baker makes small indie films, which don't turn much of a profit, and often during the year, he's directing or editing commercials as well. So keep that in mind and know that doing what you love full time often means doing a few other things too. I also recommend friend groups to keep you accountable. For example, having a writers group that meets once a week will force you to work on your project even if you're working another job because you have a deadline and people waiting on you for a deliverable. It's a way of making your creative endeavor feel like a job as well.

**How do you make time for friends and/or family when you've got deadlines to meet?**

Just like any other job, you have to find the balance that works for you. But

ultimately, I set expectations right up front. If I might have to miss a family trip because of a shoot, I let them know the first I hear there *may* be a potential issue. It helps for people that don't know the creative world to set those expectations because it's a volatile industry with a lot of ups and downs. Most people know more secure job worlds, but if they love you, they'll respect and support that - as long as you teach them about that world.

**Are there habits or goals you're still working on related to balance?**

Yes, regarding stability and security, I still struggle with maintaining daily lifestyle habits when I'm *not* working. I try to keep a few of the same things in my schedule to ground me (i.e. go to a coffee shop at the same time, write at the same time, go the gym at the same time, etc.), but it's still difficult to find enough solid things to have in your schedule, but not full time things because when I go back to work, that's a complete schedule all its own. Most of the success of being a creative person is how you handle things mentally when you are not working, and I have gotten better at it, but still want to find a better balance of a full life during those down times.



**COMPENSATION**

Compensation is closely related to TIME so we're going to talk about both briefly and then do some exercises that touch on both as they're so deeply intertwined. First, I want to introduce an acronym you may already know but might not associate with creative work, "ROI" or "Return on Investment."

The idea with an ROI is understanding how much your are *investing* and what you are getting in *return*. For the example of creative work your investment is your time, your emotional energy, and your money (Yes, your money. You

often will need to purchase supplies, travel to a rehearsal location, rent a studio, transport goods, etc).

Also keep in mind that every time you say “Yes” to a project it may mean saying “No” to another project as you do not have unending resources. No one does! I also want to clarify what I’m talking about when I use the word “compensation.” Compensation does not *always* mean money.

Compensation can look like:

- Money
- Access to more work
- Access to a community you may not otherwise have access to
- Gift certificates
- Memberships
- Exchange of goods (ie. You take photos for a company and they give you merch)
- Exchange of services (ie. You design a logo for a yoga studio and get free classes)
- Tax Write Offs
- Transportation
- Healthcare
- Childcare

The above list is by no means exhaustive, but I share it because I want you to be able to think critically about what you can ask people for if they are not able to supply you with cold hard cash in exchange for your creative labor.

Think about compensation and time together when you accept a gig. Often times creative work is not just 10 hours = final product and you need to learn how to do these calculations on your own to determine if an opportunity is really worth it, or if it’s a person or organization who is not willing to compensate you properly for everything that goes into making your art, script,

### III. JOBS + WORK/LIFE BALANCE

performance, design, curriculum, etc.

Thinking about compensation and time as linked, here are some questions to ask yourself and to consider when you are approached with an opportunity:

- How many hours will this project take?
- Do I need to perform additional research in order to properly complete this project?
- How much is my payment for this project?
- What is the timeline of this project?
- If there is not payment, what other exchange could be made for my time and efforts?
- What will the reach of this project be?
- Will I be responsible for promoting this project?
- Could this project lead to larger projects?
- Is there an expectation for maintaining this project? (this can be common with physical and/or public artwork and design)
- Are there revisions expected for this project? If so - is that included or will the client pay for additional revision hours?
- Does this project connect me to individuals or a larger network that I'd like to work more with?
- Has anyone that I know worked with these folks, and if so, what was their experience like?
- Who will own the rights to the final project/product/design/etc?
- Do I connect with this project or subject matter involved?
- Do I connect with the mission of the client or organization?

What can be true for most creatives is that we underestimate the amount of time that a project will take.

A friend wants to develop a pilot with us to pitch at an online platform. Sure! Writing together for 6-8 weeks sounds awesome and you really like working with them. But have you factored in the time it will take to meet together to

discuss revisions? How about to research the right team to pitch the project to? And how about the time it takes to think through the production team, if you're given any input? How about to look at comp titles?

Oh yeah, and you remembered that you talked about the setting for this script being 18th century London. Now you have some research to do to ensure that your details are accurate and believable. Not to mention that whenever you actually *do* get to the studio office where you're pitching likely the executive will be running late and the pitch meeting that was scheduled for 12pm which was going to give you tons of time to get to your 7pm rehearsal across town with your improv team has you waiting in the lobby for 5 hours and then an assistant sheepishly enters and lets you know that actually the thing needs to be rescheduled anyway and "Would tomorrow morning work?"

Or how about a friend you went to high school with you reaches out to you via Instagram because they see that you just finished your graphic design program and they'd *LOVE* for you to draft up a logo for them for their new website. You got along well enough when you were younger and since you're just finishing school you want to beef up your portfolio, so why not? You let them know, sure, no problem! "Sure, sounds fun. Let me know what you're thinking," you tell them. You hear nothing. You forget about it, take a few other gigs, and three weeks later at 11pm they send you eight paragraphs of design ideas.

You wake up at 7am and look at your phone and you see three more messages from them asking, "Why haven't you gotten back to me yet?" and realize that you're going to be stuck helping this person for *FREE* on something you thought would take 3-4 hours and instead of helping out a friend you're made to feel like you're their personal assistant who can't do anything right.

I share these scenarios because I know people who have dealt with them. I know people who have dealt with *WORSE* situations than anything I'll share here, and I want you to have the foresight my peers and I did not have when we were younger to ask questions so you know the scope of what you are getting

into with a creative project.

One red flag I want to call out as well. Any time you receive an offer with the words “For Exposure.” I think these are my two least favorite words as they relate to creative labor.



 \* **exercises** \* 

Let’s work through a few scenarios related to **TIME** and **COMPENSATION** and thinking about the “ROI” of accepting a particular project or gig.

In the inbox of your social media of choice you get the following DM:

*“Good Morning. I am a Pre-K teacher with the County School District and I am writing to see if you could do a mural for our lunch room? It can be small so it should only take a day or two and we know that the kids would love it so much. Thank you! Mr. P”*

**Write your initial reaction to this below thinking about if it might be a gig you want to take or not and what questions you would have:**

**Now map out how long you think the project will take, from start to finish:**



Here are some other things to consider when these types of requests or gigs come across your desk:

- Is this a paid opportunity?
- How are supplies being managed? (Do you have to go get them, and how long will it take to gather them? Are you paying for them? Do you buy them up front and they reimburse you? If so, how long do reimbursement checks take to process?)
- Are you expected to create the design or does the school already know what they want?
- If they expect you to create the design, who is the team responsible for approving the artwork?
- Do you have to get a background check for this project? (Many public entities require this with vendors or contractors)
- Will the school have any information displayed crediting you with the artwork?
- Are you connected to the school in any way...as an alumni? Did you have family members who attended?
- Who will help you paint the mural?

Maybe you're thinking "Of course I would say yes! I'm not a monster! This is for school kids!" I would ask you this question – do you think the school is also asking people to perform non-creative labor for *free*? Are they sliding into the DM's of accountants asking for them to volunteer to do their bookkeeping? It's possible that people *are* volunteering with the school, however, they're probably parents of students, alumni themselves, or connected to the school in some other very real way.

So now maybe you're wondering how you can ask more questions about the project without hurting anyone's feelings. Here's an example of how you can

walk the line of not being an asshole, and still assert yourself and present your value to folks who honestly, may not have thought of your creative labor as something of value.

*Hi Mr. P!*

*Thanks so much for reaching out to me. It's so awesome to see educators taking an interest in the arts on behalf of their students! I'd love to ask a few questions so I can better understand what you and your team are looking for, and once I have that info, I can let you know if I'd be a good fit for what you need.*

- *Is there a stipend or pay for this project?*
- *What's your timeline?*
- *Who are the stakeholders or decision makers involved for the project?*
- *What design are you hoping for?*
- *What supplies are being provided?*

*I really look forward to hearing a little bit more about the project and I would also love to hear more about your students too.*

In sending this message you're not only advocating for your own time and value – you're also helping to gently guide the teacher and their team to think about questions they likely have *not* yet thought about.

Once you get a reply – you can make a decision as to whether it's a good fit for you. The teacher may write back and let you know that they can't pay – but that they have a big gala once a year and can give you a ticket. Or that their principal sits on the board of a local arts organization and they'd love to introduce you both. Or you may get no reply which is usually an indicator that they have not thought about the value of your work. Either way, your email was polite, thoughtful, and kind.



 \* **exercises** \* 

A friend's parent sends you the following email:

*“Hi, I’m Jimmy’s mom – I think he may have told you that I’m going to be opening a restaurant over on the east side this spring. I’m looking for a piano player to perform during brunch every Sunday from 8am–2pm. At this time I can only offer a \$50 stipend – but I can also offer \$100 gift card to our restaurant and we’d tag you on all of our socials (FYI we have 25K followers).”*

**Write out your initial thoughts and questions:**



In this instance, here are a few questions that I would have:

- How long would this be for? Is this a month? Just for the summer? Until

the end of time?!

- Is the \$50 stipend a one time stipend or every week? (You'd be surprised at how often two people can read a sentence completely differently).
- Is the stipend cash or taxed? If you live in a state where it's taxed that can add up quickly.
- How big is the room? Are we talking 10-12 tables or is it a larger space?
- Can folks tip you?
- What kind of ambiance would they be looking for? (Who knows...maybe she's imagining that you're going to be playing jazzy covers of Ed Sheeran songs and you HATE Ed Sheeran)

Another consideration on this gig is that most gigs and opportunities for musicians can include late Saturday nights (which make waking up early Sunday harder) and a fair amount of professional piano players I know get paid (yes PAID) by churches to play on Sunday mornings.

One option to consider is that you could ask her to do a trial run – maybe you do the gig for four weeks and either of you can decide if you want to continue. This can be a great way when you're feeling out a client to see if you are a good fit for each other.

There were so many gigs that I agreed to early on in my career that I *didn't* ask these types of questions about and instantly regretted my decision to say yes. Or projects I agreed to because I felt guilty and I resented them every time I showed up to work on them. Or gigs where the offer had been \$500 (and I could not believe how rich I would be!) only to find out it would actually take 6 months of nonstop work which, when I did the math afterwards, amounted to pennies per hour of work.

And that is not to say that I never accept an unpaid gig or lowpaying gig – but these days I always run an “ROI” test and sit with it for a bit before agreeing to work. I often ask questions and get the answers in writing and talk through timelines and budgets *before* signing a contract so I know exactly the scope of

what I am getting into, and in doing so, I've found that I am a much happier and well rounded human.

Which brings me to the third area to consider when trying to find what works best for you - your wellbeing. When I talk about wellbeing I'm not really talking about bathbombs and skincare routines and salad. Sure, if these areas help you to feel good, that's great.

But when I talk about *wellbeing* I'm talking about something much larger - I'm talking about owning your self worth, wanting to get up in the morning and engage with the world, freedom from anxiety of microaggressions about who you are, feeling safe in your body, connecting with the mission of your creative practice.

And there may come a time where you have a balance in how you're being compensated and the amount of time you're spending working but you find the creative endeavor you're engaged in isn't good for your wellbeing.



- **Your Name:** *Lindsay Verstegen, age 43*
- **Your Pronouns:** *she/her*
- **How do you identify yourself professionally (ie. your job title):** *Chief People and Inclusion Officer*
- **How do you identify yourself creatively (if that's different than your professional title):** *writer/poet, baker, connector*

**What have been some of the things you've considered when you've worked**

### **a job that wasn't related to your creative projects?**

Mostly, I've focused on who I'll be learning from and the energy in the setting of work. I've counseled many people on how to get work and how to explore work and I have always said that the most important thing is the people you work for and the people you learn from.

I've thought about this quote a lot as I've navigated my path:

*"It's no good running a pig farm badly for 30 years while saying, 'Really, I was meant to be a ballet dancer.' By then, pigs will be your style." -Quentin Crisp*

There is a fine line between working so you can meet your basic needs and not losing yourself in the environment around you. Whether you like it or not, and no matter how much you compartmentalize, work will rub off on you, so be sure the water you're swimming in is safe (and bonus if it's fun). I've thought about the number of hours required and also thought about it as a "means to the time I need" — so when it feels soul sucking or hard, I try to ask myself what I can learn from it or what I can observe that, maybe, I wouldn't learn or observe anywhere else.

### **How do you make time for creative projects even when you're working a 9-5?**

Waking up early.

Giving myself the first hours of the day without a device or screen and simply with pen and paper. I also move my body to invite a more open disposition to the world around me. And, as a working mom, I also accept that making time for creative projects can't necessarily be an hour+. I find bite-sized opportunities to be expressive and write or think. I try not to beat myself up, that being creative doesn't look the way it used to look in my 20s. There's nothing that kills the creative urge more than self-loathing or lacking self-

compassion. And at my day job I try to stay weird and creative because hell, that's ultimately why they hired me (in addition to my hard skills).

**How often do you “log off” from work related responsibilities? For example - do you stop answering emails at a certain time? Or set aside days where you rest from your work?**

I try not to look at my phone within a half hour of waking. And try to power it down by 9pm with a bedtime of 9:30. I know rest is the key to feeling like myself and I honor myself by prioritizing sleep.

I attempt to be judicious about what emails I respond to because I know I need to be intentional about the message sent when EVERYTHING IS URGENT. spoiler alert: **it's not**. Needless urgency can crush your soul and the souls around you. I am a leader and I know that people take their cues from me and that my time reflects my values. If my time after work is spent in emails or calls that says something to me, to my kids. So I am not perfect but I try to remember my guiding principles and do my best.

I save weekends for baking bread, sourdough bread. I try to stay out of my email when I can. I check it twice maybe, more if I know something is going on that I need to be aware of. Baking bread is mostly a winter activity for me (and I live where we have winters that are cold!) and sourdough reminds me that nature has a pace and some of the best things take real time. Baking bread has become a weekly ritual that counterbalances the rush rush rush of my work life.

**If someone isn't able afford to freelance in their chosen profession full time - what do you recommend for them to keep their creative projects going?**

Look for where you can insert your creative superpower into your working life even if the person who did it before you didn't do it that way. Try to find ways to encourage your colleagues to create together. Building great teams

requires shared humanity and it's sometimes activities together that aren't explicitly in the job scope that bring us closest together. Find someone you can share your work with so that you keep your creative fire stoked and also so they hold you accountable if you stop creating and sharing for too long!

**How do you make time for friends and/or family when you've got deadlines to meet?**

I remind myself that time is the only resource I don't get more of in this life and I really try to look out ahead at my schedule. Again, I meet my life where it's at and if hanging out with a friend or with my family can only happen in bite sized moments, I seize them. And I try to own whatever decision I make and let my friends or family know what I'm attempting to balance and integrate.

**Are there habits or goals you're still working on related to balance?**

Yes, of course. Work/Life integration is an ongoing effort. I do my best to integrate my selves and help each part of me show up in all facets of my life. I am trying to remember that the point of life isn't output or accolades but rather time well spent be it on a creative endeavor or connection time with folks I love. I know there is no "perfect" and my goal is simply remembering that consistently so that any self-critical thoughts don't steal time away from anything I'm doing or rest I should be taking.



 \* **exercises** \* 

*Consider a job you currently have or a job you've recently applied for while*

*answering the questions below.*

**What are the work hours? Do you like the schedule?** *(Some people love a 9–5 job, some thrive on freelance)*

**Does your client and/or colleagues honor who you are?** *(Example: do they respect your pronouns or point of view or lived experiences and/or expertise that you bring to the table)*

**Do you like the physical environment where you are working?** *(I've been in situations where I loved the mission or tasks I was doing but the building didn't have air conditioning or a place to store my lunch, etc)*

**Do you connect with the work?** *(Sometimes the pay is great, the coworkers are fantastic, but you don't actually like the tasks or creative work you're doing)*

**Have you realized something about yourself through this work?** *(Did you think you were going to love doing a certain type of creative activity but once you*

were being paid to do it, did it take away the joy of it?)



- **Your Name:** *Burton Miller*
- **Your Pronouns:** *he/him*
- **How do you identify yourself professionally (ie. your job title):** *Former Social worker, current Corporate community engagement and sales coordinator.*
- **How do you identify yourself creatively (if that's different than your professional title):** *Writer, producer, podcast host, performer*

**What have been some of the things you've considered when you've worked a job that wasn't related to your creative projects?**

Finding a job has many considerations - but one of the larger umbrella factors is our fickle economy. Sometimes we have the luxury of having multiple things to choose from, and sometimes we don't. But, even in difficult economies I think it is still necessary to set out criteria for what you want and what you're willing or unwilling to do. A job will have a huge bearing on whether you still have energy remaining to pursue creative endeavors so this process requires your self-respect.

One major consideration that has become important as I've grown older is

whether or not the job is an “undertaking.” Undertaking jobs are jobs where you’re required to launch something, create a new program or product, and oversee development in multiple domains such as staffing and team building, program or curriculum development, and/or operations. Undertaking jobs may also mean you also have to create the structures to support all of those things. These are the types of positions where you’re said to be “building the plane while you’re flying it.” These jobs can be extremely satisfying for creative types, but also incredibly demanding and draining. You will run the risk of not having much left for your outside life.

I was in an undertaking job for five years where I oversaw the creation and launch of a specialized program at a youth camp. There were elements that were very fun and creatively satisfying. I hired my own team, I wrote and piloted educational courses, and worked in a beautiful coastal setting. But this level of hands-on effort meant I barely had a life outside of work. Thankfully, for my final year with the camp, I negotiated an administrative and sales position which was mostly remote, so I reclaimed a lot of time which is how I wrote my first show.

Non-undertaking jobs are those where you more or less clock in and out and don’t take much home with you at the end of the day. Currently in 2025 as I’m writing this, my full-time job is a non-undertaking job. There are some undertaking elements, but nothing to the degree of working for the camp. I work in an office, I go home at the end of the day, and my work is mostly sales and administration. The pay is less than what I made at the camp, but it’s a mental trade-off. None of my responsibilities are urgent, I have health insurance benefits, I don’t supervise anyone, and we get free lunch - score!

The other part of job considerations for me has been my part-time work. I’ve had many side-hustles to bring in extra cash, and my rule for these is that they have to do double duty. This means that in addition to a paycheck, they have to provide me with something enjoyable or at least access to something that I’d otherwise have to pay for. The first side-hustle that unlocked this

rule for me was giving tours of a historical property in Massachusetts. I lived in an adorable coastal town called Ipswich during grad school and needed a low-stress part-time job. The town had a huge property called the Crane Estate with a beach, salt-marsh, woods, and a sprawling castle and gardens. Crane Estate is known for being the filming location for parts of *The Crucible* (1996), *Little Women* (2019), *The Witches of Eastwick* (1987) and more. Giving tours gave me an all-access pass to the property and arriving there each day in the gorgeous setting helped much of my other stress melt away.

Other double-duty side-hustles I've had have been kayak-guiding on the Colorado River, ushering at Vegas concert residencies, and being a bartender in the theater district of Cleveland which comes with cash tips and the occasional pair of free tickets to the traveling Broadway shows.

### **How do you make time for creative projects even when you're working a 9-5?**

I wrote my entire first show while I was working a 9-5. That being said, I was working from home and although I was in a relationship, we were long-distance at the time so I lived alone and did not have kids. Working from home meant I didn't give any hours away to a commute, and not having kids meant I had a shorter responsibility list than some others. I wrote that show at all hours of the day including morning, lunch breaks, and evenings.

One thing I'll mention about making time for creative endeavors - not all time for me is created equal. Two hours in the morning is not the same as two hours late at night. At night, I'm slower and more prone to mistakes. So, if I'm working on a project that is writing based - such as the show or the book that I'm currently writing - the most bang for my buck is in the morning. This might be 30 minutes on a weekday, but most likely it's those 2-3 hour chunks on a weekend morning. I have stopped sleeping in on the weekends - mainly due to my migraine management needs - so those quiet, early mornings on Saturdays and Sundays are a gold mine to get words on a page.

Evening hours are much better for editing, graphics, and shorter tasks that take less brain power. This year I launched a podcast and recording an interview in the evening over the computer is much easier than getting fresh words typed on a page. So, it's helpful to assess your functioning at different times of day and make your creative plans accordingly.

**If someone isn't able to do the freelance thing - what do you recommend for them to keep their creative projects going?**

If you're not able to freelance, it may help to reflect on if there is a paycheck job that is able to scratch your creative itch. Just because we're devoting our efforts toward an employer and not to our own freelance projects doesn't mean it's any less creative or valuable. Using our creativity toward a stable paycheck is a great use of creativity. Sometimes it's just in how we frame it. It doesn't mean you've failed or are less successful than any other creative.

I believe that creativity is both an outlook and a way of living - so the expression of that creativity can be anywhere - freelance work, self-employment, traditional employment, volunteer work, or hobby.



**CHANGING DIRECTIONS**

Sometimes we may really be connecting to the work that we're doing - but not connecting to the people we're doing it with. Sometimes we really connect with the people, but the project or design or writing that we're doing is not exciting. And many times - if they pay is good and it's not affecting us in a negative way, these can be great projects to bolster our resume or create contacts or build a portfolio.

But if you are finding yourself feeling physically or mentally unwell when thinking about completing work for a client or finishing a project with a company - it's time to think about exiting that relationship.

If you're moving towards cutting ties with a client/creative partner/producer/museum/gallery/choreographer/designer/etc. there are a few things you should consider:

- Can you end this working relationship simply by declining offers from this person in the future? This can be a very simple way to end a professional relationship with no hard feelings
- If you're in a more long term contract or creative employment can you speak with someone in their Human Resources (HR) Department about your concerns, options, or exit plan?
- And most importantly - before you write a nasty email or gossip with someone in the community about how shitty the place is...STOP. Sleep on it. Remember that *anything* you put in writing (email/text/social media) can very easily be screenshot, shared, forwarded, etc. Most creative and artistic communities are smaller than they seem - consider whether you want a future employer who might be friends with the person you're about to rip a new one to see that email.

So what do you do if you are not privileged enough to be able to exit a toxic workplace? There are tons of reasons people can't stop working somewhere - health insurance, lack of options, family members who rely on them, not having savings...the list goes on. If you find yourself in that position, you will want to be sure to care for yourself while you look for another gig.




 \* **exercises** \* 

*Take a few minutes writing and reflecting on the below.*

**Have you ever been in a position where you needed to part ways with another creative person on a project, job, position, or collaboration?**

**What do you feel like went well and what would you do differently - if anything - given the chance to do it again?**

**If you are not able to leave a job, what are things you can do to care for yourself in the meantime?**



The truth is - this kind of self work is a life long journey. Finding the right balance between your creative pursuits, work you're paid for, family and friends, and ensuring that you're making space for new experiences takes

TIME. It takes experimentation. It takes failing and trying again.

And just when you get it figured out - something in your life may change and you'll have to adjust everything all over again. But if you spend time investing in these skills, rather than being paralyzed by change, you will be able to move along with it.



**Job Therapy: Finding Work That Works for You** by Tessa West

*When we're unhappy in our jobs, we often attribute our frustration to a bad manager, boring tasks, and stressful workloads. But our dissatisfaction at work usually stems from a deeper psychological need that's not being met at work, like not getting the recognition you deserve. In Job Therapy, Dr. Tessa West helps you figure out the real reason you're unhappy and shows you how to find a new position in which you'll thrive, whether in a different role, company, or new industry altogether.*

**An Actor's Guide to Survival Jobs, Side Hustles + Side Gigs:** <https://www.backstage.com/magazine/article/survival-jobs-3260/>

*If you're an actor, you already know you're not just an actor. As you hone your craft and gain experience, you'll also need to pay your rent and feed yourself along the way. This is where a survival job comes into play. These flexible, part-time gigs allow you to fit auditions into your schedule on short notice. Pretty much every actor has relied on a survival job to pay the bills at some point in their career.*

*Although waiting tables and temp work are both classic survival jobs, there are*

*a lot more options out there—especially with the rise of the gig economy. In this in-depth guide to survival jobs, side hustles, and side gigs, we'll walk you through the most common jobs for actors, as well as some gigs you may not have considered. Or, consider using your acting and performance skills for shorter or more flexible gigs while you audition for your dream job!*

**Art, Inc.: The Essential Guide for Building Your Career as an Artist** by Lisa Congdon

*In this practical guide book, professional artist Lisa Congdon reveals the many ways you can earn a living by making art—through illustration, licensing, fine art sales, print sales, teaching, and beyond.*

**Real Artists Have Day Jobs: (And Other Awesome Things They Don't Teach You in School) – A Comedian's Witty Guide to Personal Growth and Creative Living** by Sara Benincasa

*While the practical aspects of new adulthood can be nerve-wracking—dating, job-hunting, money-managing—the most important task of all is figuring out who you are and where you fit in the world. Author and comedian Sara Benincasa, now in her mid-thirties, had an absolutely harrowing early twenties and now, on the other side, she has a LOT of hard-earned wisdom and common sense to share.*

*Real Artists Have Day Jobs includes 52 witty, provocative essays on how to live like a real adult—especially for those who have chosen a slightly more offbeat path to get there. Chock full of information and advice, Sara's warm, smart, empathetic, and quirky voice is relatable to everyone from twenty-somethings and recent college grads to anyone a bit older who's still trying to figure things out. While Sara doesn't have all of life's answers, this indispensable book has more than its share!*

**The designer's guide to improving agency-client relationships:** <https://uxdesign.cc/the-designers-guide-to-improving-agency-client-relationships-67dc6db909f6>

*Providing design solutions as a third party to clients (large or small) is a daunting task, and more often than not, this isn't simply because of the challenge of the design, but instead a myriad of other factors. These factors, although not all purely design, have a strong consequence on how the client-agency relationship grows and consequently how well the design is received and implemented.*

**Bad bosses, low pay, big mistakes: How to navigate the pitfalls of starting a new job:** <https://www.npr.org/2024/02/08/1196978613/bad-bosses-low-pay-workplace-culture-young-professionals-advice>

*It's your first day at a new job. You're meeting colleagues, finding the bathrooms, learning the new software. It's an exciting time, but it can also be a scary time. What if you don't like your boss? What if you don't fit in? That's why multimedia producer Elainy Mata started the podcast *New Here* last fall for *Harvard Business Review*. It's "for anyone who is starting a new job or doing something new at work," she says — especially if you're just beginning your career.*



4

## IV. LIFE ADMIN



And now some sad but necessary news for you - you're going to have to take care of all the stuff in your life that either your parents did for you or that you've

put off since transitioning from a teenager to a governmentally recognized ‘adult.’

I am so sorry to break this to you. Your email inbox? Yup, you’re going to have to start managing that. Your calendar? Yup, that too. Professional creatives that you work with will not be amused if you miss deadlines.

And the dreaded voicemail box? You’re going to have to finally set it up. No more “this mailbox has not yet been setup” if you want to get booked for gigs. All of this stuff I’m talking about is what I like to call *admin* and you’ve got to get good at it in order to do the day to day stuff as well as your dream creative projects.



## **YOUR EMAIL AND YOUR INBOX**

First off - you’ve got to get an email address that is not associated with your school (either high school or college) and doesn’t have a cutesy animal or the number 69 in it.

Most people opt to have either their name and a number or city or identifying fact in their email ([lanadelreysinger@gmail.com](mailto:lanadelreysinger@gmail.com)) (*No that’s not her real email...* ) Or something like ([stevenlacy2009@studio.com](mailto:stevenlacy2009@studio.com)) (*Nope that’s not his real email either....*) But you get the idea. I can’t tell you the amount of resumes I’ve looked over with email addresses like [fartknocker89@yahoo.com](mailto:fartknocker89@yahoo.com) and just passed on the job application completely because it let me know they’re not professional. So get yourself a respectable email address. If you don’t have one already close the book right now and go set it up! Seriously, I’ll be here when you get back.

Now that you've got your email created, I want you to create a signature that gives people some information on how to get in touch with you. A signature are the words at the bottom that will be how every email you send is signed.

Most people opt for something along the lines of:

- First Name Last Name
- Title or Job
- Website or Social Media Handle
- Phone Number

Mostly I'd advise against putting any more information than that in a signature - once in awhile I've seen folks put their working hours like:

***I read and respond to emails between 9am-1pm PST Monday-Friday***

This can be really helpful as a freelance creative because it allows you to have time where you do not have to be online and lets the sender know that you're off the clock because it's 2am on a Saturday.

You'd be surprised how many people expect an INSTANT response and when you include this info it can relieve some stress for both you and them.

After you've got your spiffy new email and your signature set up - you're going to need to find a way to keep your inbox organized so you don't miss job offers, artist collaborations, gig opportunities, rehearsal updates, etc.


**exercises**



*Let's take a few minutes to think through your new shiny inbox and how it can help you with a few writing exercises below:*

**Will you only use this email for work/gigs/creative stuff?**

**What email will you be using for your personal life - app subscriptions, social media, newsletters, etc?**

**How often do you check your email currently? Do you think you should check it more or less?**

**How are you going to ensure you don't miss anything in your inbox? Do you have a habit of checking your email, opening it, and then not opening it again?**

**Once you've answered an email or taken the action that you need to take - are you going to archive these emails? Put them in folders? Label or tag them? Color code them?**

**When you get an email that requires action - do you answer it right away? How do you make sure that you'll do what you need to do with it?**



If someone is asking you a question over email that you don't know how to answer yet - you can always write to them and let them know that you've received it but have not yet answered it.

Here's an example of something I do to help folks know that I've received their question:

*Hey X,*

*Thank you so much for reaching out to me!*

*I'm not sure yet (INSERT THING HERE like: what day the event will be, if I can come to that rehearsal, what color the fabric will be, if I want to take the gig....etc).*

*Let me work on getting an answer for you – it might take a week or so – but I’ll get back to you next Monday, even if the reply is “I’m still working on it”*

*If you have a specific deadline you need to hear from me by (<—in case they didn’t say this in the email) or any questions let me know.*

*I’ll be in touch soon!*

This gives you some freedom to get organized and also lets the person know that you’ve received their email.

Just remember that you’re going to need to follow up! So make a plan to keep yourself accountable so that you get back to them.



- **Your Name:** *Sapira Cheuk*
- **Your Pronouns:** *she, her, hers*
- **How do you identify yourself professionally (ie. your job title):** *Artist and Arts Administrator*
- **How do you identify yourself creatively (if that’s different than your professional title):** *Artist*

**How do you deal with the little tasks that creep up on you like annual doctor appointments or paying bills?**

I try to set up multiple reminders! Google Calendar, my task app (I use TickTick,

not sponsored, but it's REALLY good), Outlook task reminders, etc. I don't clear the notification until the task is complete or I reschedule it to another day. If something can be automated, like automatic bill payment, I try to set it up and forget it.

**How do you prioritize what to get done when you have 'life' stuff to balance alongside a larger creative project you're working on?**

It really comes down to task prioritization and time blocking. The simplest way is to pick a day, usually the start or end of the week. Write down everything you have to do, and rate their urgency and importance. The 'life' stuff is often urgent and takes up much of your day, while the larger creative projects are often more important to you. Understanding there is a difference and prioritizing them will be helpful. The Eisenhower Matrix is a good tool for setting priorities for each task. Once that is done, you will schedule them into your upcoming week by blocking out time for each task. Make sure to build in a buffer periodically in case a task takes longer or something more urgent comes up. This way, you make sure there is time for what you want to get done for the week, you have a plan for success, and it'll free up your brain to do focused work instead of wondering when you'll get to do X.

**What's something you wish you had known in your 20's about managing 'all the things' that we have to do to adult?**

I'd wished I had known that the adult things aren't scary. Things like dealing with banks, taxes, dentists... It just feels scary because you haven't done it before. These adult places/tasks understand that you don't have the knowledge or experience, and there are plenty of folks to help you. You just have to ask! Also, the scary part is where the growth happens, and approaching them as an opportunity instead of dread is a great way to shift your mindset.

**When you have a large scale creative project, how do you break it down into manageable parts?**

Project planning is very important, and there are many methods out there on the internet. In the simplest way, write out each component and figure out all of the project steps you need to do to complete those components. Then schedule them in, using the task prioritization and time blocking method mentioned above. There will be weeks where you may not be able to work towards your project, but don't beat yourself up! Progress is always better than quitting because you got frustrated or overwhelmed. Lastly, it doesn't matter what project it is, it will take longer than you think



*Take a few minutes writing and reflecting on the below.*


**How do I stay organized right now?**

**Is it working? Or have there been times I've missed something?**

**When I have an upcoming appointment or deadline (meeting, doctor visit, dentist, taxes due, etc) how do I make sure I get things done on time?**

**Do I treat things for school/my job differently than I do for the things that aren't related to school/work?**

**Are there things my parents were doing for me that now I don't know how to do?**



Maybe you're wondering why I'm making you do all this writing before I actually show you some ways to keep organized. I know, I know. I feel the same way sometimes when I am trying to get better at something - *JUST TELL ME HOW TO DO THE THING!*

But in the long term you're also going to need to be able to figure out when and why you're doing these things in order to create good habits.



  **community perspectives**  

- **Your Name:** *Burton Miller*
- **Your Pronouns:** *he/him*
- **How do you identify yourself professionally (ie. your job title):** *Former Social worker, current Corporate community engagement and sales coordinator.*
- **How do you identify yourself creatively (if that's different than your professional title):** *Writer, producer, podcast host, performer*

### **How do you deal with the little tasks that creep up on you like annual doctor appointments or paying bills?**

Always schedule that next appointment before leaving the office! I have about a 75% success rate of going to my annual and semi-annual medical and dental appointments if I make the next one before leaving the current one. Sure, I end up canceling some of those for different reasons but I'd rather go to 75% of my scheduled appointments than 100% of my non-existent ones.

I have all of my bills on auto-pay and distributed throughout the month so they don't all hit at once. But I still have a budget-tracker where once or twice a month I fill out all of my expenses (and every single debit or credit card use!) so I always know where I'm at financially. This is a bore and at times anxiety-inducing, but as someone who spent years being absolutely terrible with my finances, this is a discipline I've developed over the last eight years and by now it's indispensable for me to stay on track. I don't set aside specific time for budgeting, but one of my rules is that if I naturally wake up early like 5:00 AM and can't fall back asleep after 15 minutes, I'll get up and try to tackle some admin before getting the shower and getting ready for work. Otherwise, I'll need a two hour chunk on a quiet evening or weekend morning to do my monthly budgeting.

### **How do you prioritize what to get done when you have 'life' stuff to balance alongside a larger creative project you're working on?**

At the end of the day, there's only so much that I can schedule, automate, and commit to tackling on-the-go. Once all is said and done, I try to use my freedom as an adult to do what I want to do when I want to, and not do what I don't want to do when I don't want to. Sometimes I don't want to do the dishes so they sit in the sink for two to three days and I continually spray some water on them. Sometimes when I'm coming home from work I'm excitedly thinking about my four hours of "free" time that evening and all the things I can accomplish, and then I sit down and watch four episodes of *The Real Housewives of Salt Lake City* (Heather Gay is inspiring!) and then pass out. Some nights my partner and I spontaneously go on a date and see a movie or go out to dinner and don't do any chores at all.

There are rhythms and seasons to everything. We have conscious control over some of that, but the rest is subconscious and even involuntary. For me, leaning into that has been freeing.

**When you have a large scale creative project, how do you break it down into manageable parts?**

How do you get to Carnegie Hall? Spreadsheets, spreadsheets, spreadsheets! For me, if it is not on a calendar, a spreadsheet, or a list - it's not happening. People will say "that's so organized!" but in fact it is the opposite. I am so *disorganized* that if I don't write something down, my head will not retain it at all. I have spreadsheets in my google drive with lists, I have lists in my phone note-pad app, I have handwritten post-its on my desk and in my wallet, and I have 8.5x11 handwritten weekly calendars with more lists. Most of the time I don't even do everything on the lists! But having something documented on a list means I don't have to try to hold it inside my head anymore and for me that's progress.

This probably goes without saying but when working on a large-scale project, you should write out a timeline sooner than later. I start with a due date and work backwards, being extra generous with the timing knowing how long

everything takes – not just for me but in terms of trying to get things done out in the world. This will help you sketch out the “big moves” and then fill in the smaller ones.



## **DIGITAL CALENDARS**

Some of us do really well when we have an electronic nudge to get something done. For me, I have found that by having a reminder when something is coming up it helps me get it done on time. It’s also a great tool if you are collaborating with someone so that you both have the same dates and deadlines in your calendar.

One cool thing I’ve found with electronic calendars is you can usually set up reminders. Let’s say it’s October and you scheduled a doctor’s appointment for January. If you put it in a paper calendar, you can’t get a reminder about that appointment without actually going to look at the January page in your planner.

But with a digital calendar you can usually choose when a calendar event will send you reminders. When I’ve got an appointment like a doctor or dentist a few months ahead I’ll ask my calendar to remind me a couple of times rather than just once. Using the example of the January appointment with the doc that you set up in October, I would set up the following reminders:

- One reminder in November (so I can start to put a few dollars aside to pay for the visit)
- One reminder in December (so I make sure I’ve got the time off from work)
- One reminder the week before the appointment (so I can fill out any paperwork ahead of time and avoid having to do it in the office)

#### IV. LIFE ADMIN

- One reminder the day before (so I don't totally space it and end up having to pay a no show fee!)

And you only have to take the 5 minutes to set up those reminders ONCE. By investing the time on the front end you save your brain from having to think about it later. Because let's be honest - will you really remember to do ALLLLLLL the things listed above without any reminders?

The other part I really like about online calendars is that you can set up an event as recurring. For example, I do this for my bills. When I move to a new place I always set one day aside to set up my google calendar with all the new billing dates and have them email me reminders a few days before the bill is due. Thanks to this, I have not ever had a late payment on a bill.



#### **ANALOG CALENDARS**

For those of you that are visual learners - a paper calendar can be a really great option. In my experience it does take a little more time and interaction (like a paper calendar can't send you an email to remind you about something!) however, a paper calendar can be really good if you're a tactile learner.

If you're going to be a paper calendar person - it's important to get the right kind of organizer.

- Do you need a paper organizer that has hour by hour breakdowns per day?
- Or has an overview of the month or year?
- Or both a larger overview and day by day breakdown?
- When will you update your calendar? Every day? Once a week?
- How will you ensure that you look at your paper calendar once a day so

you don't miss anything?

It can also be useful to do a combination of paper and digital. Sometimes when I have a large project that I'm working on it can be a useful exercise to map out all the steps of the project on a paper calendar - but use a digital calendar for my day to day time management.



*Take a few minutes writing and reflecting on the below.*

**If you have a hard time with things outside of school/work getting done, why do you think that is?**

**Is it that you are uncomfortable with these types of things? (Doctor appointments, bills, etc?)**

**Or do you have a harder time keeping up with work related things? Or do you have a really hard time with both?**

**What feelings come up when you are writing about this? Frustration? Shame? Surprise? Excitement to get organized?**



It's okay if you felt uncomfortable doing these exercises - and it's also okay if you felt good and want to move forward. These are the types of exercises you can come back to at different times in your life as well and see if your answers changed - because you are always going to be changing!

Not every tool below is going to work for every person. I would encourage you to try each of these for a bit and see what works best for you. Don't get discouraged if the first method doesn't work! Keep trying - this is something you're doing to invest in yourselves and most investments don't pay off right away.



➤ 🌀 **community perspectives** 🌀 ➤

• **Your Name:** *Erika G Abad*

**How do you deal with the little tasks that creep up on you like annual doctor**

## **appointments or paying bills?**

- I learned to save bit by bit with every payment I received. I have two checking accounts, one savings account and most recently a certificate deposit account. I am answering this question from the position of having a normative full time job with a part-time long-term hustle.
- I plan my doctor's appointments around my work schedule. I address my health care attentive to securing the financial needs to be able to afford them. Having worked through tumor removal, radiation, bereavement, among other life circumstances in the past, I proactively make a point to financially plan when I am healthy to ensure planning around my work schedule no longer exacerbates my health needs.
- When I made less money, I had applied for a health credit card so that I could make payment plans on things like oral surgery, and other large-billed health visits. In between having a health credit card and having a job that allowed me a health savings account, I would set money aside in the savings account I got with my first car loan so that if anything happened that I couldn't cover with the credit card because I didn't have it anymore. Or the health savings that I didn't have yet. The initial expense wouldn't hit me as hard.
- On the years I was healthy, I also asked myself if I could afford to not have health care because at the time people were being taxed if they didn't, and I did what some folks call a cost benefit analysis in those years, making sure I was taking. Really good care of myself so that the fact that I didn't have health care didn't affect me. I also mediated where and with whom I saw healthcare because of resources like urgent care or needs like sexual assault survivor related mental health support and I, when possible sought affordable outlets in that way.

## **How do you prioritize what to get done when you have 'life' stuff to balance alongside a larger creative project you're working on?**

- Since the fear of cancer had propelled me to be a curator in 2021, I learned

a few things about life and project balance. I approached curating with attention to care period. I worked hard to do the bare minimum because I knew I was following my health and, amid quarantine, I also understood that many others, especially full-time artists, were grappling with parallel financial struggles and uncertainties given the toll of quarantine on the economy. I did my best to do what I could with the time allotted me and made tough calls about not applying for grants or asking for financial support from colleagues I may not have had a good relationship with because I did not want to put additional physical or mental task on myself or others.

- Similarly, and I acknowledge that I am reporting this as someone whose financial goals and commitment to stabilizing addressing health needs superseded long-term/full-time commitment to a creative career. I only take on what I know I can finish. As I transitioned from curating to creative writing, I prioritize sleeping and pacing so that I could enjoy my creative practice. It's been an ongoing journey to unlearn working through emotional pain, health instability and exploitative suffering. Because so much of my 20s and early 30s before I got a full time job had normalized meeting professional goals over enjoying my life/youth.
- In the wake of my hysterectomy, I am removing projects from my plate so I can focus on my health and on financial planning to best address my health needs with the most care and patience possible.

**What's something you wish you had known in your 20's about managing 'all the things' that we have to do to 'adult'?**

- In my 20s, as a child of divorce with no generational wealth, I prioritized my career over a social life in ways that, now that I'm financially secure, have had its toll. I was really good at setting timelines and reviewing deadlines. During graduate school, if it wasn't going to help me build my career to become more financially secure in a way that I could live with and still be a creative, I didn't necessarily pursue it. During those early grad school years, colleagues and I went to a local bar's Latino night,

which provided stress relief and a social outlet. I also made sure to use my frequent flyer mile credit cards so that I could offset the cost of traveling. I was able to do this because I was the college student who did not get credit cards until I was in my early 20s. At the time, the logo on my debit card was building my credit. Student loans had been another way and, I was grateful to have learned about income-based repayment before finishing graduate school, as that allowed me to minimize the toll of student loan debt on my credit score.

- So what I did well in my early 20s was manage my credit and make fiscally conservative decisions to ensure that in my 40s, I have a great credit score and can begin to develop savings and, with my full time job develop a retirement plan.
- Unlike most people my age who either have larger student loan debt, even when subsidized loans were a thing for graduate students, The thing I wish I had known are the invisible rules about career development and social networking and community building. When I was younger in undergrad, I was told grad school was enough, only to get to grad school and realized that it wasn't. Where I went to grad school mattered in terms of the jobs I could seek, the resources I had at my disposal, and the professional opportunities I would have as a result. While my undergrad career had established a network of connections that would eventually become useful when I was applying to the job market and beginning the conference circuit to present my preliminary research, I had to redevelop my creative and research agenda various times given the limited resources I had to fund my work. In other words, because of my fiscal conservatism, in many respects. Some of the projects that I wanted to do were delayed and continued to be delayed as I'm still learning how to seek resources. For them.

**When you have a large scale creative project, how do you break it down into manageable parts?**

- This question depends on how you work well with others. By nature, I'm

a collaborator from brainstorming to info dumping and processing with others to think through ideas and because you know, youth of isolation between high school and grad school. I also realize that , in my ADHD and anxiety tend to adjust well to body-doubling, affirming supportive environments. Collaborating with others is how I've normalized socialization and so, when I have a large scale project, I look at the deadline if it has one, I look at life events, and then I make a plan. And in making my plan, I consistently ask myself what is my capacity? And how important is this?

- Before I became a guest curator for the UNLV Marjorie Barrick Museum of Art, having learned from the Women of Color Arts Festival Co sponsored shows that had taken place during quarantine, I had asked for a timeline and I had asked for a budget. I asked for these two things that I could make feasible and practical decisions. While various factors informed why I didn't have the budget until two weeks before the show, I adhered to every deadline for the timeline that I was provided to ensure that I respected the labor of the museum staff, and that I respected the time and the trust that artists were giving me and helping me build this mixed media story that I was telling. What's more, I went into curating with an agenda based on the larger organization's expectations of the museum as well as my own professional and political agenda given the years artists had trusted me to write about their work.
- And so from what I learned as a curator, um. I have adapted to every other writing and collaborative project I pursue. As a college professor, I have my students read work via their paid jobs so that they're getting trained and I'm getting feedback for the audience I intend to engage. In addition to that, I plan and pace around collaborators' times and responsibilities, knowing full well that my creative practice is not at the mercy of my financial needs. So I tend to be slow, I tend to be patient, and I tend to set a minimal set of projects to complete. So that in the flexibility and the time that I have to generate as much as I do, I am one, not overworking myself and two, not overworking my collaborators and the organizations who are supporting and or publishing my creative works.



## **ARCHIVING & ORGANIZING YOUR CREATIVE WORK**

Sometimes we don't take pictures of our work because we feel like it's petty or silly or self absorbed. But in addition to creating your work - you're also going to be your own documentarian.

If you write a commissioned post for a news outlet - make sure you download and archive it because if the company folds you want to be able to show your past work.

If you have a piece of artwork that is part of a group show - take pictures. Download a press release if you can that has the names of the other artists involved. You won't remember in 5 years - I promise! And you'll want to look back and reference it for that grant application or residency.

If you do an interview with a local media outlet - screen record it from their website. Again, you just don't know when it's going to be taken down and it would be a bummer to have great PR that you no longer have access to because the internet link stopped working or someone deleted their Youtube page.

And if you have the ability - document it with photos in person. If you're in a performance and you can ask the company photographer to buy some photos - do it! If you have a sculpture outdoors at a park - document the installation process.

When you work in creative industries your work will many times be ephemeral - only a few people may see it but that doesn't mean it shouldn't be part of your portfolio!

On that note - you can also start to think about documenting numbers.

Document your budgets – document how many people saw your work in person or read your published writing. If you’re doing commissioned work for someone as if they have any stats that you could have on hand about how your work will be used and how far the reach will be.

One piece of documenting your work is memory – but another piece is that you might want to seek out funding some day and pictures, numbers, and histories like this help you make a case that you’re the one who deserves the grant/investor/commission.



### **CREATING A ROUTINE**

Before you can really carve out consistent time for your artistic work and creation you likely need to create some routines around your life admin in order to have the mental, emotional, and schedule freedom to do so.

“But I’m working freelance right now and every single week is different – there’s no way that I can create a routine!”

I hear you. I have also been in that position – and I used it as an excuse to develop some unhealthy coping mechanisms that ultimately led me to wake up one morning realizing I was months deep into a depressive spiral.

I’m not saying that not having a route will definitely make you have depression – and by the same token I’m not saying that by having a routine you’ll be spared anything but perfect mental health.

But having a daily routine can be one tool to keeping yourself organized and caring for yourself.

Because many creative people do not have the same schedule of work each day - I'd recommend creating touchpoints throughout your day that can be done at any time.

Here are some suggestions:

- Have a tradition you do when you first wake up. Some days this tradition might happen at 5am and some days it might be at noon - and that's okay. It's more important that it be something that helps your brain and body know it's time to start your day. It can be as simple as a deep breath or as involved as a particular coffee brew method. Maybe it's a song you play when you wake up that fills you with warmth. Maybe it's opening the blinds and setting a daily intention - whatever it is - give yourself a minute each morning to enter the day.
- Set rules around your technology. Like we talked about with emails in other areas of this book - set rules around when you do or do not answer emails/texts/social media - work related or not.
- Have an end of day wind down routine. This does not have to be some twenty step two hour bath with candles/mile walk decompression/five page journaling type thing. Sure, if that works for you and you have the time - great! I have found the routines that are the most likely to stick are the simplest, easiest, and quickest. During the pandemic when I was working from home I created a routine where at the end of the day I simply said "shutting down now" while I closed my laptop. This was a physical and auditory way of signaling to my body that work was over now and it was time to transition to non work activity.



## **KEEPING YOUR PHYSICAL SPACE ORGANIZED**

So we talked a little bit about how to keep your digital life organized, now we're going to take a little bit to talk about your physical space.

I know there are so many trends right now in how we take care of and organize our space - minimalism, konmari, NEAT method, clutterbug, the five point rule....the list goes on.

One thing all of these methods have in common is intentionality. As creatives we are gifted with intentionality. In order to be a great visual artist or designer we must understand the intentional layout of shapes, colors, and textures. As performers we must understand that what is said or done during a show is as important as the moments of quiet and stillness onstage. As architects the space between speaks as much as the concrete walls holding up beams and a roof. We are accustomed to making intentional decisions.

I want to encourage you to apply this to your physical space when it comes to getting organized.

No, I'm not going to suggest that you toss out all of your belongings or fold your clothes in a specific way or shred all of your old papers.

But I am going to give you some basic tips that will allow you to be able to run to a last minute show, design meeting, performance, rehearsal, or interview at a moment's notice. It will also allow you to find the supplies that you need to practice your creative work - whatever it may be.




*Take a few minutes writing and reflecting on the below.*

**Do you currently feel like you can find things in your space when you need them?**

**When inspiration strikes or you have a project you want to work on, are your supplies accessible to you?**

**How do you make time to clean up your space in between work/projects/etc?**

**Given that we can't all magically move into a new space (even though it would be great, right?), is there anything you could do in your current space to make your life easier?**



I ask these questions because starting to think about the space we live in as a tool can be helpful. It can be a tool to help you calm down, a tool to help you finish your creative work, a tool to help you prioritize what's important to you.

Do you want a space that you can do your painting in? A space you can dance in? A space you can write and cook in? A space you can practice yoga in? A space where you can host friends?

Identifying the needs and wants you have for your space should come first. For example - if you're color swatching some design ideas but have the one window in your room covered up by boxes of old collectibles you don't really love anymore - your space isn't serving your wants or needs.

Beyond thinking about how you want your space to serve you - you should also have a few areas in your space that you keep important things like:

- Your wallet and keys. Have a designated area so when you have to leave in a rush, you are not running around looking for these two items. A bowl, a hook, etc. Anything where every single time you come home you put them in the same place is going to save you so much headache!
- If you're going to an interview, rehearsal, or meeting the next morning, lay out what you need the night before. It takes 5 minutes. You will be so glad you did it in the morning, especially if for some reason your alarm didn't go off!
- Find a place to write yourself notes and reminders. It doesn't even have to be something you go out and purchase - but have a place you know that you look often to help remember things like "Portfolio submission due Feb 21" or "Charge your phone" or whatever it is that you have trouble remembering!

- Where do you sleep? What can you do to make that area restful and peaceful? Doing your artwork/writing/singing/sewing/designing/memorizing lines in your bed is not going to be helpful in the long term. Figure out a place where you can do your creative work that is not where you sleep. Even if it's just the other side of the room - give yourself some physical space that's just for resting.
- Keep a notepad by your bed. When you're falling asleep in case you have an idea, creative vision, task that you remember when you're almost asleep - whatever it is - you'll be able to get it out of your brain so you can rest.
- Give yourself permission to change your space. Something that serves you one year may not serve you the next year - it's not a sign of failure or stupidity if something is not working for you anymore. It's a sign that you're changing and growing which is a good thing!

Regarding the keeping of things that you might use later, especially for creative projects, give yourself a deadline. If you have not used something for over a year for a show/project/design/install and it's relatively inexpensive and easy to replace - consider if you would rather do something else with the space it's taking up.

I'm not saying that your space has to be pristine, I'm not saying that you can't hang onto things - all I'm saying is it's worth taking time to get your physical space in working condition so you can make the things you were born to create!

The way you organize your time, your projects, and all of the other 'stuff' that are part of adulting is going to change over time. You're going to have different chapters where something works for a while, and then, you'll find that you need to adjust it.

I encourage you to ask other folks in your life how they manage and to keep trying different things until you find what works for you. Most importantly, be kind to yourself as you navigate all of this - we're all a work in progress

and most of us are still figuring this stuff out even twenty years into our professions!



 further learning 

**The Ultimate Time Management Toolkit** by Risa Williams

*Do you find time constantly slipping away from you? Or does completing a to-do list feel totally unachievable? We all have 24 hours in a day, but sometimes putting them to good use can feel like an impossible task. The Ultimate Time Management Toolkit is here to change that!*

*Written by a clinical therapist and author of The Ultimate Anxiety Toolkit, this book focuses on practical methods and strategies, including creative worksheets and easy to use techniques, to help you find your motivation, achieve your goals and feel less stressed about organizing your time.*

**How to organize Gmail like a pro:** 12 strategies that actually work: <https://www.notion.com/blog/how-to-organize-gmail>

*In this guide, we show you how to ditch the inbox chaos for a more efficient way of handling your emails. You'll discover: 12 valuable tips to organize your Gmail, the best tools that can help you transform your inbox and a simple way to automate your inbox management and prevent clutter.*

**How to Adult** by Stephen Wildish

*Adulthood (verb): To do grown-up things and hold responsibilities such as having a job, paying rent or doing laundry. A verb used exclusively by those who adult*

less than 50 per cent of the time. If you've forgotten to pay your council tax, you're hungover at work (again) and you've been living off pesto pasta for the past seventeen days, it's time to adult. Authentic grown-up Stephen Wildish has produced a book for everyone who feels they need assistance getting through the confusing landscape of the real world.

**Life Admin: How I Learned to Do Less, Do Better, and Live More** by Elizabeth F. Emens

Every day an unseen form of labor creeps into our lives—stealing precious moments of free time, placing a strain on our schedules and our relationships, and earning neither appreciation nor compensation in return. This labor is life admin: the kind of secretarial and managerial work necessary to run a life and a household.

*Life Admin* tackles the problem of admin in all its forms, from everyday tasks like scheduling doctors appointments and paying bills, to life-cycle events like planning a wedding, a birth, a funeral. Emens explores how this labor is created, how it affects our lives, and how we might avoid, reduce, and redistribute admin whenever possible—as individuals and as a society.

**Laziness does not Exist** by Devon Price

Like many Americans, Dr. Devon Price believed that productivity was the best way to measure self-worth. Price was an overachiever from the start, graduating from both college and graduate school early, but that success came at a cost. After Price was diagnosed with a severe case of anemia and heart complications from overexertion, they were forced to examine the darker side of all this productivity.

*Laziness Does Not Exist* explores the psychological underpinnings of the “laziness lie,” including its origins from the Puritans and how it has continued to proliferate as digital work tools have blurred the boundaries between work and life. Using in-depth research, Price explains that people today do far more work than nearly any other humans in history yet most of us often still feel we are not doing enough.

**Deep Work: Rules for Focused Success in a Distracted World** by Cal Newport

*Deep Work—the ability to focus without distraction on cognitively demanding tasks—is one of the most important abilities you can cultivate in our current moment. It’s a skill that allows you to quickly master complicated information and produce quality results in less time.*

*A mix of cultural criticism and actionable advice, Deep Work offers a vitally important message: in our age of constant distraction, focus is a superpower. With inspiring examples and clear rules, Deep Work will teach you to introduce this ability in your own life.*

**Walking in this World: The Practical Art of Creativity** by Julia Cameron

*Picking up where Julia Cameron’s bestselling book on the creative process left off, Walking in This World presents readers with a second course—part two in an amazing journey toward discovering our human potential. Full of valuable new strategies and techniques for breaking through difficult creative ground, this is the “intermediate level” of the Artist’s Way program.*

**Make Your Place: Affordable, Sustainable Nesting Skills** by Raleigh Briggs

*Raleigh Briggs teaches us how to craft a sustainable domestic life without relying on smelly, toxic, expensive consumer products. And it’s not as hard as we may think! This hand written and drawn book of charming tutorials is both fun and accessible. It’s full of simple skills that anyone can and should learn. From creating tinctures and salves to concocting all-natural cleaners and body products to gardening basics, this book is great for anyone looking to live more simply, create a comfortable nest, and truly do it yourself.*



5

## V. FINANCIAL BASICS



That was definitely me at 21.

I had finished school and realized I had over \$40,000 of debt and felt embarrassed, overwhelmed, and basically just didn't want to deal with it.

I remember the day I called all of my various loan companies and started to talk about how to repay them. I was staying for a week with a friend in Colorado as I made my way west from Indiana to a summer job in California. My mom was changing her living situation and was leaving my childhood hometown and my Dad had recently relocated to Iowa.

In addition to feeling unmoored by family changes, I felt the cloud of debt hanging over me. I knew I needed to do something - I just didn't really understand what. So I sat in my friend Erika's room while she had rehearsal at a dinner theatre and started calling each loan company one by one and scratching out notes on paper.

Repayment for Sallie Mae could start in September of that year and since at the time I was unemployed - I could pay the smallest amount possible. For my private loans I could also start paying in September of that year - but they weren't as flexible as Sallie Mae had been. I'd need to pay a larger amount and the interest on the private loans was almost as large as the money I'd first taken out.

When I hung up the last loan call I realized I would have to figure out how much I'd need to make in order to pay the loans back. And then it sunk in that I'd also be starting to pay rent, internet, electricity, cell phones. I was planning on moving to New York City in August and the job I had in California in the short term would only really make about \$2000 for the whole summer.

I guess I had to...make...a...budget?

Neither of my parents were in a position to help me pay for overdue rent or

late fees on my loans. It started to sink in that this was MY problem and MY responsibility.

The room started to spin. I can remember feeling dizzy with the realization that money was going to need to be something I thought about EVERY DAY.

Hadn't I gone into the arts because I didn't want to have to think about money?

I started writing on the page everything I could think of that I would have to pay for.

Like EVERYTHING.

I hand wrote a list of things I knew I'd have to start paying for. I didn't know how much everything was going to cost so instead I started just with a list.

- Rent
- Food
- Subway Card
- Cell Phone
- Internet
- Student Loans
- Electricity
- Gas/Heat

At that time people were not required to have health insurance like they are today - so that's why you didn't see it here. In my mind I just had to not get sick. And guess what? That didn't work out so great when two weeks later I found myself dehydrated and passing out on the N Train with a raging UTI...but we'll talk about health and taking care of yourself a little later in the book.

I started running numbers on how much I could realistically make in a month once I got to New York. At the time most jobs paid about \$10/hour if you were

lucky. My college loans alone were almost \$500 a month. I realized...I was going to need a couple of jobs at first.

OOF.

The week before I moved to New York I started applying to anything I could and reached out to everyone I knew who lived there. Any former classmates, kids I grew up with in my hometown, friends of friends, friends of cousins - literally anyone I had ANY connection to. A girl I had grown up with was kind enough to put in a good word for me at the cafe she worked at so at least I had one part time job lined up.

From there, I added a part time admin job grant writing, a stage management gig that paid about \$100 total for 5 weeks of work, and a part time ushering job at an off Broadway theatre I could do on weekends and nights when I didn't have rehearsal.

It was a really *really* grueling few months of working seven days a week. I thought I could do it - and for a little while - I did! But almost no sleep and working that many hours commuting across town multiple times a day caught up with me. Every few weeks I would get sick and I mean SICK. Could not get out of bed SICK and then I'd be out of luck with bills because with all these part time jobs I didn't have any paid time off.

I realized that I needed to look for a full time job. Once again - I started asking anyone and everyone that I knew if they knew of any openings. I could make it work while I waited for the right thing. Fortunately, I met a TV and Film Producer through my college alumni association. *Sidenote: if you have a college alumni association for the love - please use it! People want to help you! Even if you think that no one in the alumni association has a job you want you'd be surprised who they know and what connections they have that may be what you need.*

I learned that this professional connection had a job opening that would pay

enough for me to cover my bills, get health and dental insurance, and even have a little extra spending money for the first time in my life.

Budget be damned! (*jk - please don't ever disregard your budget*)

I interviewed for the job and explained how my experiences of stage management and grant writing gave me a keen eye for details and project management, and how although I did not have a TV or Film background, I was quick to learn and willing to ask for guidance when needed.

For the first few months I worked there I could not believe that I was finally making enough to live on my own. I was paying all of my bills - but I wasn't really saving any money. And when I needed a little extra for something like a dental visit or plane ticket home to Vegas, I didn't have anything leftover and I couldn't have really put my finger on *where* my money was going.



  **community perspectives**  

- **Your Name:** *Paul Kastner*
- **Your Pronouns:** *he/him*
- **How do you identify yourself professionally (ie. your job title):** *Teacher*
- **How do you identify yourself creatively (if that's different than your professional title):** *Writer/theater artist. Formerly professional technical director and carpenter*

**When you were early in your career, what kind of information did you ask for about pay - if any?**

I really did not. I was very naive and pretty much just accepted what was given without trying to have a discussion of any kind. Because of this, I found myself taking several freelance jobs on top of each other and stretching myself incredibly thin. There were stretches of time where I would go months without a true day off and put in twelve plus hour days regularly.

**Who taught you how to budget - was it something you learned in school, from family, or through life experience?**

Through life experience. It became an immediate necessity in my 20's and when my wife and I were planning on getting married we had to formalize it. Before that point, I would walk around all day with a rough estimate in my head of how much money existed in my bank account and slowly tick that number down as I bought stuff. I was always intentionally conservative with my money, but trips to the grocery store were always a point of stress. I understand that I could have sought out budgeting information on my own, but it never made its way onto my radar.

**Were there any gigs you took where the work ended up being a larger project than you had considered for the pay?**

Absolutely. So many things early on. When I was working as a TD and carpenter there were many gigs I took for a stipend that went way over my initial assumed time commitment. I remember one extremely ambitious TD job that I was trying to complete on top of working in a scene shop from 6:00am until 5:00pm. After leaving the shop at 5:00pm, I would build the other show until 2 or 3 in the morning, then drive back to the scene shop, sleep in my car for a few hours, and repeat. Luckily, this didn't last long, but the stipend for the TD gig was \$500, so I'm sure I ended up making a couple bucks an hour, tops. The set looked amazing, but it was not worth risking my sanity and health.

**What do you wish you had known about finances when you were earlier in your career?**

## V. FINANCIAL BASICS

How to negotiate, how to discuss pay and salary, and how to budget. But honestly, learning how to negotiate would have been the most important. Being a part of a union and participating in collective bargaining has been a game changer, but most artists starting out are not unionized and often get taken advantage of. It is easy to write this off as a rite of passage or an unfortunate universal experience, but it does not have to be this way.



Looking back there were a few things *I* wish I had done differently too.

The kind of advice I have for you is not about investments or bitcoin or get rich quick schemes - those are the kinds of things that you should talk with a Financial Advisor about when the time comes.

Nope, the kind of advice that I have for you is more about connecting the dots between the money you are making, how you are taking care of yourself, and ensuring that you create good habits that allow you to live the creative life you want to pursue.

These are going to be simple exercises to help you start to think about money as a tool and start to examine more deeply your relationship with money so that you can get to the point where you can catch your breath and then connect more deeply with professionals about your personal journey.

Before we jump into this I want to note that money can bring with it all kinds of complicated feelings - shame, guilt, embarrassment. I have been there. I have been in your shoes - mortified that I didn't know how to 'make capitalism' work for me (*gross but real*) and like the other chapters - these are life long skills you'll develop and learn more about as you grow.

So let's start with a task that seems deceitfully simple.



exercises

**SPENDING REVIEW**

What's....a spending review...you ask? In the most simple terms it's looking at what you spent your money on and you categorize your transactions from a certain time period.

I like to start small. Let's start with today. What did you spend money on today?

Take 3 minutes and write below everything you spent money on and the amount.

Item	Amount

Now, let's take a few minutes and dive a little bit deeper.

## V. FINANCIAL BASICS

I want you to categorize each purchase as a “want” or a “need.”

After you categorize each item, you’ll write a bit more about the *why* behind each item.

The ‘why’ is open ended and up to you. But be honest – was it something to make you feel good? Was it something you needed for a project? Was it because you didn’t plan ahead (like packing a lunch for a long day)?

Item	Amount	Want or Need?	Why?

And finally, we’re going to write a little bit about how spending on each item made you feel.

This is not an area for self judgment. Instead, it’s a space to reflect on how our feelings, choices, time management, job demands, social connections – all of this is related to how we interact with our money.

- Did you resent that you had to spend money on anything in particular?
- Did you wish you could spend the money on something else?

AN OFFERING TO YOUNG CREATIVES

- Did you feel happy with your purchase?
- Did you wish you had woken up early enough to eat at home so you didn't have to spend \$20 on a crappy pastry + coffee?
- Did you spend money because you didn't want to be honest with a friend that you couldn't afford something?

However it makes you feel - write it out.

Item	Amount	Want or Need?	Why?	Feelings?

Next - I want you to choose an item you purchased recently that was a "want"

not a “need.”

If you didn't have any of those purchases today, think of something you bought that was a “want” in the last week. And it doesn't have to be something huge – it could be a snack or a book or a movie ticket or music subscription monthly charge. Something you paid for recently that is not a necessity.

*Write and reflect on the below.*

**What was the item you chose?**

**How much did you spend on it?**

**How often do you think you purchase this thing, or something like it?** (*For example – if you chose a takeout coffee or something small but recurring, how often do you treat yourself to this?*)

**Take a minute and log into your bank account and see how often in the past 30 days you've treated yourself to this thing (or something similar/in the same category). How many times is it actually?**

**What was the total amount you've spent on this type of thing in the past 30 days?**

**Does the amount surprise you?**

**Are there other things you'd rather do with that money?**



- **Your Name:** *Justin Favela*
- **Your Pronouns:** *He/Him, They/Them*
- **How do you identify yourself professionally (ie. your job title):** *Artist*

**When you were early in your career, what kind of information did you ask for about pay - if any?**

When I first started my art career I would usually ask the museum or organization I was working with what their budget was for the project. If they did have a budget I would factor the amount of hours it would take to make an artwork and make sure I was getting paid at least minimum wage. That was the old me. Now I know to include other costs, like materials, studio space fee, enough to be paid a living wage and I always at 10-20 percent for incidentals.

**Who taught you how to budget - was it something you learned in school, from family, or through life experience?**

Unfortunately, I learned to budget from trial and mostly error. I did take a business class in high school, so I was not completely in the dark. A few years ago I did hire a financial advisor who helped me out a lot and honestly, I should hire them again.

**Were there any gigs you took where the work ended up being a larger project than you had considered for the pay?**

There were so many projects that I got underpaid for. I am still not getting paid what I deserve on some projects, but at least I can still make a living.

**How do you respond when someone asks you to do your creative work for free or for 'exposure'? Has that changed over the years (now vs when you were starting out?)**

Thankfully, I haven't been asked to work for free in a long time. At the beginning of my art career, pretty much every "opportunity" that was offered was for exposure and maybe a free meal. You do have to pay your dues, as they say, but most people take advantage of artists because they know they can or they undervalue the labor that goes into their creative practice.

**What do you wish you had known about finances when you were earlier in your career?**

I wish I would have started saving my money for retirement earlier. Saving a little money in a high yield savings account, an IRA, or even buying bonds is a low-risk way to invest your funds if you have the time to let them gain interest. Also...make food at home! I could have bought a house with all the money I spent on eating out during college.



Now maybe you're sitting there wondering why the hell I'm getting up in your business about your money. "I THOUGHT THIS WAS A BOOK ABOUT HOW TO CREATE WTF WHY ARE YOU ASKING ME ABOUT THIS AND MAKING ME WRITE ABOUT IT!!!"

And here's the thing - as creatives who often do gig work or seasonal work - we have to think about this.

In the same way we talked about organizing space earlier and considering our priorities - with money I want you to be able to verbalize your priorities and see it reflected in your spending.

I think if we can see our values reflected in what we're spending on, we feel more at peace and more satisfied with our work, creative or otherwise.

One mental hurdle I had to overcome was resenting monthly bills. In a perfect world I would LOVE to see universal income, universal healthcare, and basic human needs met. I am a humanist and an optimist and I do have a certain amount of anger around the fact that many of us find ourselves without these needs being met.

However - all of that anger and resentment about my bills didn't change the fact that I still needed to pay them. In fact, all that anger around them and the guilt around not taking the time to examine my finances when I was young actually made it more difficult for me to verbalize what I actually wanted - and instead pushed me to create bad habits around *not* examining my income.

Taking time to check in with yourself once a week can help you to get a handle on what you are doing with your finances and *why* you are doing it. It can help you make a plan for how you want to spend your money, and in turn, how you want to spend your time.

When you have an idea of what you're spending on and what you need to spend

money on, you have a better idea of how many gigs you need to take. You have an idea of if you *should* be getting a 'day job' or steady income vs smaller streams of project based work.

Taking time to sit with your money and be thoughtful about your money – while at first may be something you feel like you need to resent – can give you freedom as well. You have the freedom to decide *how* you want to spend your time (and often your funds).

Before we move onto other exercises, I want to share perspectives outside of my own. In areas of money, you'll want to talk to lots of different kinds of folks at all different stages of life.



- **Your Name:** *Rhonda Schaller*
- **Your Pronouns:** *she, hers, hers*
- **How I identify professionally:** *Meditator, Artist–Educator; Creative Entrepreneur, Researcher*
- **How I identify creatively:** *Interdisciplinary artist–meditator–educator working at the intersection of community and contemplative practice*

### **Money, Mindfulness, and Making: An Artist's Field Notes on Building Financial Resilience**

Prelude: Why This Conversation Matters

Artists, creative entrepreneurs, and cultural workers often live within a

paradox: we're trained to attend closely to nuance and meaning, yet many of us were never taught how to attend to money without fear, shame, or avoidance. I entered this work believing that financial decisions were a separate sphere from creative life. I now understand that money is a language of values, boundaries, and care—woven into our practices as surely as color is woven into the pigment of the paint.

What follows is a set of reflections that answer specific questions. My approach to money aligns with an emerging movement inside arts education to place self-care and contemplative practice at the center of creative success, rather than at the margins. To include a mindful presence around all resources, financial, emotional, creative and spiritual.

*“We’re curious about the role of contemplative practices, mindfulness, and self-care as a creative practice and as a leadership tool.” Rhonda Schaller*

My own teaching and writing emphasize mindful presence as a practical skill: *My main mission is to teach people just to be present.* For many of us, presence is the first antidote to financial scarcity narratives that keep us underpricing, over-delivering, or staying silent when work agreements and payment terms feel misaligned.

Stop, breathe, observe and take action from a place of calm and awareness is key.

**When I was early in my career, what information did I ask for about pay—if any?**

In the beginning, I rarely asked the simplest questions: How many hours are assumed? What deliverables define “done”? What’s the payment schedule and method? Is there a kill fee? Do revisions count as new work? I often accepted a flat number as a sign of trust and “opportunity,” not realizing that clarity is kindness—for me and the collaborator. Over time, I learned to

request (and offer) a one-page scope: outcomes, timeline, milestones, usage rights, and payment terms for all of my commissions.

**Who taught me to budget—school, family, or life?**

Life did. Family offered frugality as a virtue, school nurtured critique as a tool, but neither gave a template for irregular cash-flow. My real teacher was the cycle of feast-or-famine, with planning tools using meditation and visualization. I built a simple rhythm: (1) a weekly 20-minute money check-in; (2) a bucket system—Taxes, Essentials, Studio, Meditation Cushion; (3) a rolling 90-day cash-flow view so surprises became probabilities, not panic. And attention to my meditation practice to maintain clarity and calm, with optimism and reality in check. That cadence let me see money as material: responsive, shapeable, and improved by iteration. Reinforced by contemplative practices to be present, breathe and with joy.

**Were there gigs that became bigger than the pay?**

Many. Scope creep often arrived through kindness—“one small addition”—that was really three extra deliverables. I learned to pause, breathe ... then name what changed, and offer a choice: adjust scope to fit the original fee, or expand the fee to fit the new scope. Naming is not a rupture; it is relationship care. Conversation and mutual agreement is necessary, it’s a shared responsibility between artist and collector.

**What do I wish I had known earlier about finances?**

That pricing is a boundary wrapped in a story. I am the author of my story. And the story can be updated. The fastest way to clarity is to (a) cost your time and overhead, (b) add a margin for creative R & D (the invisible part of art work), and (c) test your rates in the real world—then adjust. Most importantly, small, consistent actions beat heroic sprints. Meditate first, numbers second; both matter.

## Why mindfulness belongs in the money conversation

My work inside higher education underscores that contemplative practice is not a retreat from rigor; it is a precursor to it. And it belongs in how we educate ourselves around money and our reactions and responses to it. The Mindfulness Collaboratory's mission is explicitly to cultivate resilience for artists and cultural leaders by embedding meditation, visualization, and reflective practice into creative and organizational life, learning to create and charge for our services mindfully.

To learn more visit: <https://www.pratt.edu/mindfulnesscollaboratory/>

## A Closing Word

This essay is not an argument for austerity or for treating art like a spreadsheet. It is an invitation for creatives to practice a *mindful presence* with money, the way we practice presence with line, light, typography, movement, or performance. When we breathe, name, notice, allow ...and choose again, we update our story. We are each rich with possibilities to write new chapters in our story. Changing the way we relate to money, perceive fair profit, and ask for what is needful in payment for what we make - is an important learned skill, and part of how we can live into our right livelihood. Each time we revise our relationship with money, we strengthen the creative life beneath our feet, making space for the art that only we can imagine.



You probably have professional goals. Maybe you want to live in a specific city to practice your creativity. Maybe you want to work with an artist you look up

to. Maybe you want to win a certain type of design contract. Maybe you want to have a review from a certain publication written about you. Maybe you want to join a professional union. Maybe you want to shoot and edit a particular script.

I'm sure you have some *incredible* goals.

But until you get your finances in order it's going to be difficult to reach those goals. You may be able to finish some of them - but I promise if you take hold of your finances, reaching your goals will become easier in the long term.

I want to challenge you to make some small goals around your money - and then to work your way up to connecting how these small money goals connect to your larger goals.

Let's start with something small this week.

I want to pick you to pick one of the goals below this week (or make your own!):

- Do a spending review of your past week (if you do it for the upcoming week you'll act differently with your money - trust me.)
- Spend 20 minutes writing about what makes you anxious about money.
- Think of someone in your life that you trust and seems to make good decisions about their money. Ask them about their relationship with money and if they have any advice for budgeting.

*At the end of the week I want you to write a bit below.*

**Was there anything that surprised you in the exercise?**

**What are the areas you want to learn more about with money?**

**Who in your life do you feel like you can talk with about money?**

**What are some ways you feel like your finances affect your relationship with your creative projects?**

**What are some ways that you feel like being a creative person can be at odds with money?**

**What are some creative projects you would spend more time on if they were paid?**

**What are some creative projects you would spend less time on if they were unpaid?**



- **Your Name:** *Dāna James*
- **Your Pronouns:** *she/her*
- **How do you identify yourself professionally (ie. your job title):** *Creative Coach & Engagement Strategist*
- **How do you identify yourself creatively (if that's different than your professional title):** *Artist & Voice Activator*

**When you were early in your career, what kind of information did you ask for about pay - if any?**

Oh, honey, I didn't. Nothing and nobody prepared me to have to advocate for my value or for compensation. That part of working in our world, and the particular nuances to those dynamics hit me like a truck. One of my first office gigs, the universe brought me the most incredible manager and mentor. Very shortly after we started working together she saw me reorganizing the back end of the nonprofit's website. It was a challenge for everyone and I heard about it a lot from other folks on our teams. She said, "Dāna, I can promote you for skill sets like that. But if you just do it, then why would recognition

be important?” That changed things for me. It was the first time I realized that this game is more about what you CAN receive in exchange for your gifts, but what you WILL receive is much more about how you move, and what you won't give away without reciprocity.

**Who taught you how to budget - was it something you learned in school, from family, or through life experience?**

In a weird way, my mother taught me all I needed to know about budgets. Growing up “the budget” was this all consuming entity that never seemed to have enough, never seemed to be consistent with what it required of us and truly never slept. I also clocked early that we seemed to have and do a lot of things that were outside of what my mother's colleagues thought was reasonable. People were constantly commenting on my private school education, the international travel that was pretty normal for me, and other things my mother had vowed she would make sure I had access to, even if it was to the detriment of “the budget”. Once I was in control of my own relationship with my finances, I simply made a spreadsheet. I needed to know what this budget game was all about. What surprised me most was how easy it seemed compared to the immense pressure and stress around budgeting I had grown up used to.

Turns out if you just keep track of your bills and manage your money, both what comes in and goes out, and keep it sustainable, it's not the chaos demon I was led to believe. While I'm eternally grateful for the privileges my mother was determined to give me, there was definitely a cost to living beyond our means. As an adult now, I work hard to have a feeling of sustainability, of stability. My bills are always paid and I plan ahead a month. I'm still using that handy old spreadsheet, the same one I created when I went off to college. It's a little more complex now, but the math has gotten simpler.

Because building from a solid foundation is so much easier than playing debt games with yourself. As my income grows, I'm careful not to live beyond my

means or expand to my new level of income. My dad made sure to tell me that. So I guess I can thank both of my parents for showing me the spectrum of relationship folks can have with money. I'm very passionate about getting comfortable talking about money because it does seem to be a favorite color for the trauma fairy to paint with.

**Were there any gigs you took where the work ended up being a larger project than you had considered for the pay?**

Yes. All the time. At this point I realize that this challenge is more about my lack of artistry around deploying boundaries than anything else. I'm someone who is very adaptable and I give my whole heart to things. That doesn't necessarily mean that the gig is ready to reciprocate in that way. I tend to grow very easily and now I'm cognizant of not growing beyond what the space can support. This is harder than anything else I've had to do, but the reality of becoming overburdened by work that isn't yours can be one of our biggest hurdles as creatives. When I'm speaking now with my clients, most of what we talk about is how to communicate around boundaries while preserving relationships.

Both in our personal and professional lives, remembering to make sure we're pouring into our own cups and keeping them full is a tough medicine to get any human with compassion to do, especially nowadays. It seems counterproductive, but maintaining balance within ourselves and what supports us is the best thing we can do to bring our best selves and our best work to our teams and our audiences.

In the past I've become resentful when promises to reconcile the gap between what I was assigned and what I was being paid to do but resentment is rarely received with reparatory energy. Now I do my best to stay ahead of that curve, which helps me stay enthusiastically consensual in all of my relationships, especially those that pay me.

**How do you respond when someone asks you to do your creative work for**

### **free or for ‘exposure’?**

I don't. If I'm going to do anything for no compensation, it would be a favor for a friend, or it would be because it's something I proposed because I and no one else has deemed that it's worth my energy or something I want to be a part of. I'm not in spaces where this happens. And that's on purpose.

### **What do you wish you had known about finances when you were earlier in your career?**

That audacity and discernment have more to do with it than any certifications or degrees that you can amass. I coach creatives who have been recognized by institutions and academies all over the world, but when it comes to it, the act of negotiating their own compensation may still not see them bringing in a living wage. Invest in yourself and get comfortable thinking of yourself as a business. It doesn't have to be icky.

Those of us who aren't super turned on by capitalistic ideals often have a bit of an allergy to business baddie energy. But it's just another piece of our wardrobe we put on when the scene calls for it. Find the character and play with the energy. Make it yours. Because at the end of the day, this is just financial artistry. And we know how to develop our artistry. Happy practicing!



  **exercises**  

Choose one goal for the next month. You can choose your own or choose from the list below:

- Journal for 5 minutes each night about your spending. What patterns are

you starting to see? Are there things that you start to realize that you're spending on that you want to change your spending patterns around? Is there anything you would rather be saving up for or putting money towards?

- Do a spending review at the end of each week for a month. What emotions come up when it comes time to sit down and write about your spending? Do you want to avoid it? Or is it something that you're looking forward to? Are you making enough money to cover your expenses? If not - what seems to be causing problems? Are you working multiple smaller jobs throughout the month? One full time job? If you look at your budget - do you have enough to cover your 'needs'? Or are you coming up short even if you stopped spending on your 'wants'?
- Talk to three different people in your life about how they track their spending and budget. If they're creatives - ask them how they budget to be able to work on passion projects. Ask them who the people are in their lives that taught them about money. Talk to people who are in similar financial chapters to you (fellow young folks) and maybe, if it feels appropriate and/or safe - talk to someone a little older. Ask them how they (financially) got to where they are.
- Put together a budget for a project you want to work on. Think through if you would need to budget to take time off of paid work - think through the supplies and/or costs of doing the project. Write three ideas about how you could raise the money, save up for the money, or do the project on a shoestring budget. Don't do this all in one night. Take time to do it over

the four weeks.



- **Your Name:** *Gregory Peters*
- **Your Pronouns:** *he/him*
- **How do you identify yourself professionally (ie. your job title):** *Former Artistic Director of The Plagiarists*
- **How do you identify yourself creatively (if that's different than your professional title):** *Playwright, Director, Actor, collaborator*

**When you were early in your career, what kind of information did you ask for about pay - if any?**

When I was in college, my thinking around money in theatre was heavily influenced by folks like Grotowski, Peter Brook, and Erik Ehn (and later Howard Barker), who largely articulated an approach to artistic work that either didn't factor in money or rejected it as a corrupting influence. (RIP RAT Theatre movement!) The value was in doing meaningful work that you thought was engaging and would speak to the audience in some way. Ehn describes it specifically in terms of the priestly vow of poverty. As a middle-class Midwestern '90s kid with authority issues, money in theatre largely seemed to coincide with works that felt boring, safe, or stupid. I was already producing independent productions with no money before I graduated, so I never paid myself. Very few actors in the community were paid, so it wasn't even a question.

Once I moved to Chicago and we started our company, we made paying our collaborators a priority—not as an economic decision, but as an attempt to show respect for our performers. Even much larger storefront companies at the time did not pay, so we liked offering performers a small stipend (probably enough to cover some public transit costs). Even then, I rarely if ever took my stipend, just letting it go toward covering cost overruns. I have never been afforded the ability to work exclusively in the arts, so I've always had some kind of day job. I don't judge others who assert what they need to be paid on a project, but my approach can sometimes make me a little blind to the economic needs of artists. Luckily, we've had a lot of community pushback here in Chicago, so there are clear standards around when and how pay is disclosed. The upshot of this is I usually forgot to ask if I wasn't told.

**Who taught you how to budget - was it something you learned in school, from family, or through life experience?**

My father works in budgeting, so you'd think I got something from him, but all my fiscal planning knowledge has been self-taught. It helped that I started with such small budgets and built up over years. Experienced production managers & technical directors taught me a lot about how to design a show budget, and overhead was just priced by how much we spent the previous year. In later years, grant managers often offered us advice on how to approach and account for things, and we found out we'd been doing some things wrong for years. I really wish college curriculums had more to offer on this stuff.

**Were there any gigs you took where the work ended up being a larger project than you had considered for the pay?**

My perspective on this is a little weird, because pay was never a factor for me in why I took a job or what I expected the scale to be. I did have jobs that turned out to be more than I could handle or more than the production process would support. The first full Plagiarists show had seven or eight short pieces with moving sets and film interludes, and I literally had a sort

of panic attack/nervous breakdown during tech week (and I wasn't the only one). Directing storefront work in Chicago is extremely time- and energy-consuming. I sometimes think so much realism gets done here still because it's all people can conceive and execute without losing their minds.

**How do you respond when someone asks you to do your creative work for free or for 'exposure'?**

Ugh, I find the offer to do work "for exposure" gross and patronizing. But I do the work to do the work and don't really care about pay, I care how my time is used and how I feel about the project. I am aware that this is a privileged position I have due to having a day job and a spouse, but it is also a function of how miserable I am when I'm working on something I don't like or don't believe in, and how little theatre I see that I find compelling ("90% of everything is crap," as Theodore Sturgeon said). I also feel this may have been a factor that limited where my artistic "career" could go. I knew I was never going to be a professional actor once I realized that I would rather be at home than spend weeks rehearsing a play I don't like for a director I don't respect. Our company always tried to be cognizant of offering an enriching and collaborative experience for the artists we worked with. We were grateful for the time and energy they brought to the work, we never felt like we were offering them an "opportunity" that they should be grateful for.

**How do you fund projects you're passionate about?**

Many years ago, a local magazine did a feature on what theatre artists get paid in Chicago, and a successful storefront Artistic Director posted his income as negative. I didn't really get it until I was AD of a company and found myself making an annual donation that far exceeded any pay I received. So that's one answer. Grantwriting is another skill I wish I'd learned in school that I've gotten better at through practice. It's one of the areas in the arts where being able to talk articulately and passionately about a project can get you money. I found that working within the framework of our company meant that we

started with a set amount of resources, and would often select or develop projects that could fit those resources rather than the other way around.

As a writer, I would often think through some of the staging and production requirements to keep things achievable. If you consider the company as a whole, our most successful eras and projects were those that built or served a larger community. When we had a lot of opportunities to bring people who were interested in our ideas into our circle, that often led to deeper pools of talent, bigger audiences, and more donations. Basically, convincing others to share a dream project takes some of the load off.

**What do you wish you had known about finances when you were earlier in your career?**

If it's just one thing: if you don't want the stipend, take it and donate it back, that counts as budget and income. Otherwise, EVERYTHING. How to account for in-kind donations (or to account for in-kind donations), budgeting across multiple seasons, what FTE means...



**Finance for the People: Getting a Grip on Your Finances By Paco de Leon**

*Unlike most personal finance books that focus on skills and behaviors, FINANCE FOR THE PEOPLE asks you to examine your beliefs and experiences around money—blending extremely practical exercises with mindfulness, and including more than 50 illustrations and diagrams to make the concepts accessible (and even fun). With deep insider expertise from years spent in many different corners of the financial industry, Paco de Leon is a friendly, approachable, and wise guide who invites*

readers to change their relationship with money.

*With her holistic approach you'll learn how to:*

- *root out your unconscious beliefs about money*
- *untangle the mental and emotional burden of student loans to pay them off*
- *use a gratitude practice to help you think differently about spending*
- *break out of the debt cycle and begin building wealth*

*This book is for anyone who feels unseen, ignored, or bored to death by the way personal finances are approached and taught, and is ready to go on a journey of self-discovery and step into their financial power.*

*Paco de Leon is an author, illustrator, musician and the founder of The Hell Yeah Group, a financial firm dedicated to inspiring creatives to engage with their personal and business finances. Her career experiences in banking, business consulting, financial planning, and wealth management have informed her financial philosophies. She is a TED speaker and her work has been published or featured in The New York Times, NPR, Bloomberg, Vice, and others. She lives in Los Angeles with her wife.*

**Arts & Numbers: A Financial Guide for Artists, Writers, Performers, and Other Members of the Creative Class** By Elaine Grogan Luttrull

*The creative class artists, actors, writers, musicians, freelancers, dancers, performers, and the like are known for applying their passion for creative expression to everything they do. Perhaps the one thing that most fills this group with apprehension is the rigid world of numbers. This leads to problems arising from the unconventional financial and business situations of creative professionals, as well as the nonprofit organizations with which they're often affiliated. Finances, budgeting, and business matters can be dreaded, if not outright ignored, by creatives—to the detriment of their artistic pursuits.*

*Author, artist, and CPA Elaine Grogan Luttrull has written Arts & Numbers to help creative professionals find the same confidence in their financial dealings as in their chosen mode of expression. It is an engaging, accessible guide that covers a variety of must-know topics, such as budgeting, cash management, visual charting, taxes, employment, and business etiquette. In a simple, straightforward style, Luttrull draws examples from smooth-flowing narratives depicting common issues within the arts worlds, as well as from her own personal anecdotes. Unlike stuffy textbooks and patronizing business books, Arts & Numbers is a lively and artfully done ally in helping creative professionals plan their present financial situations and secure their futures.*

**The Creative Professional's Guide to Money: How to Think About It, How to Talk About it, How to Manage It** By Ilise Benun

*Creatives - which include anyone promoting their own creative services (designers, copywriters, photographers, illustrators, interior designers, web designers, and more) - are great at their work, but when it comes to running the financial side of their business, most would rather not talk about it. This book focuses on proven techniques and resources used by a wide range of successful creatives to manage their business finances. Expert advisers are interviewed on topics such as accounting, taxes, contracts and financial planning.*

*Ilise Benun is the author of 7 business books for the "creatively self-employed," a national speaker and founder of Marketing-Mentor.com and the new "Business Coach" for the Savannah College of Art & Design. During her more than 30 years in business, she has worked with thousands of creative professionals to help them learn the skills to build the business (and life) they dream of. She has developed and delivered programming for creative professionals, previously as instructor in the "Business of Design" graduate program at Maryland Institute College of Art and as co-founder/host of the Creative Business/Design Entrepreneurship program of HOW Design Live.*

**Wealth para todos:** <https://wealthparatodos.com/>

*Wealth Para Todos is committed to increasing financial literacy and confidence among BIPOC, women, and LGBTQ+ individuals, so they can retire early and work because they want to, not because they have to. We're dedicated to breaking down barriers for BIPOC, womxn, and LGBTQ+ communities and guiding you through dinero sin vergüenza. Embrace financial literacy as a social justice issue, heal from the wounds caused by systemic oppression, and tailor your personal finance journey with us. Stand with us in cultivating wealth for all!*

*Rita-Soledad Fernández Paulino is the founder and CEO of Wealth Para Todos, a financial coaching and education platform dedicated to removing barriers to financial security for marginalized communities. Soledad is a former public school math teacher turned personal financial educator and financial healer, who used zero-based budgeting to pay off student loan debt, create an early retirement plan, and achieve financial security. Through Wealth Para Todos, Soledad offers workshops, 1:1 coaching, a 12-month membership, and a weekly podcast to teach others how to self-care their way to financial freedom.*

**NPR's Life Kit:** <https://www.npr.org/lifekit>

*Everyone needs a little help being a human. From sleep to saving money to parenting and more, host Marielle Segarra talks to experts to get the best advice out there. Life Kit is here to help you get it together.*

*Marielle Segarra is a reporter and the host of NPR's Life Kit, the award-winning podcast and radio show that shares trustworthy, nonjudgmental tips that help listeners navigate their lives.*



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**MENTAL HEALTH**

When you think about great writers, painters, and performers, how often do

you conjure the ‘suffering artist’? Someone who has a sacrificial and toxic relationship with their genius creative work? Someone who made harmful decisions about themselves in order to create and in turn creating because they’ve made painful choices?

So many people romanticize the idea of creative suffering. I think there is an idea that to be a *true* artist you need to live a life of strife, self hatred, and destruction in order to say or do anything that matters.

What a terrible way to nourish the creative spirit and self.

I have many theories about why this thinking has prevailed for so long including lack of access to healthcare, stigma and shame around mental health, lack of financial resources, but it can be hard to shake tradition and legacy of self harm for your chosen craft.

For myself I definitely went through a period in my creative journey where I felt like I needed to be at least a *little* fucked up in order to make or say something interesting. Looking back, I think this stemmed from a lack of confidence in my artistic voice and untreated anxiety and depression disorders - but all of this manifested in a way that nearly took my vision and light from me.

During my younger years I was a straight “A” student, participated in every club you could find, and auditioned or worked on any theatre production my school had. I used my schedule as a way to drown out the mental chatter, lack of steady home life, and self doubt. Rather than learning stress management techniques or talking with a counselor, I found all of my self worth in performative action like good grades or extracurriculars.

I remember my senior year in high school having what was my first panic attack. A teacher I loved and looked up to dearly found me on the floor of our rehearsal room bawling my eyes out. I couldn’t speak - but what I could get out was panic about the future. Through tears I told my teacher that I

knew I'd never be good enough. That I didn't think I had what it took to go to college. That I was letting everyone down by even taking time to feel this way. I couldn't breathe and I was shaking. The teacher sat with me and slowly helped me sit up and instructed me to take deep breaths.

At that time I didn't have any context or language around anxiety. I didn't have any understanding of how to set boundaries, check in with my body, or take care of myself mentally. I was a Stage Manager in high school and loved to volunteer long hours. I didn't even know it was an option to say 'no' if someone asked me to pitch in and help.

I thought that I had to say yes to everything or I wasn't a team player. It didn't matter if I didn't feel well, or needed to rest, or just needed a mental break - I filled my schedule with as much creative work and academics as I could despite how it was starting to affect me.

When I got to college and my anxiety and depression ramped up - filling my schedule wasn't working as well as it used to and I could feel myself panicking under the surface. Rather than reaching out to the school therapist (which by the way was FREE) I continued to overbook myself. I would get sick because I never rested and tried to take on every opportunity that came my way.

I was having a harder time coping with my dark thoughts. I was having a hard time sleeping. Back home (as I went to college out of state) my family was going through upsetting changes with parents and step parents moving to new locations, ending some chapters, and starting new chapters.

If I'd taken the time to acknowledge that these changes were causing me stress - alongside the normal stress of college - it may have set me up to have a better relationship with alcohol, which I had just started drinking. At first it was mainly at parties or events, but over the following couple of years it morphed into a crutch for my creative self and a stand-in for mental health treatment.

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Rather than spend my time writing, making art, doing homework, and dreaming like I had when I was much younger, I started to spend more and more time drinking. At the root of my drinking was undiagnosed depression, anxiety, trauma from childhood abuse, and recovery from an assault. I thought that I could compartmentalize all of this in such a way that my art was the outlet and I didn't need help from any mental health professionals. In my mind, all I needed was to be able to work on creative projects and let off some steam by drinking. In college and my early 20's I was able to sustain being a high achiever while also drinking heavily. I held down multiple jobs during this time and NEVER missed rehearsal or work because of a hangover.

But drinking started to affect my creative life. If I wanted to make a piece of art, or write, or read, I felt like I needed to also have a drink, just to take the edge off. Some mindful breathing, meditation, and therapy could have had just as big of an impact if I'd been open to mental health care. Instead I started to foster an unhealthy relationship between my creative output and my drinking. I couldn't even make anything anymore unless I was a *liiiiittle bit* fucked up.

As I transitioned out of my 20's and into my 30's, I started having anxiety attacks any time I had to be out at night, which for a person working professionally in theatre, created all kinds of issues since most of my work required me to be out and about at night. It all came to a head however right around the time of my 31st birthday.

I had recently transitioned out of part time work with the Second City (a famous comedy and improv theatre in Chicago) and into a full time job with their producing team the year before. It had been my dream to work with them full time and I thought I would be with them forever. I also thought that by getting this full time job in my chosen creative field it would magically fix all of my mental health issues I mentioned before - depression, anxiety, and my ever growing drinking.

I threw myself into the position. I worked long nights & weekends. I opted out

of time with friends to instead just hang around at the theatre hoping that my bosses would see how devoted I was to the craft. I even stopped going home to see my family back in Las Vegas for holidays, deeming the opportunity to cover for the higher up producers much too big of an opportunity to display loyalty.

One particular weekend they had a Stage Manager call out due to a personal emergency and my name was first on the list asking if I could drive three hours from Chicago to Milwaukee to call cues on a show I'd never seen before. I was supposed to be at one of my closest friends' weddings the next day, but said yes to the gig.

I was sacrificing everything in my world for this position thinking that if I just gave more I would somehow feel better. During this time I had trouble sleeping. My mind would race each night when it was time to go to bed. Pouring over what I'd said throughout the day - was I funny? Did I sound smart? Had I said anything that sounded stupid? Was so and so mad at me? I'd replay every moment of the day, paranoid that at any moment I'd be found out as a fraud.

It was around this time that I started having more frequent panic attacks. Sometimes they were during the day and I'd need to walk out of the office and hide in a stairwell shaking and sobbing uncontrollably because I thought I was a complete waste of human space.

Sometimes I'd wake up in the middle of the night with a tight chest and throat unable to breathe. I'd be covered in sweat and just be sobbing. Inconsolable, my husband finally said the words I needed to hear, "I'm worried about you and I think you need help."

During this time I'd also started secretly using drinking as medication for my anxiety and panic attacks. Although I'd drank socially in the past, it had never really affected my work or my personal relationships. Now it was starting to affect both. I was going to work inebriated, but I was mentally and emotionally

unstable and not being a good friend, family member, partner, or colleague. And I was lying about how much I was *actually* drinking.

What was so upsetting and confusing to me was that I had everything I had EVER wanted in my professional life. I had theatrical projects lined up, got to work with people who were famous or about to become famous, a community of people that were also interesting and creative and that cared about me, and a partner that I loved and loved me.

But deep down I hated myself and it only made me angrier and sadder that I could not enjoy my success.

The kind of negative self-talk that rattled around in my head was so toxic the only way I could drown it out (because at this time I had not really tried therapy) was to drink myself into numbness.



 community perspectives 

- **Your Name:** *Layne Manzer*
- **Your Pronouns:** *He/Him*
- **How do you identify yourself professionally (ie. your job title):** *Strategic Corporate Marketer for an interior design firm (for some reason providing this title gives me the “ick”)*
- **How do you identify yourself creatively** (if that’s different than your professional title): *Artistic Creator (Which includes performance, writing, visual story telling, creating collaborative artistic environments)*

**What’s something you took for granted around mental and physical health**

**when you first started out in your career?**

When I first started out I wasn't fully conscious of my health limitations. Because I had to face my serious heart condition so young I spent a lot of time ignoring the severity of what this condition meant. We were all poor. All the artists around me were poor. We made just as much money as we needed to drink and be reckless night after night and have really great stories. I think that in pushing myself to exhaustion I wasn't able to use my "instrument" (my own body) in the most effective way. My performances were uneven. My professional relationships were muddy. My mental health was often being strained and distracted me from being my best product. I thought that the suffering WAS part of the art. And now I see that differently. But that might have been a product of wanting to collect as much dramatic life experience to draw from, as well. In retrospect, it just feels like it was messy.

**What are some of the things for young creatives to consider with their care and the types of jobs they take? Like for example - did you find yourself surprised by any of the physical or mental demands of your creative work when you were starting out?**

- Flexibility
- Able to shut off
- Financially consistent

In doing this long enough, I see many of my peers burn out. In school we were taught "if you can do anything else in this world... then you should" which made me think that you had to throw yourself into poverty, and work 3 jobs that were flexible enough to move around your actors schedule and when you weren't doing your art you were working. Now I see that's why so many of us burn out. Physically, it's impossible to keep up that pace.

As we age, being on your feet 8 hours a day is grueling for most. And health insurance typically isn't part of the gig. Once I started auditioning

for TV/FILM/COMMERCIAL work I needed something that would allow me to have stable income, with health insurance, but allowed the flexibility to audition. Something that allowed flexibility and didn't draw me into an all night party fest with my co-workers that made my brain squishy for that Super Bowl Commercial Audition the next day.

**What changed in how you cared for yourself as you've gotten further away from your 20's?**

I know it's easy to say this at 45 now that I have a job that I work from home and have a studio set up in my dining room for self tapes, but the industry changes and will change again and again. So really I had to think strategically early on. The first hard lesson that I learned was that *no one was going to come and save me*, I had to do that myself. This applied as a bigger note in my life but artistically it served as a reminder that I couldn't just think "One day when I'm rich and famous I'll invest in all those adult things I have to". I had to start doing it in the smallest ways. I had to take \$50 a month and put it away into an account I never touched. If you have autopay, you set up an account that you don't ever look at. Because I was always one health disaster away from having to quit my career. I was always one car repair away from not being able to pay rent. But the security that comes from a little tiny next egg began to allow me to take bigger professional risks.

Get your brain right... Being fu%ed up doesn't make you a good artist. I often thought that I was a good artist because I had all that trauma to pull from. But the reality is that it was all a tornado. I reacted to everything and didn't have control over my biggest tools. I learned that healing myself allowed me appropriate access to the emotional tools that I needed when I needed to use them. I could filter them into my writing without being scared of them, I could access those experiences without them owning me.

Find a process, because that is always something you can lean into. It protects your mental and physical health too because you can adjust that process

according to how you adjust with your health. So what does this mean... Not everyone memorizes or prepares a scene the same. I have a dear friend whose memorization is so easy for her. And for me it's something that I really struggle with. I always have. So I know that I have to set up a system for myself to get off book as soon as I can, because otherwise the anxiety of getting off book dominates my exploration of the role.

So that means, I set up a schedule. I spend the week before rehearsal doing my book work. After we rehearse a scene I dedicate a period of time getting that scene off book so the next time I work a scene I'm present and trying new things. When I write I loooooove brainstorming. I can get lost in it. I have notebook after notebook of ideas spilling into other ideas and making a story into a book and a play and a screen play. But part of the process I have to pound out is writing that first draft as soon as possible. Because the magic for me is in the editing. The pushing out of the edges of that world. And then it gives my brainstorming some structure so I'm following a thread. When you have a process you can adjust to your week with the flu or a bad breakup or losing your job. Because art still has to happen as we live life. It's the most important thing.

**How do you think creative folks can care for themselves when they have a limited budget?**

I think you should find an artistic mentor. I think that makes you feel tethered to someone who is balancing a healthy artistic life that you admire and want to emulate. That mentor may continue to change as you level up.

There are options for therapy and there are therapists willing to give you an artist rate. Mental healthcare will help you persevere a longer career.

Never skip the doctor. I had some pretty big bills from getting my heart hardware replaced. And I don't even think I had insurance for some big surgeries. And it was shameful and embarrassing. But I paid what I could

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(as little as \$20/ month) and I never had those bill collectors knocking on my door. But don't compromise your health because you can't afford the care.

Community is a form of healthcare. I'm such a stubborn individual and when I came to Chicago when I was 25 I thought I could only do it alone. But I now know that humans are meant to be communal/tribe-like in many ways. We share resources, we buy each other food, we take each other to the doctor.

I grew up in a rural town in the midwest that thought it was bad to use any government resources. And, honestly, this is why we have them. If you make below a certain income, you should check what resources are available to you for discounted health services. For me I leaned on the LGBTQ Center in my city. There are great resources in Chicago and LA. They often offer discounted or free healthcare services, including free STI testing.



*Write and reflect on the below.*

**Currently what is your decompression routine? How do you come down from a long day?**

**Are there times when you're not able to unwind?**

**How do you talk to yourself in your head? When your internal monologue is happening - is it kind?**

**Would you talk to other folks the way you talk to yourself?**

**How do you rest? For you is the only way you rest at night when you sleep - or are there other ways that you've found to reset your nerves/mind/spirit?**



- **Name:** *Mackenzie Cavalluzzi*
- **Pronouns:** *She/Her*
- **How do you identify yourself professionally (ie. your job title):** *I'm currently the Associate Director of Experiential Learning in the Center for Career and Professional Development at Pratt Institute. I oversee experiential learning and student employment strategy, and I'm a Gallup-Certified Strengths Coach.*
- **How do you identify yourself creatively (if that's different than your**

**professional title):** *Creatively, I think of myself as a connector. I connect learners to opportunities, ideas to action, and learning to purpose. My creativity lives in helping people gain clarity around their interests, strengths, and values.*

**What are some of the things for young creatives to consider with their care and the types of jobs they take?**

The majority of my job is focused on helping creative students find internships and jobs. In that process, I encourage young creatives to pay attention not just to the title of a job or the pay, but to its structure, rhythm, and the kind of mentorship available from their supervisor. Who will you be learning from? How is feedback delivered? Are expectations clear?

**How do you decide if a health care practitioner is the right fit for you?**

It takes time! The biggest indicator is whether I feel comfortable sharing. I require a lot of patience as a ‘patient.’ Do they listen fully? Do they explain things clearly? Do they take my concerns seriously? Do I feel comfortable asking questions? Feeling safe and heard matters as much as their credentials. It’s okay to try a few sessions and decide it’s not the right fit.

**What changed in how you cared for yourself as you’ve moved through different chapters?**

Earlier in my career, my thinking was very day-to-day. I focused on getting everything done well, being responsive, proving myself, and optimizing my productivity. Self-care often meant better time management or finding ways to squeeze more into a day. As my responsibilities grew and I began leading larger strategic initiatives (redesigning systems, aligning multiple stakeholders) my thinking had to shift from daily output to long-term sustainability. Care has now become less about managing my calendar and more about protecting my capacity to think clearly, lead thoughtfully, grow in my responsibility, and make good long-term decisions.

**How do you think creative folks can care for themselves when they have a limited budget?**

The Collaboratory (<https://www.pratt.edu/mindfulnesscollaboratory/>) has provided so many ideas! Taking a moment to arrive in a tough meeting. Taking a breath before responding to an email. Walking without my phone. Drinking enough water. Prioritizing sleep. Community is also a powerful and accessible resource!

**What are one or two concrete steps young people can take to care for themselves physically and/or mentally?**

**1. Build reflection into your career (even when you're not actively job searching.)**

Pay attention to job descriptions or titles that catch your eye. Notice the skills being asked for. Keep a running list of projects you've contributed to, problems you've solved, and feedback you've received. Career clarity develops gradually and sometimes changes over time. Ongoing reflection helps you make intentional moves instead of reactive ones driven by urgency or burnout. It also allows you to spot gaps early so you can build skills strategically rather than scrambling later.

**2. Choose mentorship intentionally.**

Seek supervisors who teach, not just assign. Early career roles should include guidance. You should be learning how decisions are made, how feedback works, how systems operate, and how to navigate complexity.



**PHYSICAL HEALTH**

I want to start this topic by saying you know your body better than anyone. If any part of this chapter doesn't ring true for you - for heaven's sake don't do it! If you have a routine of physical self care that's already working or are under the care of a physician, continue down the path where you've already had success.

But if you're a person who has not yet had the opportunity, time, space, or curiosity about your body and want to learn more, I hope these pages will offer some exercises and reflections to help you grow.

***When your body tells you something - listen.***

I had the opportunity as a young person to take dance lessons during high school in lieu of a P.E. course - and one of the biggest takeaways from the class (besides that I'm a very sub par dancer) was that if your body is asking you to stop doing something and you ignore it, the only mechanism it has to make you listen is to ask more aggressively to make you stop - and if you still don't listen - it might stop working all together.

We were doing stretches one day my senior year and even though our teacher was diligent in telling us not to push if we felt a pain, pop, or crunch. I wanted to give it my all and continued to stretch my left leg past where I'd been able to move it before. And wouldn't you know it even though my knee and surrounding muscles were telling me that they weren't ready to stretch that far and I felt a soft snap. Something in my left leg had moved in a way it really was not supposed to. For the rest of the day I could feel the pain.

I was in pain when I went to rehearsal that night, in pain when I rode the bus home, and had to gingerly climb into bed when I finally ended the day. Even now my left leg still gives me issues from time to time - although that's mostly the result of carrying a human being inside of me and giving birth - but I can

remember the time pre 'left side pain' and that I will probably not have that kind of time again.

I bring this up because our bodies are intrinsically linked with our creative practice. Dancers, painters, printmakers, actors, opera singers, fabricators, wardrobe technicians, lighting designers - the list goes on and on. Many of us rely on certain abilities within our bodies in order to perform our art.

This is not to say that it looks the same for anyone or that there is one 'right' body type or ability level, but I bring this up because your physical health should not be sacrificed for your art.

I had the opportunity to work for a few summers as a scenic artist at a repertory theatre. I spent long days and nights in the wood shop mixing colors, rolling paint, taping edges, washing brushes. One day another scenic artist and myself were in the small unventilated paint room and we realized that in order to get the shade we needed, we would need to mix the pigment with the base paint ourselves.

We got out all of our supplies - pigment, stir sticks, paint keys, drill with mixer, and colorless base. I was ready to get started and I realized she was still messing around with preparation. When I asked what she was still looking for she said she was getting her PPE on - gloves, eye goggles and a respirator. Even though I'd taken a stage safety course I looked at her like she was joking - WHY WOULD WE NEED THAT? We were 19 & 20 and in good health and we were just like....mixing stuff. Did she think we were going to be doing some kind of turbo paint event with ingredients flying everywhere?

I thought for sure it was some kind of prank and that when I started to put on the protective gear she'd tease me. Instead, she calmly waited for me to also get PPE and put it on while quietly telling me about one of her technical theatre professors at school who had a colleague that had died of lung cancer from years of exposure to theatrical paint, pigment, dust, glues, and chemical

vapors during their time as a prop master and scenic artist.

I was shocked. How could something as pure and wonderful as theatre HURT somebody physically?! Weren't theatres looking out for the health and safety of their artists?

Most of the time - yes. The museums, design firms, theatres, music halls, rehearsal rooms, sound stages, recording booths, and venues that you work in will have your safety in mind. However, there may be times when rules are bent to save a buck, someone manages a space and doesn't know what they're doing, or it's genuinely an accident and a hazard is overlooked. If you are in a situation as a working creative and your 'spidey sense' goes off and you do not feel safe - LISTEN. Ask questions.

Most artistic industries have someone whose position is responsible for your safety. A stage manager, site surveyor, compliance officer, engineer, safety officer, HR specialist, union representative, or operations coordinator. Each industry has slightly different rules and regulations - but in the US an organization called OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) helps to keep you physically safe on the job.

When you start a position or gig - be keen to learn about who in the company/venue/studio tends to these types of issues, and listen to your gut. If you feel unsafe find a way to speak up or talk to the person who manages these areas.



- **Your Name:** *christina michelle watkins*
- **Your Pronouns:** *she/her*
- **How do you identify yourself:** *writer/therapist*

**What is something that you took for granted around mental and or physical health when you first started out in your creative journey?**

When I was younger, there were ways I felt invincible physically. Not consciously, but I took for granted that my body would always just... work. Because at that point it mostly had! If I could go back in time, I think it would have been helpful to think about the importance of preventative care versus reactive care. And the importance of tending to the basics: food, water, sleep, and movement. These four areas impact mood, cognitive functioning, pain levels—everything.

Also, my teeth! I didn't understand how truly important dental care is! The year after graduating college and being without health insurance (this was pre- Affordable Care Act), I had a tooth abscess. It was incredibly painful, but I wasn't sure what to do. I was waitressing at a breakfast diner at the time, and I remember before shifts I would take shots of whiskey to try and help the pain, and when I got home, I would put a frozen fish on it (didn't have a legit ice pack) and eventually fall asleep. I was incredibly fortunate—I found out later that it could have been life-threatening because of the way bacteria could have slipped into my blood stream and infected my brain or heart. I eventually got it pulled, and here I am, about twenty years later, and I still need to get an implant put in. It's on my to do list to try and handle this summer. So my dental health being fine was something I took for granted.

I wish I could have appreciated my body for all it could do instead of just focusing on its flaws. I took for granted the ability to move fairly freely. I engaged in movement to try and change how I looked and didn't appreciate how many amazing things my body did on a daily basis. Even walking, which I used to think of as a "simple" activity, requires complex coordination and

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communication between your brain, joints, muscles, and bones. It wasn't until I started to have issues that impacted my ability to walk without pain that I really began to understand how many things went "right" with my body every day that I wasn't paying attention to.

Movement is important to me—for both my physical and mental health. If I don't get enough movement throughout the day, even just taking a few laps around the block, I feel off. In my training as a therapist, I now better understand the significant positive impact different kinds of movement can have on anxiety, depression, PTSD, ADHD, etc. And movement can look all kinds of ways! Lifting weights, dancing around the house to songs you enjoy, taking a walk, stretching. It all counts. Now that I'm older and dealing with a lot more health stuff, I'm having to think about ways to access movement differently than I did in the past—I wish I had been better able to appreciate what I had before. And am working hard to appreciate what I have now and not take it for granted.

My body needs different things at different times of the year, at different times of the month, at different times of the day. The last few years I've been trying to understand how to tap into and recognize my body's specific language. For example, what does my body feel like when I need more sleep? More water? Less screen time? More connection time with others? More connection time with self? What does it feel like when I need some time in nature? When I'm overstimulated vs understimulated? Our bodies can give us so much information and data! We just need to learn how to hear it and respond to it as much as we are able.

Mental health wise, when I was younger, I bought into the idea that the "best art" came from artists who were mentally unwell. So I was worried—what if I couldn't write anymore if I wasn't depressed? But what I've come to realize is that I was creating despite the pain, not because of it. And, when I'm well, I can create interesting things in a more sustainable way. And, similar to physically trying to get more attuned to what I need, I've come to better recognize when

my mental health needs are making themselves known. I know better what it feels like when I need to connect spiritually, create, journal, make time to process something with myself or a friend, and when I need to reach out to my therapist. The power of self-awareness—and substituting curiosity for judgment—has made a huge difference.

***How has how you've cared for yourself changed as you've gotten further away from your 20s?***

Physically, caring for myself as I've gotten older has felt less like a choice or luxury. The consequence for doing/not doing an action is much more immediate than when I was in my twenties. For example, it is annoying to have to stretch, but, if I don't, I end up injured. I don't always feel like going for a walk, but, if I don't, I tend to end up in pain because my body needs more movement. I have no idea how I used to pull all-nighters—I *feel* the way my brain doesn't work as well when I've not gotten enough sleep, how it impacts my mood, thinking, reaction time.

Before, I would have these high expectations for myself without even giving my body the bare minimum of what it needed. Now, I'm better able to calibrate my expectations on what I will be able to accomplish based on how I've been able to care or not care for myself. Still a work in progress for sure.

Mentally and emotionally, if I haven't been caring for myself, I usually can notice sooner than in my twenties. I used to constantly keep myself in motion until I finally hit a breaking point. Now, I recognize the signs that I'm doing too much and need to slow down. Something that makes a huge difference is when I remember to take ten to fifteen minutes a day to just lie down with my eyes closed. And usually when that feels more difficult, that's when I need it the most.

The last few years I've tried to look for patterns in what I need. I'm trying to learn from nature. For example: spring, summer, winter, fall. Those

are different seasons that need different things and have different purposes. Trees aren't always blooming and producing fruit. They aren't supposed to. Sometimes plants can look like they're dead/inactive—but they're resting and doing deep root work. We don't need to always be producing. That's the lie of capitalism. It's not healthy, sustainable, or natural. So, maybe in the summer, I find myself needing more time with people, and in the winter needing more time away. Or vice versa. Ok. It's what I need—and what if there is nothing wrong with that? Can I view my needs as neutral and not judge them? And my needs have changed over the course of my life, and they will continue to. So I try to pay attention, track the changes, and respond to them. Make it like a fun experiment.

***How can people care for themselves when they have a limited budget, limited capacity? What are some big things they can do for themselves if they don't have a lot of resources?***

Limited resources are a real thing, I don't want to pretend they aren't. I also think that there are ways we can empower ourselves to find where we do have choice, even while navigating a world where so much is out of our control. I remember reading something by Tricia Hersey, who developed The Nap Ministry (<https://thenapministry.wordpress.com/>) and is a champion of rest, and she said something about how rest can look like taking two minutes in the car or between shifts just closing your eyes. About making an intentional choice to put time aside for yourself. I think there is a real power in that.

I want to honor the reality of the impact of limited resources. And that's where I think about community, about mutual aid. How do we support each other? If you're needing connection, maybe there is a friend or a family member you connect with. You can write them a letter a week or send voice memos or talk to them. I have a group thread with two friends that is specifically a place where we share our joys with each other. That fills my cup and helps me work the muscle of noticing what is going well in my life and making choices that cultivate opportunities for joy. I have to remind myself that things don't

always have to be big to make a difference. In my experience and observations, it's actually small consistent actions that lead to the most change.

Maybe it's taking two minutes in the shower to imagine washing off negative gunk from the day instead of letting it stick to you. Maybe saying an affirmation or two. And it doesn't have to be a "positive" affirmation if that feels too strange. Go for neutral! Maybe it's shifting from "Ugh, I can't stand my body" to "I have a body. I have two arms and two legs." And if it feels like two minutes won't change anything... why not do yourself a solid and just give it a try? What is there to lose? Give it a week and take two minutes a day to engage in a ritual/routine. Maybe it's when you go to that job that you hate but pays your rent, before you go in, you say to yourself, "All right, I'm not going to take on what's not mine."

It's the intentionality that can make a big difference, just like someone can have all the money and go to therapy multiple times a week, but if they're not being intentional with it, it's not going to do as much.

And again, I will not pretend like money does not take away a lot of problems. It definitely allows there to be a higher chance of stability and happiness when, you know, your housing isn't at risk because you can't afford rent. Or when you can afford the medication you need or can afford going to a therapist or body worker for more support. There are basic things that everyone should have a right to—no one should have to earn the right to live; everyone should be able to live in safety with dignity. I'm just thinking about what can be done within the constraints we might be in at any given time.

I think when we can tap into our sense of agency to make *some* choices, even about very small things, it can help us stay connected to a sense of power that can support a sense of hope. And having a community that can hold hope for you and remind you of it when it's one of those days where you can't access it for yourself.

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On a concrete level, there are some great free resources. For example, public libraries often will have resources—groups, classes, tool lending, etc.— or can connect you to the resources you're looking for. You don't have to figure it out alone! A lot of therapists will have a certain number of sliding scale slots they offer and you can ask about that. Training clinics—mental health, acupuncture, massage, etc—often will offer lower fees if you are open to seeing a trainee. Open Path is a nonprofit that supports connecting people to sliding scale slots with therapists. There are certain organizations, like the Loveland Foundation, that offer grants for specific identities that can cover a certain amount of therapy sessions. There are sometimes groups that offer healing clinics within the local community. Sometimes therapists will have free resources on their website. Again, there is the need to have the capacity to be able to look for them or have loved ones who can look for you, so I don't want to pretend that's not a potential barrier. But encourage folks to ask for help how they can.

There are also podcasts, books, and individuals sharing information online that can be useful, like Dr. Raquel Martin. Just try and vet your people— just because someone says their name is Dr. XXX on Instagram, it doesn't mean they're doctors. It's not that you have to be a doctor, I'm not, but using that example to remind folks to just be aware that people can present themselves as a specialist or expert in something that they are not.

Try and find what works for your current needs. For some people it's therapy, for some it's their dance class, for some it's their spiritual community, for some it's sitting in silence by the tree down the street once a week. Usually, it's a combination of many things. But I encourage people to not give up. You don't have to and can't do it alone. None of us can.



  **exercises**  

**BEING IN YOUR BODY**

- Gather a pencil/pen and separate piece of paper or a notebook.
- Go to a quiet space. Sitting on the subway or in a loud classroom is NOT the space to do this exercise in.
- Think about something that frustrated you today. Not something huge – we’re not going to bring up trauma right now – but something small that bugged you. Maybe someone didn’t hold the door for you, maybe you got a passive aggressive text, maybe when you walked to this quiet space you had to walk by a stinky trashcan.
- Set your timer for 3 minutes and write on your paper/notebook about how you felt when you were frustrated by this.
- Did you feel hot?
- Did your throat tense up?
- Did your chest feel tight?
- Did you clench your jaw?
- Did you start to breathe more quickly?
- When you wrote about the thing that bugged you, did you start to feel that way again? Or did you not feel it in your body? Was it easy for you to shake it off when the timer went off or are you still feeling a little....crunchy?

I know it can feel silly. How can a three minute writing exercise help me to feel in my body? But these small changes in your body are important for you to notice and honor. If you feel ill after every being with a particular person – notice it. If you have an ache or pain in your back, leg, head, or stomach that becomes consistent – notice it. Try to figure out when you’re feeling the pain starting or subsiding so you can talk to a healthcare professional about it

thoughtfully.



community perspectives

- **Your Name:** *Justin Favela*
- **Your Pronouns:** *He/Him, They/Them*
- **How do you identify yourself professionally (ie. your job title):** *Artist*

**What's something you took for granted around mental and physical health when you first started out in your career?**

When I first started out I didn't realize how important rest was. My mind and body is now paying for all that I put it through in the early years.

**What are some of the things for young creatives to consider with their care and the types of jobs they take? Like for example - did you find yourself surprised by any of the physical or mental demands of your creative work when you were starting out?**

I did not realize how much of myself I was giving to people. I am a people pleaser, and I never wanted to let anyone down. I would agree to programs or commissions that I was not comfortable with but didn't want to seem difficult to work with. Now I know that setting boundaries and communicating what you are uncomfortable with is more important and will also gain you the respect you deserve.

**What changed in how you cared for yourself as you've gotten further away from your 20's?**

After you turn 30, your body changes so much and you start to feel the aches and pains that would normally subside in your 20s. I am now trying to listen to my body and actually ask for help from my doctor and other medical professionals. I am also in therapy and on medication for my mental health. I regret not getting the help sooner. As I got older I stopped caring about what people would think of me and all of the hang ups around therapy and mental health awareness.

**How do you think creative folks can care for themselves when they have a limited budget?**

Even though I did not get paid enough when I started my career as an artist, I was still able to surround myself with creative people that encouraged me and helped me when I needed it most. I think that finding your community and contributing to it is a great way to care for other folks and yourself. So many of my friends and fellow artists helped me in the beginning and are still my support system today.



**CONNECTING WITH HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS**

For many of you reading right now you may not have ever had to find your own doctor. Or dentist. Or counselor. Or therapist. You may not have had access to these services in your hometown. Or you may have had these services in your hometown but not had the funds to visit them. Or the transportation necessary to get to them. Or heck - you may not have felt *safe* in the presence of a healthcare professional. That's okay.

We're going to talk a little bit about how to find a healthcare professional for what you need and also explore questions to ask yourself about your interaction

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with them once you meet with them. The first thing you need to figure out is what you need to see someone about.

Do you have a toothache? Are you experiencing anxiety? Is gender affirming healthcare something you've been curious to learn more about? Or do you just want to talk to someone about like...generally are you healthy? It can get overwhelming to try and tell yourself "Okay I'm going to get healthy and by healthy I mean everything in my body will be perfect."



*Write and reflect on the below.*

**What is one thing you would like to talk to a healthcare professional about?**

**What has stopped you from talking to someone thus far?** *(Examples like Finances, not enough time, not knowing where to start, fear that something might be wrong, lack of access....write anything that's been in the way.)*

**Have you ever talked with anyone about this health issue before? If so - how did it go? Was there anything that happened that you wish had been different?**

**Who would the ideal health care professional be? Write about who the doctor would be - are they young or older? What gender do they identify as? Are they queer friendly and/or queer? Do they come from the same background or culture as you? Are they direct and get to the point - or do they like to have small talk a bit during the appointment?**

**What mode of meeting would you prefer? In person, telehealth, home visit. Do you mind having to go into a hospital or would you rather go to a small office to meet with this person?**



I want you to take time to think about your ideal healthcare professional because although you may not be able to check *all* the boxes on your wish list - oftentimes you can check some of them, even with free clinics.

However, if you have not thought about it beforehand, you could risk putting yourself in an uncomfortable or even traumatic situation that could affect your willingness to talk with other healthcare professionals in the future.

If you're a person who gets overwhelmed with meeting new people and being in new places - taking time to think through what you want to get out of the experience before you're in the loud office can also help you. We're going to

talk about some general ways to find healthcare professionals - but before we do - I want to encourage you to think through what you would say to the healthcare worker *before* you're in the room with them.

When we're not used to going into these offices by ourselves it can be intimidating and scary - but you need to begin to advocate for yourself and communicate your needs. Sadly many doctors, nurses, counselors, therapists, dentists, surgeons, etc have more work than they could ever get done in a day. Because of this - if a person doesn't feel like they can communicate what they need, their well being can be sacrificed due to time/stress/need to move onto the next patient.

I am not saying this to shame anyone in the healthcare industry - they have an impossible task and I know healthcare providers are doing their best. I'm saying this because I want YOU to get the care and support you need.



 community perspectives 

- **Your Name:** *Lizzy Welsh*
- **Your Pronouns:** *she/her*
- **How do you identify yourself professionally (ie. your job title):** *Musician/Academic*
- **How do you identify yourself creatively (if that's different than your professional title):** *Musician*

**What are some of the things for young creatives to consider with their care and the types of jobs they take? Like for example - did you find yourself surprised by any of the physical or mental demands of your creative work**

**when you were starting out?**

I feel like string-players openly acknowledge the physical and mental demands of chasing a highly competitive career on what are often considered very difficult instruments to play. However, I was often somewhat surprised by the mental stress of experiencing unethical conduct of colleagues, particularly around working conditions. It's important to learn to stand up for your right to work in a healthy environment, and to surround yourself with colleagues who will do the same, both for themselves and for you.

**How do you decide if a health care practitioner is the right fit for you?**

For performing musicians, it's vital to find healthcare practitioners who understand that we're using our bodies like athletes, and need to find sustainable solutions for moving our bodies through the world, mostly with our instruments attached, that don't involve taking months off playing.

**What changed in how you cared for yourself as you've moved through different chapters?**

At the start of my career I was busy doing all sorts of random gigs, but didn't have as many family commitments so was able to make time to look after myself. Now I'm busier with family, but have more ability to be more selective with which creative projects I take on. The main thing that has changed as I've gotten older is that I'm better at understanding when my body or my brain is telling me to slow down.

**How do you think creative folks can care for themselves when they have a limited budget?**

In terms of physical care, I've found having a foam roller and spikey ball in the lounge room can fix all manner of tensions before I need to seek professional help. Making time to stretch and strengthen the whole body also helps to

support playing without great financial cost. Exercising in general has the added bonus of also being beneficial to mental health.

**What are one or two concrete steps young people can take to care for themselves physically and/or mentally?**

Never practice for too long at once. Never practice when your emotions are extremely heightened to the point where you may not notice if you're injuring yourself. Always make time to stretch and move your body outside of your practice. Try to remember, your career is important, but it's not the only thing in life worth enjoying.

**Anything else you'd want to add?**

Remember that you are an artist, and you will always have your creativity no matter what gigs or opportunities you are offered. Your career is important, but your creativity and well-being is the most important thing.



*Take 5 minutes and write out the script of what you want to talk with the Healthcare professional about.*

A few examples:

- “It’s nice to meet you – I’m a little nervous about my appointment today but I’m here because I’ve been thinking about getting tested for high blood pressure. I know my grandfather had a heart attack – and even though

I'm young - I want to make sure I'm taking care of myself."

- "I've been having racing thoughts and I think I might have had a panic attack. It felt like my chest was really heavy and I was having a hard time breathing. I don't know what a panic attack feels like - but I thought I should come and talk to someone. I don't even really know what my options are - can you talk me through what a panic attack is and what I should do if I feel that way again?"
- "This is my first time booking my own dental appointment for a cleaning. It's been a few years since I've had it done and I'm scared I might have a cavity. Is there anything we can do to make my cleaning less painful or stressful?"

**Below write what you will say to not only the doctor - but also to the person who picks up the phone when you call to make an appointment.**



## community perspectives

- **Your Name:** *Dr. Esmilda Abreu, Ph.D., BCH*
- **Your Pronouns:** *She/Ella*
- **How do you identify yourself professionally (ie. your job title):** *Visiting Associate Professor in the School of Design and Contemplative Researcher for the Environmental Research Hub at Pratt Institute*
- **How do you identify yourself creatively (if that's different than your professional title):**

**What are some of the things for young creatives to consider with their care and the types of jobs they take? Like for example - did you find yourself surprised by any of the physical or mental demands of your creative work when you were starting out?**

I have been working with young people for over 25 years and in that span of time, I have learned to consider not only the job tasks but the way it fits into the 24 hours of the day. That is, I encourage young creatives to think about what they would like a typical day to look like —how can they know that it is supporting them mentally, financially, emotionally and spiritually. I encourage them to remember that creativity is not a sprint—it's a lifelong relationship with your imagination.

The jobs you take early on should help you grow, but they should also allow you to remain curious, healthy, and connected to why you create in the first place. You are your most important creative tool - your body, your mind, and your perspective. Taking care of those is not separate from your creative work; it's what allows that work to flourish over time.

Industry demands can sneak up on you! Jobs in the Creative Economy can be incredibly fulfilling, but it can also have demands that people don't always anticipate when they are starting out. One of the biggest surprises for many creatives is the way their work might be physically taxing. Whether you are a designer, filmmaker, architect, musician, writer, or artist, creative professions often involve long hours sitting, standing, or working intensely on a project without breaks.

Many people underestimate how much time they will spend in front of screens, hunched over drawing tables, editing equipment, or working late nights to meet deadlines. Over time, this can lead to eye strain, back pain, fatigue, and burnout if we don't develop healthy rhythms early. It is important to use "noting practice" and notice your full self. Also creating a self-care plan to weave into your creative practice is key.

A wellness journal can help you track those small eye strains and time pressures before the burnout sets in. Incorporate simple wellbeing habits into your work week like taking mindful walking movement breaks, stretching, getting outside, practicing mindfulness or breathing exercises, and maintaining relationships that nourish you outside of work. These practices help regulate stress and keep your creativity alive rather than depleted.

While gaining experience is important, it's equally important to ask: Does this job support my long-term well-being? Sustainable creativity requires boundaries. Some jobs normalize overwork—late nights, tight deadlines, and constant hustle. When you're starting out, it's easy to feel like you have to say yes to everything.

Also it is important not to confuse the experience of one job with the scope of an entire art career, which might encompass a number of jobs over your life span. Here I guide them to reflect on their careers not only in terms of financial opportunity or areas of interest, but also in terms of how they can care for themselves holistically – mind, body and creative spirit.

Creative work often involves cycles of inspiration followed by critique, revision, and uncertainty. Early in your career, you may find yourself tying your sense of self-worth to how your work is received—whether by clients, audiences, professors, or collaborators. Learning how to receive feedback without internalizing it too deeply is an important skill for protecting your mental health and creative confidence.

**How do you decide if a health care practitioner is the right fit for you?**

A good practitioner should make you feel heard, respected, and involved in your own care. This relationship between you and your health care practitioner should be built on trust and communication. From a mindfulness perspective, I often encourage people to notice their internal response after an appointment. Do you leave feeling more informed and supported, or rushed and dismissed?

The right practitioner should empower you to become more connected to your own well-being rather than making you feel dependent or confused. Do they explain things in a way that helps you understand your body and your options? It's okay to try a few providers until you find someone whose approach aligns with your needs and values.

**What changed in how you cared for yourself as you've moved through different chapters?**

In earlier chapters of my life, I pushed through exhaustion and thought “productivity” was the goal. Later I began to understand that rest, reflection, and homeostasis are essential to creativity and productivity. You must fill your creativity well, not just dip into it to solve problems, create, and innovate.

Audre Lorde wrote: “Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation.” Taking time to fill your well is crucial. I became more attentive to sleep, movement, stress management, and emotional boundaries. Mindfulness helped me notice when my body was asking for a pause, and

honoring those signals became part of how I sustain my work and my well-being. I also realized I wanted to have generative work and was more cautious about extractive work that was couched as “productive”. I chose “work-life fit” over aiming for “work-life balance.”

**How do you think creative folks can care for themselves when they have a limited budget?**

The most powerful practices for wellbeing are free of cost. Practices like deep breathing, walking, stretching, meditation, journaling, auto-drawing, waking with the sun, and spending time in nature can have a profound effect on both physical and mental health. These small practices are often more impactful than expensive wellness trends.

Being in community can also be a powerful resource. Sharing meals with family and friends, joining creative or mindfulness groups, using public parks, libraries, and community classes can provide support without too much cost. Many cities also offer sliding-scale wellness services or community clinics.

One of my favorites is “Noting Practice”. Notice if you are taking enough breaks, whether you are drinking enough water, need to step away from screens, eating away from your workstation, and making space for rest.

**What are one or two concrete steps young people can take to care for themselves physically and/or mentally?**

Three practices that I want to share are 1.) neuro-pause and 2.) mindful walking and 3.) starfish pose. These practices are simple and may seem small, but they accumulate. Caring for yourself consistently, even in small ways, helps ensure that your creativity—and your well-being—can grow over the long term. A stressed mind reduces our bandwidth and limits our creativity.

1. “Neuro-pause”- I coined the term neuro-pause because I want people to

know that if we pause and breathe just 30–60 seconds before making a decision, we will make a much more empowered conscious **decision**. Just 30–60 seconds is enough time to take us out of reactivity into conscious response (sympathetic to parasympathetic state). Even half a minute of conscious breathing – especially between tasks— can help regulate the nervous system and reduce stress. It’s a small habit that builds awareness and resilience over time.

2. Mindful walking- Walk slowly rolling your foot from heel to toe and alternate your gaze from looking all around you like a flood-light to looking right in front of you like a spot-light. Do this from 5-10 minutes a day.
3. Standing Starfish pose- Stretch your arms and legs out like a five-pointed star by spreading the legs wider than hip-width and extending out your arms and stretching your fingers and toes wide. Chin up and smile. Takes less than one minute.

### **Anything else?**

I studied cognitive psychology, dance and martial arts, so I was always very aware of how thoughts influence your body and how your body influences the quality of our thoughts. Bruce Lee once said, “Under duress, we do not rise to our expectations but fall to our level of training”. So I know that it is important to simply sit in contemplation or commit to one of the above gentle practices as part of your daily training.

Simply 7 minutes per day is enough. You are worth 7 minutes daily of investment. These small turns towards inner development and holistic alignment train you to meet daily challenges as well as times of difficulty with balance, grace, and aplomb.



I know these types of writing exercises can be the worst – but the more that you practice what you’ll say and do in these situations, the better you’ll feel when you’re in a new and unfamiliar situation.

While you’re thinking about scripts to talk with healthcare offices about on the phone, there are some terms that may come up that you haven’t heard before. This doesn’t cover *everything* but it helps you to get started.

### HEALTHCARE VOCABULARY

- **Premium:** the amount you pay for your health insurance per month or per year
- **Deductible:** the amount you have to pay each year before your healthcare kicks in to cover everything (for example – you may have to reach a \$2000 deductible before your health insurance covers 100% of costs – in the meantime you’ll pay a majority of the cost of things that are outside of normal checkups)
- **Sliding Scale:** this allows people to pay based on their income or access to resources
- **Medicaid:** in the US this is healthcare available to people who cannot afford health insurance
- **Clinic:** this is a place where you get preventative care done and usually leave that day (think: quickcare)
- **Community Clinic:** provide free or low cost healthcare services like vaccines, check ups, general medicine
- **Marketplace:** in the US, the state website or national website where you can buy your own health insurance (especially helpful for freelancers)
- **General Practitioner/Primary Care Physician:** a doctor who you see regularly and can refer you to specialists. They’re like your ‘home base’ doctor. Usually they also have nurse practitioners in their office – they’re the folks who will take your blood pressure, weight, and height at the

## VI. HEALTH

start of the appointment and gather some information about what you're coming in to talk about.

Okay, now that you've taken some time to think through how you'd prefer to talk with a healthcare professional as well as words you might hear - how do you go about finding a healthcare professional whether or not you have insurance coverage or access to financial resources?

- Ask someone you trust. It doesn't have to be your best friend or someone related to you - it can be - but it doesn't have to be. Ask them who they go to for dental work, sexual health, general prescriptions, therapy, etc. Ask them what they like about them or if they even like them! When I was trying to find a new general practitioner I asked so many friends if they liked their GP and SO MANY said, "No but I'm too lazy to find a new one" which I totally get. It's stressful. But once in awhile someone will answer, "Ohmygosh, yes, I have a person I just love, let me get you their info"
- Put out a social media post. Ask people if they like their (insert person here - Dentist, OBGYN, General Practitioner, Physical Therapist, etc) and if so, if they'd recommend them to you. Ask them what they like about them and how long they've been seeing them.

If you do not have health insurance and/or are low on cash there are programs for you. They may not meet all of the 'wants' you have but they will probably be able to meet a few of them. Colleges, medical schools, dental schools, or licensing agencies often have these and offer community service at a very discounted rate. I want to warn you - it can be overwhelming to start to look.

Choose ONE service at a time to try and find - set your timer for 30 minutes and find at least one or two places you can call and ask some questions about cost, wait times, methods of meetings, services offered, etc. If you are looking

for free services I want you to know ahead of time it can be a little bit before you find the right fit - so please give yourself grace and space to take the time. If you are currently feeling good in an area, that's a great time to find support. Waiting until you're in dire straights can leave you panicked.

If you don't have a toothache or recently were able to get a cleaning on your parents insurance - that's a good time to start looking for sliding scale dental care and find a place you like. If you're able to - start when you are feeling good. I know you may not have that luxury in all areas - there may be times you cannot get started as early as you wish.

But while you're putting out the fire in one area (example: getting into a free clinic to get an STI treated like RIGHT AWAY) start to think about another area where you could do some preventative maintenance.

Go to your search engine of choice. Some phrases you can search are:

- Sliding scale (insert therapy, obgyn, birth control, healthcare, dental care, yoga, etc) and your city's name. You will be surprised how much will come up
- Community clinic and your city name
- Affordable therapy and your city name
- Sexual Health Clinic and your city name
- Your city name "Health Clinic"
- Your city name + dental school
- Your city name + affordable healthcare



**A Queer and Tender Guide to Things I've Learned the Hard Way about Caring For People, Including Myself** Written by S. Bear Bergman + Illustrated by Saul Freedman-Lawson

*As an author, educator, and public speaker, S. Bear Bergman has documented his experience as, among other things, a trans parent, with wit and aplomb. He also writes the advice column "Asking Bear," in which he answers crucial questions about how best to make our collective way through the world.*

*Featuring disarming illustrations by Saul Freedman-Lawson, Special Topics in Being a Human elaborates on "Asking Bear"'s premise: a gentle, witty, and insightful book of practical advice for the modern age. It offers Dad advice and Jewish bubbe wisdom, all filtered through a queer lens, to help you navigate some of the complexities of life – from how to make big decisions or make a good apology, to how to get someone's new name and pronouns right as quickly as possible, to how to gracefully navigate a breakup. With warmth and candor, Special Topics in Being a Human calls out social inequities and injustices in traditional advice-giving, validates your feelings, asks a lot of questions, and tries to help you be your best possible self with kindness, compassion, and humour.*

**Rest Is Resistance: Free Yourself from Grind Culture and Reclaim Your Life** by Tricia Hersey

*In Rest Is Resistance, Tricia Hersey, aka the Nap Bishop, casts an illuminating light on our troubled relationship with rest and how to imagine and dream our way to a future where rest is exalted. Our worth does not reside in how much we produce, especially not for a system that exploits and dehumanizes us. Rest, in its simplest*

*form, becomes an act of resistance and a reclaiming of power because it asserts our most basic humanity. We are enough. The systems cannot have us.*

*Rest Is Resistance is rooted in spiritual energy and centered in Black liberation, womanism, somatics, and Afrofuturism. With captivating storytelling and practical advice, all delivered in Hersey's lyrical voice and informed by her deep experience in theology, activism, and performance art, Rest Is Resistance is a call to action, a battle cry, a field guide, and a manifesto for all of us who are sleep deprived, searching for justice, and longing to be liberated from the oppressive grip of Grind Culture.*

**Do you freeze up in front of your doctor? Here's how to talk to your physician:**

<https://www.npr.org/2023/04/28/1172843588/doctor-appointment-preparation-questions-symptoms-diagnosis>

*Listen + Watch for tips on talking to your doctor — including what information to bring to an appointment and what follow-up questions to ask after a diagnosis.*

**Stress Resets: How to Soothe Your Body and Mind in Minutes** by Jennifer L. Taitz

*Here's a promise that could not be more timely or needed: You can dial down your stress in just a few minutes, with no ponderous meditations, medications, or martinis required. Written by Dr. Jennifer L. Taitz, a clinical psychologist who specializes in teaching mindfulness-based behavioral skills to manage intense emotions and situations, Stress Resets provides 75 scientifically proven ways to improve how you respond to stress, both in the moment and the long run.*

*Jennifer L. Taitz is a clinical psychologist and an assistant clinical professor in psychiatry at the University of California, Los Angeles. Dr. Taitz completed her fellowship in psychology at Yale University School of Medicine and achieved board certifications in both cognitive behavioral therapy and dialectical behavior therapy. Passionate about spreading hope to a wider audience, she enjoys writing for*

publications such as the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and *Harvard Business Review* and sharing her work on leading podcasts ranging from NPR's *Life Kit* to Spotify's *Call Her Daddy*.

**Disability Visibility: First-Person Stories from the Twenty-First Century**

Edited by Alice Wong

*According to the last census, one in five people in the United States lives with a disability. Some are visible, some are hidden—but all are underrepresented in media and popular culture. Now, just in time for the thirtieth anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act, activist Alice Wong brings together an urgent, galvanizing collection of personal essays by contemporary disabled writers.*

*This anthology gives a glimpse of the vast richness and complexity of the disabled experience, highlighting the passions, talents, and everyday lives of this community. It invites readers to question their own assumptions and understandings. It celebrates and documents disability culture in the now. It looks to the future and past with hope and love.*

*Alice Wong was a disabled activist, media maker, and research consultant based in San Francisco, California. She was the founder and director of the Disability Visibility Project, an online community dedicated to creating, sharing, and amplifying disability media and culture. Alice was also the host and co-producer of the Disability Visibility podcast and co-partner in a number of collaborations such as #CripTheVote and Access Is Love. From 2013 to 2015, Alice served as a member of the National Council on Disability, an appointment by President Barack Obama. She died in 2025. For more: [disabilityvisibilityproject.com](http://disabilityvisibilityproject.com).*

**Take Care of Yourself The Art and Cultures of Care and Liberation** by Sundus

Abdul Hadi

*In Take Care of Your Self, Iraqi artist and curator Sundus Abdul Hadi turns a critical and inventive eye on the notion of self-care, rejecting the idea that self-care means*

buying stuff and recasting it as a collective practice rooted in the liberation struggles of the oppressed. Throughout, Abdul Hadi explores the role of art in fostering healing for those affected by racism, war, and displacement, weaving in the artwork of twenty-seven artists of color from diverse backgrounds to identify the points where these struggles intersect. In centering the voices of those often relegated to the margins of the art world and emphasizing the imperative to create safe spaces for artists of color to explore their complicated reactions to oppression, Abdul Hadi casts self-care as a political act rooted in the impulse toward self-determination, empowerment, and healing that animates the work of artists of color across the world.

**Play Your Way Sane: 120 Improv-Inspired Exercises to Help You Calm Down, Stop Spiraling, and Embrace Uncertainty** By Clay Drinko

*If you've been feeling lost lately, you're not alone! And in our current political turmoil, it's safe to say that people are looking for new tools to help them feel more present, positive, and in sync with the world. So what better way to get there than play?*

*In Play Your Way Sane, Dr. Clay Drinko offers 120 low-key, accessible activities that draw on the popular principles of improv comedy to help you tackle your everyday stress and reconnect with the people around you. Divided into twelve fun sections, including "Killing Debbie Downer" and "Thou Shalt Not Be Judgy," the games emphasize openness, reciprocation, and active listening as the keys to a mindful and satisfying life. Whether you're looking to improve your personal relationships, find new meaning at work, or just survive our trying times, Play Your Way Sane offers serious self-help with a side of Second City sass.*

**Journal of Radical Permission A Daily Guide for Following Your Soul's Calling** by adrienne maree brown and Sonya Renee Taylor

*Based on the bestselling philosophies of radical self-love, emergent strategy, and pleasure activism, this journal gives you permission to love yourself, deeply, as you*

## VI. HEALTH

*are. Journaling to these prompts will help you surrender to your body's needs instead of forcing yourself into cramped disciplines. It will encourage you to become awed by the natural beauty of your divine self instead of being rampantly self-critical. It will aid you in embracing your shadows and accepting responsibility for your impact all while liberating you to just be.*

*Sonya Renee Taylor and adrienne maree brown have designed a twelve-week course called the Institute of Radical Permission where participants uproot old patterns and create new conditions for claiming miraculous potential. This structured journal, based on the course, provides six key practices, with prompts for each practice that center on curiosity, surrender, grace, and satisfaction.*



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## VII. FAILURE + SUCCESS



maybe not tomorrow, and certainly not all the time - but at some point in your creative journey you are going to 'fail.'

Maybe you'll have applied for a fellowship that goes to someone else. Maybe your first big review of the show you've written will say that it's abysmal. Maybe you'll take on a client who is nothing but unhappy with the design work you produce. Maybe you'll have a commercial gallery offer to represent your work only to find that none of it sells.

Or it could be something even quieter. Smaller. Something that only *you* know. Maybe even though your work was a commercial success you weren't happy with it. Maybe you got the dream job but it wasn't what you thought it was going to be. Maybe you realize that you don't love dancing as much as you used to.

All of these things could happen to anyone.

And I need you to take a deep breath and accept the following piece of advice: just because something does not turn out how you imagined it would or how you wanted it to does not mean that you are not a true artist. It doesn't mean that you should leave the industry. It doesn't mean that you're worthless. It doesn't mean that you will never get past it.

It does, however, give you permission to learn and to grow and to change.

Scientists don't see failure as the end all be all. They see it as an opportunity to run the experiment again and to try different circumstances and inputs. The arts community has so much we can learn from our peers in the sciences - they run scenarios over and over failing again and again only to come into the lab the next day to try something different.

I think of improvisation and comedy as one place in the arts that has really harnessed the power of failure to flourish in its creativity.

## VII. FAILURE + SUCCESS

When I first started working with The Second City (a famous improv and comedy venue in Chicago) as a Stage Manager I was amazed at how often the actors on the stage failed.

Someone would perform a scene to zero laughs and sometimes they would bear down on the joke (which can actually subvert the audience and end up being funny) and sometimes they would change directions completely (which would also win over the audience because they appreciate that the actor was listening to their feedback). Either way, the performers I had the privilege of watching night after night failed their way to new characters, scenarios, and scenes. And through the process of failing they began to write new scripts and develop new characters that became audience favorites and critical darlings.

In my current role in the College of Fine Arts Advising Center at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas I spend much of my time talking with students who are on academic probation. If you're not familiar with this term - in most schools it's when a student's GPA falls below a certain number. When I meet with these students they often come in nervous and anxious. Many of them believe that I'm going to make them feel bad about their grades for the semester - that I'm going to make them feel like a failure. Instead, we use the time to focus on surroundings, circumstances and outcomes.

Together we reset expectations, we talk through what went well and what went wrong during their semester, and we put together a plan forward.



  **community perspectives**  

- **Your Name:** *Lindsay Verstegen, age 43.*
- **Your Pronouns:** *she/her*

- **How do you identify yourself professionally (ie. your job title):** *Chief People and Inclusion Officer*
- **How do you identify yourself creatively (if that's different than your professional title):** *writer/poet, baker, connector*

**What did you *think* success would look like when you first started working professionally?**

I thought it would mean making a hard and fast choice in one lane or another, committing to an identity fully. If I didn't do something 1000000% of the time, dedicate everything I have to it, I wouldn't be doing it at a serious level. Now that I'm an Executive doing work I love, I realize that I am both/and. I am the leader I always wanted to work for while also being the human that I admire. I defy category. It doesn't mean I'm not a good leader nor means I'm a bad mom or friend. This flies in the face of what I thought growing up. I didn't even think about being an Executive because I thought if I was an Executive I would have to be humorless and rigid. I think most people who work for me would disagree with that and that my version of a whole life is a lot of both/and.

I mean business and also think everything is always a little bit funny. I hold people accountable while also wanting the best for them. I can make a spreadsheet but also compose a compelling vision for where we are going. Left brain and right. And better for accessing both at the appropriate time.

I am not all-knowing. I thought to get where I am would require knowing *all* the things, never looking stupid, never not having the answer.

Turns out, the more you can admit when you don't know things the more you will learn and the more respect you gain by being human and honest.

**Does failure look different as you've gained more experience?**

Failure now is not living by my values. Failure now is not a technical glitch but rather a miscalibration of where I am spending my precious resource of time. Any other “mistake” is figureoutable, but time I don’t get back being wasted on something that isn’t important to me is the only failure that remains.

**Do you ever feel like an imposter, even with all of the ‘wins’ you’ve had during your career?**

Yes! Of course! I also have realized that even if I have done work to empower women in my career (and I have), I’m still part of a system that has taught me (and all the other women) how to apologize, deny my needs, never gloat. I want to be liked! That’s human. But at some point I learned that I have to accept (and even love) that I’m not for everyone and that if someone is making me aspire for their approval, they’re not good for me. It’s okay that they don’t like me and okay for me to not like them.

That doesn’t mean I don’t belong.

**What would you tell your 20 year old self about success and failure?**

I would tell my 20 year old self to believe that everything is exactly as it should be, that the universe is always conspiring to shower me with blessings, even if it’s not always immediately clear. would tell her that the only failure that exists is in the time wasted beating herself up and failing to embrace the woman she’s becoming. I would tell her “you’re doing your best and it’s more than enough” and “Finish each day and be done with it. You have done what you could. Some blunders and absurdities no doubt crept in; forget them as soon as you can. Tomorrow is a new day. You shall begin it serenely and with too high a spirit to be encumbered with your old nonsense.”

— **Ralph Waldo Emerson**

**Success (and Failure) is in the eye of the beholder so be sure your eyes are beholding all of your own efforts and learnings along the way — those are**

**all little wins to be celebrated as you go.**



  **exercises**  

*I'd like you to write about something that to you - at the time it happened - felt like failure. I don't want you to choose something REALLY traumatic. Just something where you had imagined it would turn out a little differently and maybe you look back and feel a bit of embarrassment.*

**What was the project/ artwork/ poem/ play/ design/ client/ circumstance/ performance/ choreography/ assignment/ choice/ that made you feel this way?**

**When you started on the path above - what did you expect or imagine the outcome would be?**

**What was the actual outcome?**

**What contributed to the difference between what you had imagined and**

**what actually happened? Did you have control over the outcome - or was it something that you didn't have control over? Or a combination?**

**What were the parts that you felt proud of or that went well?**

**If given the chance to re-do the whole thing - are there parts you would do differently?**

**Let's say you can time travel back to when you realized the project was not going as planned - what would you say to yourself?**



Part of the reason I like these questions is it helps us to realize that nothing is a total failure. It also takes some of the morality out of the creative process.

Words like success and failure are so overloaded with good and bad subtext – when really – if we think back to our friends in sciences – they’re moreso *outcomes*.

Of course there are going to be things you regret. Things you would have done differently if you’d had different knowledge. You might have made different choices. But you probably also learned from the experience and the next time you’re faced with a similar situation – you can make different decisions.

For some of us – the idea of *ourselves* as failure starts to be the narrative. It isn’t a single project or experience or negative review – it’s maybe that we have a script that’s playing in our head saying “I’m a failure because (*insert something here that you would NEVER say to someone else but you probably say to yourself*)”



  **community perspectives**  

- **Your Name:** *Vicki Haller Graff*
- **Your Pronouns:** *she/her*
- **How do you identify yourself professionally (ie. your job title):** *Executive Director*
- **How do you identify yourself creatively (if that’s different than your professional title):** *Theatre artist*

**What do you tell yourself when you doubt your success?**

I doubt my success all the time. However, when I keep my values and my personal mission at the forefront, it reminds me that my success is real and meaningful. Just now, at age 44, I feel like I can own the successes I’ve made

and built.

About ten years ago, I had a conversation with a beloved college professor, years after graduation. I was feeling small because many people from college had succeeded in big ways: major professional accomplishments like films and Broadway, nominations for major awards. But when I told her what I had been doing (running a small theater company focused on new work, writing an opera, raising an awesome child), she reflected back how true my accomplishments and successes were to my values. I wanted to make a deep impact in my community, create theater, and have a family. I go back to that conversation a lot. It helps to ease the doubt and highlight how I am being successful in line with my values.

**How do you approach talking with others about your success?**

It really depends on the situation and the person or people I'm talking with. When I'm in a position to lead, such as speaking with young people, especially young women, and especially young women who may be on a non-traditional artistic path, I see my successes differently than when I speak to peers.

**How do failure and success look different as you've gained more experience?**

I hardly see anything as a failure anymore. It's very cliché, but there is always something to learn and something to grow through. I used to take failure very personally, but I've been able to take responsibility for my role in a failure without falling apart. Success is harder. I recently became the executive director of an arts education center. It has an incredible legacy and good will in the community. Getting this job may be the first time I've really been able to own a success. I see that my hard work, focus, sacrifice and creativity over many years of work have paid off. I see my experience and the fruits of it.

**What would you tell your 20 year old self about success and failure?**

I would tell twenty year old me to keep going through success and failure. This creative work is not about either. It's about the process.



One thing I hear young creative people say over and over is they feel like they've failed. Because the students I work with often are having a rough semester academically - we talk about taking less credits the following semester, which can lead to finishing a degree in 5 or 6 years instead of 4.

Often they look at me when I tell them this news and I can see the weight on their shoulders - they are crushed. I completely understand - when you have created an outcome in your head you want it to look a certain way!

But we often have a conversation that goes like this (or some variation of this):

**Me:** "I know this is hard - but you haven't failed - this is just an adjustment on your timeline. Instead of spending four years here, you'll be here for 5 and a half."

**Student:** "I feel like a failure because I have to graduate in four years"

**Me:** "Why do you have to graduate in four years?" (*It should be noted that the students I work with often go to school in their hometown and do NOT live on our campus so it doesn't usually change their financial costs much*)

**Student:** "Because...I'm supposed to graduate college in four years"

**Me:** "Who said that?"

**Student:** "Everyone"

**Me:** “Who is everyone?”

**Student:** “I dunno....like....everyone”

**Me:** “Can you tell me who said it? Was it a friend, or a parent, or someone else?”

**Student:** “I...don’t...know....?”

And then we both smile.

I want them to realize that an adjusted expectation or outcome is not failure.

I want them to think about *who* is telling them they’re a failure, if anyone. More times than not they’ve created a goal or narrative in their head. No one external has created this goal for them.

But they’ve told themselves a story over and over for so long - they can’t even remember where it started.

The weight lifted when a young creative person discovers they have the ability to change is visible. I had a colleague sitting in my office watching one of these meetings and he remarked that students’ entire body language changed and opened up upon the realization that they could adjust their goals.



  **community perspectives**  

- **Your Name:** *christina michelle watkins*
- **Your Pronouns:** *she/her*

- **How do you identify yourself professionally (ie. your job title):**  
*writer/therapist*

### **How do failure and success look different as you've gained more experience?**

This question makes me think of love and grief—you can't have one without the other. Failure and success—you can't have one without the other. That's just how it is.

You will not get any success (whatever that means to you) unless you're willing to fail. And fail a lot! I think also redefining what "failure is". Jessica Lanyadoo, an astrologer, talks about how things are only a failure if you don't learn from them. So I try to approach things as exploration and experimentation. Curiosity over judgment.

It's not easy though. This feels a little weird to talk about, but I was someone who found the things I was good at pretty early on in life. Then I mostly focused on doing those specific things. So I got a lot of practice at doing things I was good at. But then, in my 20s, I started to encounter more things I wasn't good at. And it was really hard for me!

Sometimes, I wish I'd learned earlier that "failing" at something doesn't mean you as a person are a failure. Before, I had the feeling that if I was failing at something, it meant I shouldn't and couldn't do the thing, as opposed to: You can just play around! You can work at something and get better at it! Being "the best" is not the only reason to do something! Being good at something does not define your worth!

That viewpoint also made it hard to ever feel good enough. Because "being the best" got turned into "being perfect." Which is impossible. So for a large part of my life, even when things were going well, I would somehow still feel like I was failing. When I had a success, I would think, "Well, I should have been able to have done this years ago". No matter what I did, it wasn't good

enough. It's a horrible way to move through life.

I've been pushing myself to just try things and celebrate that I tried, regardless of what happens next. Last year, I wanted to start putting my writing out there more. So I set a goal of simply applying to some play festivals. I told myself that applying itself was the goal, and that's what I would celebrate. Making the measure of success not rest in the outcome of whether I "won," which wasn't in my control anyway, but putting it into what I could control: Applying.

When I would get a rejection letter, I had to remember that I'd already gotten the success I had hoped for. Not to say it didn't hurt. It definitely did. And it's important to give yourself space to feel the feels. But to also keep everything in a wider context.

Failure is part of success. And I want to remember not to rest my self worth too heavily on either part.

### **So when you do talk with others about success that you've had?**

I can still struggle with owning my successes. But working on that in community with others is helpful. Having friends where we make a point to share and celebrate our successes with each other really helps. It's getting easier as I practice. I think it's important to find a group of people where y'all can celebrate successes and talk about failures. Just talk about the whole process, right? Being able to talk about one without the other can create some unhelpful dynamics and get in the way of authentic connection.

Also, on a spiritual level, something has shifted for me. I think of myself as part of something larger than just myself. I'm continuing something that came before me and will continue after me. A piece of a lineage. So me downplaying my gifts or success? Or holding on too tightly to failures? It feels disrespectful at this point! Any success I have rests on the shoulders of those who paved a way so I even would have the chance to succeed.

Remembering that I'm a part of something bigger helps me treat myself with the same compassion I'm able to offer others.



  **exercises**  

*Write and reflect on the below.*

**What is something that you categorize as a failure in your head that is actually just a change in direction?**

**Why do you think you've thought of it as a failure?**

**Are there any specific people who have told you it was failure - or was it something you told yourself?**

**What would it look like to give yourself permission to not be afraid to fail?**

**Is there a creative project that you've avoided because you were afraid of imperfection or failure?**

**What are other words or phrases that you could use to talk about what some people refer to as failure?**



## **SUCCESS**

Many folks view the flip side of failure as success. Such a binary, right? Either perfection or failure. How exhausting to hold yourself to such standards. It leaves SO LITTLE ROOM for exploration, experimentation or fun.

Recently when I was meeting with a graduate student in studio art they told me that they had overwhelming anxiety because they felt like they had failed. Failed on a recent studio project, failed their family, failed their partner. I looked at them and asked if someone had told them they'd failed? No, they answered. And then I asked, *then what would it look like to succeed?*

We sat in silence for a few minutes and she answered, "I'm not sure."

I smiled and we both laughed. "Then why are you saying you're a failure

if you don't even know what succeeding looks like?!" I teased them. They put their head in her hands and let out a sign, shaking their head. "I don't knooooowwwwwwwww."

And I've had this conversation over and over and over with different creatives. A year earlier an old friend and visual artist was visiting from Berlin. She's a working visual artist and parent to three children and as we walked through our childhood neighborhood late one night catching up she kept talking about how often she felt like a failure. A failure with her kids, and failure in her creative practice, a failure in her job. I had asked her what it would look like to succeed. She said something along the lines of.... "to just make all the perfect decisions" and I asked if that would ever be possible. "Ummm...no...." she relented. "So why would you create a standard for yourself that you could never ever meet? Why would you want to do that?"

As creative individuals we often create impossible standards for ourselves. Things we would never ask of other people. Things we'd balk at if a friend or family member told us was a metric they were expected to meet.

We spend so much time obsessing with failure that we often forget to consider what "success" even is.

I talk with fine arts students often about defining their success. For some young creatives it looks like making it through the semester. For some it looks like straight A's. For some it looks like trying something new.

Think of a project you have coming up - creative or otherwise. Something that has a hard deadline or end period - not something like "my career" or "my mental wellbeing."



  **community perspectives**  

- **Your Name:** *Jack Tamburri*
- **Your Pronouns:** *he/him*
- **How do you identify yourself professionally (ie. your job title):** *Professor and theatre director*
- **How do you identify yourself creatively (if that's different than your professional title):** *Theatremaker, writer, and educator*

**What did you *think* success would look like when you first started working professionally?**

Running a non-profit regional theatre as an artistic director, racking up positive reviews in papers of record, notoriety within the field, projects of increasing scope and resource level on an ever-upward trajectory.

**Does failure look different as you've gained more experience?**

Yes. I have experienced failure in a few different ways, and true failure is not doing bad work; it's doing no work. True failure is resisting opportunities that arise because they're not "the right" opportunity, and resisting putting in unremunerated labor to create opportunities for oneself. Failure is standing still because you're not being invited to work at the level of "professionalism" you expect. Failure is waiting for invitations.

**Do you ever feel like an imposter, even with all of the 'wins' you've had during your career?**

I now work less consistently than ever and I feel less like an imposter than ever. That's in part because I've got a clear narrative that accounts for my

artistic output over the last 7 years: I worked in academia full-time and then had kids. So now, any time I do make a play professionally it feels like a bonus achievement, rather than a step toward the future success that might actually validate me. I see all around me the profoundly talented people I met along the way who gave up, moved on, or just couldn't fit themselves into the world as it exists. I don't consider any of them to be failures or imposters, and I am able to frame my own career similarly.

There are choices I made that I wish I'd made differently. There were also lots of circumstances outside of my control affecting the outcomes of my choices at every step. On balance, I've got 20 years of pretty interesting work behind me, even if none of it is notorious or beloved. And I've got at least another 20 ahead of me that will be even more interesting, and who knows, notorious and beloved could still be on the table.

### **What would you tell your 20 year old self about success and failure?**

Success in the professional American theater requires starting with family money or working hard in a compulsive, self-abnegating way, and usually both. Make the most of the cushion you have – it's not what some people have but it's more than most get. Don't squander it. Success on your own terms will come from being vulnerable at every opportunity – making a compulsion out of not protecting your own feelings.

It is important to understand your worth in both directions: you are not a piece of shit, and you are also not necessary; both of those self-images are aggrandizing.

You will understand success sooner if you write a lot more, and smoke less weed. Relationships are more important than achievements.

  
  **exercises**  

*Write and reflect on the below.*

**Choose an upcoming project you have - what is it?**

**When will this project happen?**

**What is something you want to learn about yourself by doing this project?**

**Who do you want to see this project or share this project with?**

**What would make you feel good about this project?**

**Is there something that scares you about this project? And if so - how will you still move forward even if you're nervous?**

**What's one thing that might be an obstacle in completing this project?**

**What will you do if that obstacle comes up?**

**How do you think you're going to talk about this project to other people when it's over?**

**What are some goals you have around this project other than completing it?** *(Some examples: I want to take care of my bills while still being able to do this project, my goal is to invite 3 friends to come engage with this project regardless of whether they're able to make it or not, I want to have someone I trust give me feedback on this project, I want to show myself that I can do this)*



  **community perspectives**  

- **Your Name:** *Bentley HG*
- **Your Pronouns:** *He/Him*
- **How do you identify yourself professionally (ie. your job title):** *Web Developer*
- **How do you identify yourself creatively (if that's different than your professional title):** *Artist / Game Developer*

**What did you *think* success would look like when you first started working professionally?**

Coming out of College I definitely expected that I'd be working for a major game development studio and would be winning awards within a handful of years. I don't think I would ever have admitted that out loud, of course, but that's what success looked like to me in my early twenties. As time goes on I've adjusted my perspective as my fantasies came into contact with the reality of my resources, talent, and time available to me. Today my visions of success are much more humble in nature, but my mental health has certainly improved.

**Does failure look different as you've gained more experience?**

I'd like to say that I've gotten used to failure, that I've hardened to it over the years. The truth is that failure still hurts. Every time. What *has* changed as I've gained experience is my ability to bounce back more quickly after failure. In the past negative experiences could set me back weeks, or even months. I'm prone to depression, and a failure could trigger depressive episodes that would limit me for large chunks of time. More often negative feelings tied to failure would cause me to procrastinate, which would also limit my output.

Although I was initially resistant I eventually got help through medication and therapy for my depression. That's helped me a lot to readjust my relationship with failure so that I can process it in a more 'normal' way so that I can shake it off and get back to work sooner.

The procrastination? That's still a bit of an ongoing process. For that it's helped to build routines and habits around my creative practice to keep a somewhat predictable rhythm to my creative work. That part helps me to "show up" to doing creative work even when I'm not totally feeling it. Finding supportive creative communities and collaborators around that I trust has also been helpful. Seeing my colleagues put work out can put a healthy pressure on me to put my own work out. I would stress that in finding communities it's been much more helpful to find those communities in-person as opposed to online.

**Do you ever feel like an imposter, even with all of the 'wins' you've had during your career?**

Oh my God, yes. Even now! For me, and for a lot of creatives I imagine, I tend to look at artists and creatives who are much more successful than I am for inspiration. It can be a good thing to draw inspiration from "the best" but it can also lead to a loss of healthy perspective. I tend to do my best work when I'm only trying to do better than I did yesterday. Trying to rise to the level of the luminaries I'm inspired by when I'm not at their level only leads to frustration, creative paralysis, and that dreaded feeling of imposter syndrome.

In my last answer I stressed the importance of being a part of a creative community. I've found that's also super-helpful for combating imposter syndrome. As I bounce into people within creative communities I definitely find that there are people with more success or skill than I have, but I also get a reminder that those are people too with their own struggles, or even that there are things that are difficult for them that come easily to me. The flip-side of that is true as well though, in that I find people who are earlier in their

creative journey and I find that I might be in a position to be an inspiration for others. All of this helps to keep me grounded, and to recognize that we're all at different places in our creative journey, and that I belong.

**What would you tell your 20 year old self about success and failure?**

I'd tell him not to think about success and failure so much, just concentrate on the work. Short-term goals that can be achieved in days or weeks tend to be more helpful than long term goals. Long term aspirations and goals are great, but they shouldn't be the yardstick for your success. Are you making progress on the short-term goals? THAT'S success!

Racking up quick wins on short-term goals gives momentum and confidence, and those are things that get you closer to achieving the long-term goals.

Also, don't go it alone! Find community, make friends, and accept help!



So often we start to define things as 'successful' in a really narrow way. Ticket sales. Likes. Reviews. Money. Number of patrons. Contract offers.

What happens when we start to have many different variables to success? One thing you may be thinking is, "Great, now there are ALOT of different ways to fail!"

Okay.....Stop.

What this really does is it helps you to see creative work outside of a binary. Good/Bad. Success/Failure. Perfect/Broken.

These terms are so much richer than we give them credit for - and often - they are both present in our work.

The reason I want you to get in the habit of putting together multiple goals for a project is because you're going to reach some of them - and some you may not. And it's going to get you more comfortable with pushing through spaces of discomfort and reflection rather than running from spaces of imperfection.

Here are some of the goals that I've had in writing this book:

- Deepen my own understanding of *why* I want to create and how it's changed since I was in my late teens and early twenties
- Better connect with the young people I mentor and help guide them to better shape their creative practice
- Finish a big project
- Engage with other creatives to have dialogue about ALLLLLLL of these chapters and give them an opportunity to reflect
- Offer young people multiple paths to strengthening their creative practices and the way they view their artistic outputs

The process of defining success and failure is going to change many times over your life. Be gentle with yourself, flexible when you need to change, and surround yourself with people who will cheer you on either way!



**The Creative Independent:** <https://thecreativeindependent.com/>

*The Creative Independent (TCI) is a growing resource of emotional and practical*

guidance for creative people. It was founded in 2016 by Brandon Stosuy and is published ad-free by Kickstarter, a public-benefit corporation. TCI produces interviews, wisdom, and guides that illuminate the trials and tribulations of living a creative life, as told by working artists—including writers, musicians, designers, visual artists, and others. Our goal is to feed and grow the community of people who create.

**The Art of Failure: The Importance of Risk and Experimentation:** <https://www.arts.gov/stories/magazine/2014/4/art-failure-importance-risk-and-experimentation>

*In this issue of NEA Arts, we'll speak with individual artists, entrepreneurs, and critics about their relationship with failure. Told as edited, first-person musings, these pieces offer personal insights into the fear of failure, whether failure can be helpful to the creative process, and how failure, either real or imagined, has contributed to current success. Taken together, these voices show that maybe—just maybe—failure isn't such a dirty word after all.*

**Failed it!: How to turn mistakes into ideas and other advice for successfully screwing up** by Erik Kessels

*Failed it! celebrates the power of mistakes and shows how they can enrich the creative process. This is part photobook and part guide to loosening up and making mistakes to take the fear out of failure and encourage experimentation.*

*It showcases the best and most hilarious examples of imperfection and failure across a broad range of creative forms, including art, design, photography, architecture and product design, to inspire and encourage creatives to embrace and celebrate their mistakes.*

**Radical Compassion: Learning to Love Yourself and Your World with the Practice of Rain** by Tara Brach

*Tara Brach is an in-the-trenches teacher whose work counters today's ever-increasing onslaught of news, conflict, demands, and anxieties—stresses that leave us rushing around on auto-pilot and cut off from the presence and creativity that give our lives meaning.*

*In this heartfelt and deeply practical book, she offers an antidote: an easy-to-learn four-step meditation that quickly loosens the grip of difficult emotions and limiting beliefs. Each step in the meditation practice (Recognize, Allow, Investigate, Nurture) is brought to life by memorable stories shared by Tara and her students as they deal with feelings of overwhelm, loss, and self-aversion, with painful relationships, and past trauma—and as they discover step-by-step the sources of love, forgiveness, compassion, and deep wisdom alive within all of us.*

**The Rise: Creativity, the Gift of Failure, and the Search for Mastery** by Sara Lewis

*From celebrated art historian, curator, and teacher Sarah Lewis, a fascinating examination of how our most iconic creative endeavors—from innovation to the arts—are not achievements but conversions, corrections after failed attempts.*

*The gift of failure is a riddle: it will always be both the void and the start of infinite possibility. The Rise—part investigation into a psychological mystery, part an argument about creativity and art, and part a soulful celebration of the determination and courage of the human spirit—makes the case that many of the world's greatest achievements have come from understanding the central importance of failure.*



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could be a professional (insert the creative thing you are good at here).”

And that’s not to say that we shouldn’t – obviously if you’re reading this book you’ve had some kind of inclination to take your artistic self further. But as I replay these moments from my own life in my mind – and not even the ones from my younger life, but even recent moments – something doesn’t sit right with me.

It’s not that I don’t think that artisans & creative professionals should do things ‘just because they love them’ and not be paid for them. Obviously if you’ve read the rest of this book up until now you know that’s not the case. But I think it’s the idea that *everything* creative we do should be monetized. That we cannot in this day and age have creative practice without an audience. Or that it has to be tied to some kind of external success metric in order for you to be taken seriously in your pursuit of it.



- **Your Name:** *Gregory Peters*
- **Your Pronouns:** *he/him*
- **How do you identify yourself professionally (ie. your job title):** *Former Artistic Director of The Plagiarists*
- **How do you identify yourself creatively (if that’s different than your professional title):** *Playwright, Director, Actor, collaborator*

### **What does non-monetary creative practice look like for you?**

When I write, it’s on my own and for no money. When I had a company, I was writing for the company and had a good chance of seeing it produced,

but it was still largely independent and unpaid. I write plays because I have something I need to work out, some ideas and voices I have to get out and communicate to the world. Acting and directing are similar, it's always for the project. I have done some small things for money (I got to be Hamlet on an educational CD-ROM, which is the only way I was ever going to be able to play Hamlet), but the experiences are usually unfulfilling.

**How do you foster your practice when you're responsible for other 'adulting' things?**

This is often my biggest challenge. When you're writing, setting aside time when you're not too exhausted and your brain is working to focus requires either a job with a LOT of down time or a very deliberate approach that sets aside blocks of time (and assumes you'll feel inspiration during that time). I make a lot of notes to myself to follow up on later. Sometimes a reasonable goal will help - I set a goal to write one play a year for a while and it worked pretty well as long as I was flexible in how I defined it. I think staying engaged in the community helps - nothing inspires me as much as seeing a really amazing play.

**How did the ways that you engage with these types of projects change from when you were younger (18-25) vs now?**

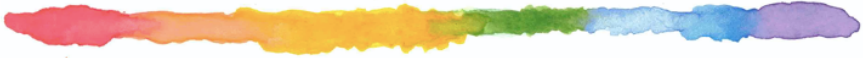
The main one is energy and time. I don't have as much energy as I did when I was younger, and getting enough sleep and taking care of myself have become much more important, even necessary. So, late nights building sets & props, rehearsals on the other side of town, and even long plays become very difficult. I'm also much choosier even than I was when I was starting out. If I'm going to give up time from my day-to-day life, there better be a pretty compelling reason.

**What advice would you give to folks who are trying to engage with their creative side outside of paid work, but don't know where to start?**

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Find your people. Theatre is such a community-based art, it all gets easier if you have a gang to run with. I think the idea works across disciplines though, as a good theatre company is basically a miniature art movement. As much as we romanticize the lonely artist alone in their garret, most of the artists you like were part of a community of people who argued with, critiqued, loved, hated, challenged, and admired each other.

If you work in a discipline that can be done alone in a garret, do it. Practice it. Just make yourself do things to keep the muscles limber. I have met so many “playwrights” that have never finished anything. Maybe the first dozen things you make will be trash, but get it down, learn how to do the thing. Listen to Ira Glass on “The Gap” - it’s one of the smartest things on creativity that I’ve heard.



In a 2015 interview I did with the now completed podcast *The Compass* I spoke with actress Leah Walsh about this impulse to try to see anything and everything we make and my wish to reserve some things that I made to be for the sake of beauty and the pleasure of making and no other reason. But I didn’t always feel this way.

In earlier chapters of my life I felt like all of my work needed to be for external validation or have something to show for it that could be reviewed by others. I poured all of my artist self into my job at a theatre, working overtime which left little capacity for me to have any kind of creative practice not tied to the job.

It went on like this, off and on at different theatre jobs, for almost a decade. I sacrificed most of my hobbies and pleasurable creative activities for work that I felt was more noble because it was serving cultural institutions that were

household names.

But I was miserable inside. I'd lost all the joy I once held for anything related to live performance - and in the process I'd also stopped making visual art and writing - which were things I'd been doing for pleasure and self expression since my teenage years.

And after making all of those sacrifices for my 'dream job' I was laid off. Despite working long hours for way too little money and pouring all of my creative juices into the place - they decided to eliminate my position. And the irony was that when it happened in 2015 it was the SECOND TIME it had happened to me. Sometimes we have to learn a lesson twice in order to learn it at all.

I share this with you because it is important to keep doing things that bring you creative pleasure that are not tied to performance reviews, paychecks, likes and views, or accolades. You need to ensure that you are setting aside time for you to explore, play, and investigate creative pursuits that you do simply because they make you see beauty. Or make you laugh. Or bring joy. Or let you cry. Or allow you to fail. Or make space for you to question things.

If your only creative outlets are tied to decisions that someone else makes when looking at a bottom line - you're giving your power to people who will not treat it with the dignity and care it deserves.

Okay, I get the 'non monetary part' and that we don't want all of our creativity to be tied up in money but why do you use the word practice? Like it's so weird. Are you like practicing being creative? I mean...kinda! Here's the thing - in mindfulness and meditation the word practice is used as an active state of attentiveness and awareness.

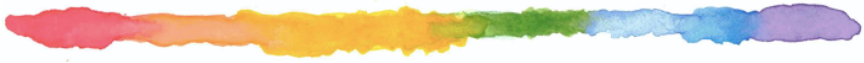
It's something that you're working on and being present with often. It's not something you do once or twice. It's something you devote emotional and

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mental space to as well as time. It's a way of being. When I think of creative practice - I think of it as a way of moving through the world. Maybe you're worried that when I say practice it means that you're going to have to get *really* good at these creative impulses.

Nope. It's not about the output at all. It's about being present in the action of creating. The journey. Not the final piece.

For me over the past twenty years I've cultivated my creative practice in different ways. At different ages it's looked like different things - sometimes I have lots of space for creative practice. Sometimes I have very little (re: bouts of depression, family obligations, large projects looming, etc)



Here are some of the ways I've engaged with non-monetary creative practice in my life - not all of these happen at once - but I go through ebbs and flows with them.

- Visiting museums
- Reading or listening to books about things I am not familiar with
- Being in nature
- Taking walks
- Conversing with neighbors
- Cooking and baking
- Sewing
- Moving my body in new ways (ie. a dance, sport, or exercise that is new to me)
- Learning to play an instrument
- Visiting the library and browsing without keeping an eye on the clock
- Reading a poem

- Spending time with animals
- Going to a sports game
- Birding
- Playing board games
- Printmaking experimentation
- Tie Dying
- Playing video games
- Making body care recipes like soaps and soaks
- Engaging with Oracle decks
- Watercolor daily journals
- Writing letters and sending them via the mail
- Reading a newspaper with differing political views than I hold
- Journaling from prompts other folks have suggested
- Gardening
- Taking a class on budgeting and accounting

Non monetary creative practice is about feeding your curiosity without having to tie it to external validation - whether that's money or otherwise.



- **Your Name:** *Britannie Bond*
- **Your Pronouns:** *she/her*
- **How do you identify yourself professionally (ie. your job title):** *Marketing Manager and Photographer*
- **How do you identify yourself creatively (if that's different than your professional title):** *Retired Actor, Aspiring Artist*

**What does non-monetary creative practice look like for you?**

Using art as a way to unstick and center my mind. Whenever I find myself facing depression, grief or generally feeling stale or stuck, I always turn to my creative practice to get the emotional flow back in motion.

**How do you foster your practice when you're responsible for other 'adulting' things?**

Finding time to cultivate a little solitude usually opens into my creative practice. It has always been a solitary practice even for me if I'm in the studio with others. Carving out the time is really important for me mentally.

**How did the ways that you engage with these types of projects change from when you were younger (18-25) vs now?**

Rilke's Letters to a Young Poet in grad school really broke it open for me. For a long time I thought my creative practice had to happen under special circumstances, but reading Rilke made me realize it can be taken with you wherever you go.

**What advice would you give to folks who are trying to engage with their creative side outside of paid work, but don't know where to start?**

Follow your joy and curiosity! Feeling stuck? What are peaks your curiosity today? Dive into that!



*Write and reflect on the below.*

**When was the last time you did something creative for the pleasure of doing it? Not for likes, not to fulfill a project requirement, not to submit, not to sell, not to post - just because you liked it?**

**When you hear the words 'creative practice' what does it mean to you?**

**What is something that you haven't engaged in creatively because you're worried that you might be bad at it?**

**What are some things you think could encompass 'non monetary creative practice' for you? *(It doesn't mean that other people may not do them to make income - but something you like to do that fills you and that you do not want to pressure to be perfect)?***

**What are ways that you could build more of this type of creative practice into your life?**



- **Your Name:** Caroline
- **Your Pronouns:** She/Her
- **How do you identify yourself professionally (ie. your job title):** Retired Registered Nurse
- **How do you identify yourself creatively (if that's different than your professional title):** I don't have a title...it's just a lifelong, rough and tumble pursuit of creativity.

### **What does non-monetary creative practice look like for you?**

It means I do it mostly for myself, and occasionally for my friends and family. Admittedly, I sometimes have a shame-complex about my own art because I'm not getting paid for it. I judge myself harshly because I'm not a "professional" but I also know the pitfalls of being paid to provide art as a negotiated output. When I sold my pottery online during Covid, I found that I really didn't enjoy the process of creating art for someone else, even if I was being paid. I prefer the freedom to explore my own individuality through artistic expression, without the pressure of making sure someone else likes it or finds it worthy.

### **How do you foster your practice when you're responsible for other 'adulting' things?**

Sometimes it's as small as getting on Pinterest and looking at pictures of things I like, and pinning them to my boards with no expectation that I will ever make anything like it. It's quiet, private, and easy. I can do it while I watch TV or when I'm traveling internationally. I have dozens of Pinterest boards and many of them represent different times in my life when I was inspired by different types of art, because my interests have always been very fluid. My Pinterest

boards take up no physical space and cost absolutely nothing, but they feel engaging even when I'm exhausted, stressed out, or completely unmotivated. Sometimes Pinterest leads me to new forms of expression and sometimes not, but it's the lack of pressure that feels comforting to me, especially when I've got a million other "adulty" things to worry about.

**What are the ways how you engage with these types of projects change from when you were younger (18-25) vs now?**

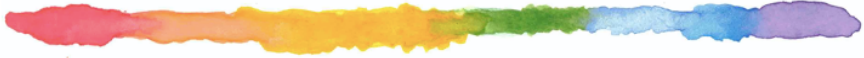
I was diagnosed as having bipolar disorder in my early 30's, and before I stabilized with meds and therapy, my art looked a lot different. In my teens and early 20's, art often felt frantic, wild, frenzied, and out of control. I wanted to try everything immediately and expected it all to be a masterpiece. It felt like a survival tactic; like I absolutely had to keep going. Engaging in artistic expression was hurried, forced, savage, and often felt like I was running from something. Since I've become much healthier through meds and therapy, and now that I'm in my 40's, the process is so much different. It's much slower and thoughtful. It doesn't feel like life or death. I listen to the critic in my head and work to slow her down a little bit. I try to be mindful. I try not to worry nearly as much about the outcome. Of course those thoughts come up all the time, but I try to be more aware and work through them, rather than using my art to flee.

**What advice would you give to folks who are trying to engage with their creative side but don't know where to start?**

It's okay to start small. It's even okay to stay small. Listen to the expectations you're putting on yourself, and then learn to question them with curiosity. Who's telling you that you need to be bigger, better, or faster? Gently shut them down if necessary. Also, you don't have to spend thousands of dollars on art supplies. I love buying supplies from thrift stores and upcycling. I honestly hate spending money on art supplies. We are all easily tricked into thinking we need the highest quality or most expensive supplies to become the best

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artist possible, and it's just not true. Supplies can also be made and found, and that is also part of the artistic process. Also, widen your understanding of what creativity is. We use our creative brains every day, in ways that are very unexpected. You are already an artist and a problem solver.



Recently I've been part of a Creative Mindfulness Leadership program with the Pratt Institute. In this 18 month training we met together and practiced mindful meditation, breathing, walking, writing, and contemplation.

I've started to think of this kind of engagement as part of my creative practice as well. I had the opportunity to talk with the leader of the program, Rhonda Schaller. Rhonda has been a visual artist, teacher, and meditation practitioner for many years. I was curious how her creative practice has changed over the years - and she noted that for her - creative practice has morphed into the way she lives her life.

When she was younger her obsession and goals were to be published in a certain way, her artwork to be sold at a certain type of gallery, to have representation in a specific way. However, over the past few decades, this changed. She experienced success but found it didn't fulfill what she'd imagined it would.

Achieving goals and hitting markers wasn't going to be enough to fuel her creative soul for the next chapters of life. Instead, she found that mindful engagement in the world around her was where she found creative energy. Instead of compartmentalizing her creative self into a rigid box she allowed her creative practice to expand to how she performed every day duties.

Part of why I'm sharing this is deeply personal - this is how I felt when I was maybe 13 or 14 and over the next decade this internal truth was drained from

me. When I first started to know myself during my early teenage years I had a deep knowledge that I could define my own success. That I was a creative being and that everything I was curious enough to engage with could be part of my artistic story. Painting, music, dancing, acting, writing, reading, decorating, mixtapes, collages, watching movies, hiking - in my bones I felt that engaging in these acts created me as a whole and complete artist.

But as I moved through Jr High, High School, and later College - I was consistently given a message that by not choosing one thing to get REALLY good at and set everything else aside that I would be doomed to fail.

Fail at what, you might ask? To be 'of value.' I needed to be able to have a skill to sell - and all other creativity needed to be set aside in order to honor this goal. Maybe you're wondering then why did I spend so much time in this book talking about being paid for your work?!YES! You need to eat. You need to make a living. But you cannot sacrifice your entire artistic self to external validation. You need to protect that part of your spirit that was drawn to experimentation in the first place.



*Write and reflect on the below.*

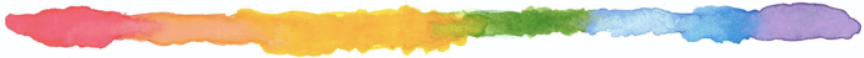
**What is your first memory of being creative?**

**What are some of the first things you were curious about when you were**

**younger and that made you feel joy?**

**Do you have any judgments about people who enjoy doing something creative even if they're bad at it?**

**How can you make time to engage in this type of 'practice' even if you're busy?**



One of the biggest hurdles (in addition to money) for many of us who are creatives is time. It's really hard to find time for the projects and work we already have - and our communities and families - so how can we possibly make time for this new random task of non-monetary creative practice?

I agree.

For a long time I felt like I needed everything to be perfect in order to create. I needed the right materials. I needed to have done lots of research. I needed it to be quiet. I needed to be visited by the 'artistic muse' as it were. But what I

have found to be the most effective way to strengthen your creative self is by folding it into the life you already have and allowing it to grow from there.

- Do you commute every day via bus or train? Instead of doom scrolling your email why not listen to an audiobook on something new you've never learned about. BAM. Creative self engaged.
- Do you have young kids in the house - your own or siblings or otherwise? Why not sit with them and try out watercolors together. BOOM. Practice initiated.
- Do you have to drive to and from work for hours each day? Create a playlist of podcast episodes interviewing poets, engineers, and architects. WHAM. You did it.
- Do you want to spend time with friends and you're worried this will take away from your chill hangs? Have everyone come to your house and bring a food dish from their family recipes and talk a bit about it. Share memories and build new ones together.



That my friends IS CREATIVE PRACTICE.

I know that for some folks this may not be the way they want to engage with their artistic selves. That's okay! But for those of us for whom in reading this you feel seen - I want you to know there are so many paths outside a binary of 'successful vs unsuccessful.'

There may be times in your life when you are not engaging professionally with your creative self and by cultivating a life that is engaged in this type of creative community you will sustain and push through. When you have writer's block all will not be lost. It will be one facet of your creative self instead of feeling

like you've lost EVERYTHING.

You will continue to practice your curiosity, trying new things, and being creative for joy and pleasure. Give yourself permission to grow and change – you'll be surprised how this small engagement can filter it's way into all the other aspects of your life.



**What It Is (Lynda Barry's Creativity Series)** by Lynda Barry

*How do objects summon memories? What do real images feel like? For decades, these types of questions have permeated the pages of Lynda Barry's compositions, with words attracting pictures and conjuring places through a pen that first and foremost keeps on moving. What It Is demonstrates a tried-and-true creative method that is playful, powerful, and accessible to anyone with an inquisitive wish to write or to remember. Composed of completely new material, each page of Barry's first Drawn & Quarterly book is a full-color collage that is not only a gentle guide to this process but an invigorating example of exactly what it is: "The ordinary is extraordinary."*

**How to Be an Explorer of the World: Portable Life Museum** by Keri Smith

*Artists and scientists analyze the world around them in surprisingly similar ways, by observing, collecting, documenting, analyzing, and comparing. In this captivating guided journal, readers are encouraged to explore their world as both artists and scientists.*

*The mission Smith proposes? To document and observe the world around you as if you've never seen it before. Take notes. Collect things you find on your travels.*

*Document findings. Notice patterns. Copy. Trace. Focus on one thing at a time. Record what you are drawn to. Through this series of beautifully hand-illustrated interactive prompts, readers will enjoy exploring and discovering the world in ways they never even imagined.*

**Tiny Experiments: How to Live Freely in a Goal-Obsessed World** by Anne-Laure Le Cunff

*Life isn't linear, and yet we constantly try to mold it around linear goals: four-year college degrees, ten-year career plans, thirty-year mortgages. What if instead we approached life as a giant playground for experimentation? Based on ancestral philosophy and the latest scientific research, Tiny Experiments provides a desperately needed reframing: Uncertainty can be a state of expanded possibility and a space for metamorphosis.*

*Neuroscientist and entrepreneur Anne-Laure Le Cunff reveals that all you need is an experimental mindset to turn challenges into self-discovery and doubt into opportunity. Readers will replace the old linear model of success with a circular model of growth in which goals are discovered, pursued, and adapted—not in a vacuum, but in conversation with the larger world.*

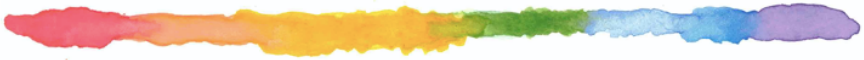
**unMIND, A Graphic Guide To Self-realization** by Siddharth Tripathi

*unMIND is not just a book—it's a visual experience. This powerful, minimalist graphic guide blends ancient Eastern wisdom with modern design to help you navigate the noise of the mind and reconnect with the calm awareness beneath it all. Whether you're feeling overwhelmed by thoughts, stuck in your head, or yearning for something deeper, unMIND offers a moment of stillness, clarity, and transformation.*

*Through symbolic storytelling, sparse text, and elegant illustration, this book gently guides you to observe your thoughts without getting lost in them. It's a tool for reflection, mindfulness, and self-inquiry—a meditation you can hold in your hands.*

**Radical Unlearning The Art and Science of Creating Change from Within** by  
Lewis Raven Wallace

*The beliefs that hold us back—inherited prejudices, self-limiting thoughts, destructive patterns—often feel permanent. But what if they’re not? In Radical Unlearning, you’ll learn about how neuroplasticity—the brain’s ability to form new neural pathways—plays a key role in how we learn (and unlearn) behaviors and biases. Journalist and activist Lewis Raven Wallace likens the process to how footpaths are created by countless people walking the same route over years. We can choose to disrupt existing neural connections, to create new paths that lead to meaningful change.*





## About the Author

Kim Miller (she/her) is a graduate of the University of Evansville, an alum of Las Vegas Academy of the Arts, and a 2024 member of Pratt Institute's Mindful Arts Leadership Cohort. She has nearly two decades of experience in theatrical production management and arts administration, working with organizations like The Second City, Blue Man Group, and Martin Lawrence Galleries.

As a mixed media artist, Kimberly has exhibited at the Winchester Dondero Cultural Center, Las Vegas City Hall, Nevada Humanities, and the Laughlin Public Library. In 2026, she was an artist-in-residence at Power and Light Press' Golden Hour residency. She also serves on the advisory board for the Southern Nevada Arts Coalition.

Currently she serves as a Senior Academic Advisor for the College of Fine Arts at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

In her home life Kim enjoys cozy video games and gardening with her husband, daughter, dog, and cat.

*Photo by Krystal Ramírez*