

Marketing Tools for Artists

Presents

TEN THINGS ARTISTS DO TO SCREW UP THEIR CAREERS!



An excerpt from
'50 Things Artists Do To
Screw Up Their Careers!'

by Owen Garratt

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Biography of a Pencilneck ®

OWEN GARRATT

Artist, Adventurer, Rugged Individualist, Good Egg.

Owen Garratt (The Pencilneck ®) is one of the top selling artists in the world...

A full time artist since 1996, his limited edition pencil prints sell for over \$200 unframed, his original pencil drawings sell for up to \$12,000, and his commissions can run into six figures.



Thousands of corporations have purchased his pencil art and he's done portraits for:

- Rock and TV star Gene Simmons
- Ivanka Trump
- Supermodel Kathy Ireland
- 'Ironman' Cal Ripken Jr
- Country star John Rich
- Best-selling author Mark Victor Hansen
- Comedienne Joan Rivers
- TV's original Batman Adam West
- NFL Superstar Emmitt Smith
- Heavyweight champ George Foreman
- Entertainment Icon William Shatner

Owen Garratt was born in Regina Saskatchewan, Canada in 1968 and has very quickly become a bestselling artist and everyone's favorite Pencilneck® - while remaining a well-kept secret.

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As Owen likes to put it; he's "...completely unencumbered by formal instruction" and his art is strictly black and white, due to a degree of color blindness that leaves him unable to see certain pigments.

"I didn't realize that I was 'color-impaired' until I was 19, when I tried to join the Naval Reserve as a summer job. Surprise! I'm not totally color blind, but if it's not a real vibrant, primary color, all I get is mud. So unless I wanted a career painting Amazonian tree frogs, it was pencil for me!"

In addition to being a World Class artist, Owen is a former full time freelance drummer, an avid bookworm and writer, an intrepid adventurer, a great outdoors loving, husband, father and all round Good Egg.

Oddly enough, he's not the wild-haired, tie-dyed, over-emoting, flaky artist he's a red meat eating, clean shaven, six-foot guy next door.

"I drew a lot as a kid (most kids do, until they get tired of hearing Mom and Grandma yowling that they have to stay in the lines), but as I got into my teens, I got into music, sports, and all of the other teenage hair-raisers. I didn't quit drawing; I just never got around to it. When I was 27, I drew a tiger for a Christmas present, and it was a big hit. An argument with a girlfriend who thought it was crappy was the spark that got me to take it up seriously. I was stung into proving that I could do art, and I sold over 900 prints of my very next drawing...which is a little is puzzling, because those first drawings were so bad they nearly hung themselves!"

Owen is the driving force behind www.MarketingToolsForArtists.com, a website dedicated to helping artists sell more of their work.

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Section One: Screwing Up the Art

Making Crap Art

The first thing to get straight is that you **MUST** be putting out good art.

The Pencilneck's ® Soapbox Principal #09

Make Good Stuff. Commit to it.

Sure, it's subjective, and everyone has their own opinion about what's good and what isn't, but I'm referring to one of several things:

- The lackadaisical, and even belligerent “who cares?” attitude.
- The phenomenon of “I created it, so it **MUST** be good/validated!”
- The oblivious ones who can't see how bad their art is, and perhaps the most insidious...
- The ones who **KNOW** there're problems with their work, but put it out anyway.



The last one is particularly troublesome to the artist because when they know it's sub-par, it undermines their determination and their efforts to send it out into the world. At some level they accept its non-acceptance by the public because they know that it wasn't what they were capable of. And maybe they set it up that way...

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A career has enough difficulties without hobbling it by trying to pass off work that YOU KNOW is beneath you.

But none of these attitudes are absolutes - paradoxically, there's a grain of benefit in each of these that can and should be embraced...to some extent. They all involve a balancing act.

The Pencilneck's ® Soapbox Principal #01

Everything in life is a matter of balancing paradoxes. Everything.

From empirical evidence of my own career and from everything I've observed I'm happy to report that the sloppy art problem comes down to either:

1. Plain old impatience, and/or
2. Plain old laziness

This means the solution is simple...

The Pencilneck's ® Soapbox Principal #74

Take your time. Do it right.

My dear friend Mike Sibley subscribes to The Chain Theory of Art, which is that “*A work of art is only as strong as its weakest part*”. And I completely agree. The human eye is drawn to inconsistencies, and the simple process of fixing the problem bits can raise art to new heights of accomplishment.

I find that it's very helpful to “finish in stages”, that is, when its “done” put it away for a couple of days and bring it out to see it with fresh eyes. In fact, do this a couple of times. But don't do it too much; we'll talk about this later on...

I also have a couple of people whose feedback I trust implicitly to cast a critical eye and search for weaknesses. The trick here is make sure these people really DO want you to make a terrific piece (so be careful of showing it to other artists - SO many of them are petty and jealous), but will also give you Tough Love and point out the hiccup (so be careful of showing it to friends, family, and employees - SO many of them won't tell The Emperor that he has no clothes!)

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It's a trick to find these people; it took me over a decade but it's been invaluable.

Any writer worth his salt will tell you that it's almost impossible to proofread yourself; why should art be any different?

Yes, I often get peevisish at their feedback, but after I cool down I see that they're right far more often than I am...

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Wrapping Their Egos Around Their Decisions

When artists come up to me and complain that they can't sell, they make ALL kinds of external excuses:

- *"Nobody gets me!"*
- *"People in this town don't buy art!"*
- *"Nobody wants to pay for art!"*
- *"My art is too REAL for them!"*

Now assuming that they actually have ability - you'd be surprised at how many artists complain about not selling but don't have the ability to be critical of their own work. If it stinks, that *may* be a reason it doesn't sell...



But more often, the reason is because they're painting something that:

- There's no real market for, or
- There market is so spread out either geographically or psycho-graphically that it's tough to communicate with them, or,
- There're already a million others doing it

For example, if you're one of the several gabajillion painters who seem to specialize in painting 'granny flowers', then you've got a dashed tough road ahead of you. Even if you're a world class granny flower painter, there's zillions of other artists who do exactly the same thing, and if you're trying to get noticed in a sea of anything, the odds stacked against you are astronomical.

Then there's the unfortunate phenomenon of the granny flower market being rather soft - and how do you find a group of granny flower painting enthusiasts? The odds are turned against you...again.

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I can hear the uproar now. *“Owen, do you mean to try and tell me that I have to sell out my ‘artistic vision’? That I have to pander to a fickle public?! I’m an Artist, dammit, and I should be able to do whatever I like!!!”*

Youbetcha. An artist’s vision and direction are entirely up to that individual and NO ONE has the right to change one smattering of it. You don’t think I let anyone tell ME what to do or how to do it, do you?!

However, as this is a book on marketing, I’m going to encourage you to suspend any rage and examine these points for the truth that’s inherent in them, and to drop the drama and see if you can benefit from it. (You can always go back to having a hissy fit later!)

Here’s the point: almost without exception, the people who’re struggling with the idea of resonating with a specific, identifiable group of people are doing so because:

- A. They’re hesitant to admit that what they’ve been doing really doesn’t resonate with very many folks
- B. They get awfully defensive at the notion that it might be prudent to change direction a little,
- C. They get their ego all wrapped up in their ‘decision’ to do whatever type of art they do.

However, after pretty much 20 years of hearing artists complain and bemoan the ‘commercialism of art’, I’ve come to these very important conclusions:

1. They DIDN’T consciously decide on their subject matter or what their art was going to stand for...they just fell into a routine, or kept on painting the very first stuff they learned. (DING! That’s why there’s SO many people doing granny flowers: they never progressed beyond that point in their artistic journey! It’d be a different thing entirely if they came back to it after a full exploration...)
2. They DIDN’T consciously decide on their subject matter or what their art was going to stand for...they just fell over backwards into something that looked pretty good, and

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keep on going in the same direction, the decision being one of being able to *produce*, not connect.

3. They DON'T want to admit this, and so get very protective of the idea of what "they represent", whether it sunsets, flowers, various animals, or anything else where there's a million other indistinguishable voices.
4. They "scrub harder" in terms of effort to validate their decision - though it's actually a *lack* of decision - and continue deeper into the nonproductive rut they started.

The Ironic thing is they really DIDN'T really create anything anyway; they typically saw somebody else do something similar and (hopefully) changed it a little and started on their way. This is why SO much art looks the same; everyone's painting the same granny flowers that their first painting teacher taught them.

So what are they hanging on so hard for?

If the direction the art is taking wasn't a conscious decision, and/or is blatantly derivative of something else - especially something else that's a dime a dozen - why do these artists get so dashed sniffy about it?

Because their ego is steering the boat.

The Pencilneck's ® Soapbox Principle #247

Egos make lousy captains. They're too busy making sure they're focusing on getting praise and validation and/or looking over their shoulders in paranoia that they inevitably end up smashing on the rocks.

So take a hard and unflinching look at your art, and then take look around. Are there a whole bunch of other artists doing the same thing? Honestly, did you decide to make that kind of art because it moved you, or because it was convenient?

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The good news is that we're not stuck doing what we've always done! While I give dire cautions in other places against pinballing around and NOT sticking with something, this is the exception...

If it's not going all that well, if there's a tons of others trying to play in the same pool, if you're doing a particular type of art out of convenience, then by all means, you can, actually, you MUST, progress along your artistic path!

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Looking for Love...

In an effort to gain praise and validation, artists constantly do things and make decisions based on seeking praise instead of building their careers.

When we're children and are learning, well, anything, we constantly look to our parents for feedback. In school our teachers are whom we look to for guidance and reinforcement, but begin to use our peers as a sort of 'channel marker' to see how we're doing. As we develop our artistic aptitudes we look first to our instructors (if any) and our family, friends, and artistic peers and not so much our parents – though we still have an instinct to flock towards authority figures for validation.



Art is about communication, and it's only natural that, having created something, we wish to communicate and share what we've done, especially if we've only ever been praised for it (a common, but serious problem). It's a dopamine hit to the pleasure centers of our brain. And if we've taken some lumps, we feel unsure of ourselves and crave praise and attention as reinforcement. It's only natural. But it isn't particularly helpful.

We never ever get unbiased feedback from our family and close friends; that's not their job. Their job is to encourage us.

Our artist peers are just as unreliable. If they're friendly towards us they won't be critical, but there's "the other kind" of peer too. They're the artists who, usually out of a sense of jealousy, will go out of their way to be critical and don't hesitate to spread vitriol about us and everything we do.

The Curse of The Art World

Most artists make the mistake of basing their decisions about their career on the opinions of other artists. And quite often, the newer artists tend to get really intimidated by the old timers who stand around and pontificate and offer opinions and insults about any and everything remotely connected to art.

How does this affect artists?

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They tend to:

- Create art that their *peers* like as opposed to creating art that connects them to people.
- They tend to charge only what others in the group charge.
- They tend to attend shows based on who else is doing the show, as opposed to doing show that clients attend.
- Take career advice from their peers – even when the advice giver isn't doing very much
- Do things calculated to get a certain effect with their peers.

The greatest danger in spending too much time in close proximity to artists is the exposure to negativity. I'm not picking on artists here; pretty much every subculture is crammed with them: writers, musicians, teachers, sales reps, unions, the medical professions, public speakers, entrepreneurs, hobby groups...you name it, they all have tons of bitter naysayers who never quite seem to have got their careers to where they think it should be, and they viciously attack or berate anyone who dares to do what they were unable to.

Now, their only 'reward' seems to be in having the newbies gather round while they 'hold court' and they drape themselves in this importance.

Under such influence, is it any wonder that so many artists are conflicted about success and what they should do?

So we can't trust our friends and we can't trust our peers...what are we to do?! Who can provide guidance? Who can shine a light on the path?

If you have a desire to be a professional artist, the ONLY people whose opinions matter are your client's. Period.

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Our families aren't clients. Our friends aren't clients. Our instructors aren't clients. Our peers certainly aren't clients.

Being a professional means getting paid, and that means being of benefit to those who can give money to you. If we are to be of sufficient benefit to others so as to get paid, we must have something to offer them, and that means understanding them, understanding their needs and desires, and understanding our role in fulfilling those needs and desires.

Who cares what any other artist thinks about what we do? Sure, it's always nice to get a clap on the back, and I'm certainly not immune from the effects of having sunshine blown up my skirt, but I've learned to separate the nice things I may occasionally hear from other artists from anything having to do with my career. If I get praise, great, but I mustn't forget that the sound of cash crinkling is the important one to pursue.

Crass? Are we to sell our artistic souls in the pursuit of filthy lucre? No, this isn't about toadying to public whim; an artist has to stand for something the public can get on board with. *But the person who parts with gold to purchase a drawing that I've created offers the most sincere appreciation and praise of me and of my art.* Praise, platitudes, and other talk is cheap. Words cost nothing, but ponying up some dough is the ultimate acceptance, because it has, by definition, cost something.

Do I get bent out of shape when other artists say snippy and dismissive things about me and my art? No, though I'd still rather they didn't. But it's a pretty rare day that someone, somewhere doesn't reach for their credit card to participate in what I do, and that matters more. To that end we must guard against giving undue weight and importance to the opinions of those who have no interest in doing business with us.

Critics don't buy, so they don't get a vote.

The wife of the 2nd generation owner of a medium sized trucking company in Wyoming who is interested in maybe using my art to give to their 20 best clients for Christmas is someone who's opinion matters to me, not a group of amateur artists who can't give their art away to relatives

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and who'd rather gather round the cauldron and cast jealous aspersions than do anything productive.

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Section Two: Screwing Up With the Clients

Being a Flake

Are you professional?

Even asking this question is interesting; it reveals what we think professional means – and not everybody has the same idea.



- Some people think it means being stuffy.
- Some people think it means being anal retentive and extraordinarily picky about minutiae.
- Some think it means being gregarious and the life of the party.
- Some think it means having military precision and perfect timing in everything that you do – everything has to be ship shape and Bristol fashion. Not a speck out of place.
- Some think it means being super cautious and frugal and prudent.
- Some think it means having nothing but the best; looking like a big shot – the finest support materials, the nicest clothes, the best show booth.
- Some think it means committing everything to paper...mountains and mountains of paper, and notes, and memos, and checklists, and ...

Certainly, there can and maybe should be elements of each of these to most business person's make up...just keep them balanced.

My own definition of professionalism is broader, yet simpler.

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The Pencilneck's® Soapbox Principal # 191

Professionalism is the qualities of one's self and one's business that give the optimum customer experience, so that the client will

- 1. Ache to do business with us again, and*
- 2. Tell everyone how wonderful we are.*

In a general sense we all kind of know what we should do:

Dress appropriately

This is a tough one for SO many artists. Why do so many artists insist on “showing their creativity and/or individuality” in their manner of dress? The dirt honest truth – and I’m saying this in the manner of the well-wisher who’s telling you your zipper is open – is that human nature mocks those of us who ‘peacock’. If you go around in garish or outlandish attire, you’re hurting your career. Very few of us can pull it off.

If you insist on trying, then you’d better be prepared to spend a fortune. Aim for elegant class instead of shock value. Please.

Be well groomed

I know that from time to time fashions cycle through periods where it looks like nobody showers or shaves or washes their hair, but again, these attempts at looking studiously mussed are on purpose and never by accident.

If you need a haircut or need to get your teeth looked at, then do so.

The only people who can wear hairstyles 25 years old are the 25 year olds.

NO perfume or cologne. EVER. Millions of people who have scent allergies. I’m one of them. If I smell you, even if it’s nice, you’ll never see me again. I have no choice. Don’t sacrifice a potential long term client just because you seem to think it your right to inflict your odors on everyone.

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And just because nobody's ever complained about how you smell doesn't mean you don't!

And then there's halitosis...

The Pencilneck's ® Soapbox Principal # 35

ALWAYS assume that you have body odor and bad breath.

Why? So you'll never get caught with it.

Develop a healthy paranoia about it. If you're always vaguely worried about smelling bad, then you'll never let it get the best of you. You'll have mints or mouthwash or gum and sanitizer and deodorants with you at all times.

I do. Seriously. Ask the Colonel.

Oh, and if you smoke, then you need to know that everyone who doesn't smoke knows about it because they can smell you. Actually, hand sanitizer works real well at removing smoke smell from hands and clothes (test first for colorfastness)

Be reasonably organized in our business systems so we can easily and smoothly conduct business.

When someone is willing to give you money, you have to make it easy for them! Accept credit cards, make sure your online shopping cart works like you think it does, and provide bags from them to carry your stuff home from art shows (NOT old shopping bags!)

Have goodish communication habits

You don't need to be super vivacious. You don't need to be Tony Robbins and be 'fascinating'. You don't need to know a bunch of corny jokes.

You just need to be able to chat with people.

The Pencilneck's ® Soapbox Principal # 15

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If the thought of being engaging troubles you, just chat like you do on those occasions when strangers strike up conversations in a line up or on a park bench or on an airplane.

Instead of learning a bunch of canned patter like a burgeoning Lothario trying to work up some good pick-up lines, learn to be genial, convivial, and unassuming.

Get rid of the plasticity phoneyess.

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Section Three: Screwing Up the Work

Being Too Busy To Any Work

Disclosure: I still wrestle with this – at least weekly.

All of us are busy; here's a typical Wednesday for us:

- Get the kids up and helping The Colonel get them ready and out the door with her.
- Writing and drawing is first. Not email, Facebook, or TV.
- Prep the evening meal (something in the slow cooker, marinating, etc.)
- 11:15 go pick up Harding at pre-school and schlep him over to daycare
- Stop at Staples to get a half dozen things
- Pop into gallery to have lunch with The Colonel and The Groovy Framing Elves™, sign some limited edition prints, do a radio interview, go over some reference photos that were waiting for me, trim and size the paper for a new drawing, take a scheduled call with a commission client, and before I know it, I have to race home to meet the boys on the school bus at 3:45.
- Pack swim gear while they have a snack and do homework
- Get to the pool by 4:30 for Hudson's swimming practice
- Home to eat by 6:00



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- 6:30 off to bagpipe practice (I'm the drum sergeant in the Spruce Grove Fire Services Pipe and Drum Band)
- 8:30 my one weekly social thing - off to a local pub for beer n' wings with the Fire Chief and other senior pipers (For the record, I'm having the beer; Chief doesn't drink)
- 10:30 home, to watch the PVRed Survivor with The Colonel
- 11:30 - Prep the next day and make sure I know what I'll be doing.

This probably sounds a lot like your life, doesn't it? Lots of go go go...

When does the art happen? When does the marketing happen?

Then there's all the other stuff: mowing the lawn, renewing car insurance, getting groceries, gassing up the vehicles, helping the kids with homework, and on and on.

Everyone's too busy for everything. But that's no excuse.

Here's a tidbit that I got from my hearty chum, Google Adwords guru, and bestselling author Perry Marshall:

A Perry Marshall Soapbox Principle:

There're \$10 an hour jobs, there're \$100 an hour jobs, and there're \$1000 an hour jobs, and most people are too busy doing \$10 an hour jobs to do the \$1000 an hour jobs.

Wow. When I heard that my whole life changed. You know truth when you hear it.

You NEED to stop doing the \$10 an hour monkey stuff and get a hold of more \$100 and \$1000 an hour jobs.

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I don't mow my own lawn, shovel my own driveway in winter, and The Colonel doesn't mop the kitchen floor, vacuum or scrub toilets. We hire that stuff out.

Now it took some real convincing, of both me and The Colonel, to come around to this frame of mind. We both come from farming families, and two of the overarching values that farmers tend to have are:

1. Hard work
2. Self reliance

So it felt a little shameful to be hiring out things that we were certainly capable of doing, and a wasteful approach to money, but we examined it with logic and gave it a try for 90 days.

Sure, we suddenly had FAR more time on our hands, but something interesting happened – once we got a service to come and take care of our lawn, we had one of the nicest yards in the whole subdivision! I LOVE having a beautiful lawn, but I don't have the compulsion to waste my own sweat and Saturdays doing it myself. And I'd never be able to get it as nice as these guys.

We've got a great local kid who shows awesome hustle concerning our driveway. For \$10 he's out there in weather that'd freeze a polar bear stiff, and I get to avoid those unpleasant heart attacks.

My mother in law (The Admiral) chafes at this *"How lazy are you that you can't even do your own driveway?"*, but she's missing the point. By letting this kid do it I free up my time AND my psyche. I hate shoveling snow, and have to work hard at not procrastinating on it. For \$10 I don't ever have to worry about it. It's done, he does a great job, and to be frank, I feel a sense of social responsibility to reward this kid's hustle – put another way, I'd feel like I'm screwing him out of the \$10!

But I understand The Admiral's point of view as well. Like her, I grew up in a farming family and that sense of self-reliance and work ethic runs deep. One doesn't slack off: ever. One can't. Come hell or high water, the crop gets harvested, the animals get tended, and you just get it done. Which is fine as far as it goes, but the point is that outsourcing and delegating isn't about shirking responsibility, the work gets done, but it's foolish to do everything yourself. I now

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contend that outsourcing this stuff is FAR MORE responsible to my career and my family than forcing myself to do it out of an sense of illogical, ill-fitting propriety.

It's a false economy. By reliving ourselves of the minutia of dozens, if not hundreds or minor tasks, our minds are free to stay on the exiting and important things - family, career, friends, learning, etc.

Ten dollar an hour jobs are things like getting supplies, cleaning, data entry, maintenance, bookkeeping, and so on.

In my case, \$100 an hour jobs are things like researching references to draw, writing my newsletters, and double checking that systems we've set up are being implemented and getting the proper results.

Thousand dollar an hour jobs are writing ad copy, negotiating with suppliers, designing marketing funnels and systems, giving sales presentations, and drawing.

But what if you're not able to afford even a couple of \$10 an hour jobs?

If you're in a spot where you just don't have the ready cash flow to hire the \$10 jobs, you likely feel that you have to still do them yourself. I've been there too, but you need to make it a priority to get out of that.

I've found that the biggest hurdles are:

1. Procrastination
2. "It just takes a second' thinking, and
3. Stupid cheapness.

The procrastination occurs when, deep down, you don't want to do the \$100 or \$1000 jobs so you create all kinds of 'busy work' to keep yourself from the important jobs. For some reason we decide to sort our receipts or clean our desks or that we need an emergency haircut at the time we should be doing the high paid stuff.

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Fight that tendency. Make a plan. Work the plan.

The Colonel still has to fight the “It’ll just take me a second to do this...” thinking. She’s constitutionally incapable of inaction. She needs to do something. Coupled with her farmer’s ethics, she was tough to get to come around to letting others do a given chunk of it. She’ll start the car on a winter’s morning and decide to shovel the driveway while she’ll out there. The astute folks out there will note that I’m a very lucky man to have wed such an industrious woman, and I really don’t have an answer to *“What else was I supposed to fill those 5 minutes with? Was I supposed to make a sales call? Was I supposed to just stand there?!”* Of course not, but she takes that example as justifying ALL the situations, so her evenings are filled with vacuuming, running a load or two of laundry, cleaning a litterbox and all kinds of things that “just take me a second”...except that the whole evening is now gone and she’s not focused on any projects or family or active enjoyment. Sure, if the cat’s got sick on the floor it’s got to get cleaned up, but it doesn’t mean you might as well mop the entire floor, dust, clean the bathrooms while you’re at it!

Now, we have someone come in for three hours or so at a time, two or three days a week and The Colonel has enjoyed a substantial increase in the quality of her lifestyle. She’s gotten back into knitting, takes the boys skiing every week, has guilt-free time to watch ‘her shows’, and she even spearheaded a project to buy a new laser engraver for the gallery that’s spun off three separate revenue streams - custom engraving, electrical tags for industry, and tchotchkes for a booth at local Farmer’s Markets...and any one of these MORE than pays for having someone come and keep her evenings free!

And if you’re just cheap, then shame on you. I’m of stout Scottish blood, and trust me, life gets a whole lot more liberating if you quit saying “Oh, I don’t have to pay ‘X’ for that – I can do it myself...” Just pay qualified people to do the thing and go do something in the \$1000 an hour class.

One day you’ll discover that it’s easier to earn \$1000 than it is to earn \$100, and when you do, your life will make a big, BIG step forward.

Do the math; if you can profitably realize just ONE \$1000 hour of work, that can pay for 100 hours of busy work!

TEN THINGS ARTISTS DO TO SCREW UP THEIR CAREERS!

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Section Four: Screwing Up the Marketing

Sales resistance

I hate salesmen too. HATE them. I'd rather have a tooth pulled than go buy a new car.

Why? Because most salesmen suck at their job. Most salesmen are stuck in a 1950's way of selling that has more to do with pinning people to the mat than helping folks get what they want.

To me, old school selling is like trying to find a mate by spouting cheesy lines. Time to grow up.

The problem is when you've got round pegs and the client has a square hole. Old school salesmen use psychological pressure, intimidation, trickery, and lies to get people to a place of such discomfort that they'd buy just to end the process. Ever had that happen? What about from a panhandler? It's often very similar. It's awful, and I refuse to have anything to do with it. There are parallels in courtship too aren't there? It can get ugly - so no wonder selling has gotten a bad rep.

However, the flip side is that most sales reps swing the pendulum too far the other way and don't sell anything at all...they're wiggled out by the phenomena of people hating sales reps so and they never learn what sales is really about.

The Pencilneck's ® Soapbox Principal #003

To paraphrase David Sandler and Dan Kennedy:

"If you don't have a system for selling your art, then you're at the mercy of the public's system of buying – or not buying."

THAT'S why learning about selling and marketing is so important...



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So now you're thinking, "NO way...I've read some 'sales training' books and listened to a couple of CDs, and I just can't bring myself to do that...it's too manipulative!"

I've got some good news for you...

The Pencilneck's ® Soapbox Principal # 99

Virtually everything you've ever read about sales training is dead wrong.

The Pencilneck's ® Soapbox Principal #005

Proper salesmanship is exactly like courtship.

I hate being 'closed'.

I hate when they use 'tie downs' – "Don't you just love this?" They seem to think that if I say yes that somehow I'll be magically unable to say 'no'.

And don't even get me started on 'lies of omission.'

However, don't take it too far the other way. We still have to learn to communicate and put the very best spin on ourselves, and we can do it without getting sleazy or cheesy.

The Pencilneck's ® Soapbox Principal # 398

People love to buy, but they hate to be sold

Focus more on making it easy for them to buy, not on selling them. It's like courtship – one doesn't want to look desperate. When we chase, what happens? Right...they run.

When we attract, what happens? Exactly...they come

The Pencilneck's ® Soapbox Principal #889

From my Mom: "Play hard to get, not hard to want!"

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So you've got to do what you can to jazz up your story!

It's perfectly fine to make yourself as appealing as you can – you shower and shave/put on makeup before a date don't you? Then why not dust your sales story off before you present your art to the market?

There's nothing wrong with presenting yourself in the best possible light.

We're not talking about lying here:

- Don't say you've got George Clooney for a client if you don't.
- Don't say you have education you don't have.
- Don't say you've studied with someone you haven't.
- Don't say you've won an award you haven't.

So what can we do?

Well...

- If somebody sent your art to their aunt in Australia, then you're an "internationally known artist".
- If you win, like ANY award, then you're an 'award winning artist'!
- If anyone has bought anything of yours...then you're "in demand".

Here's where you want to be in regards to salesmanship: make it a non-issue!

You want to have the right product, with the right offer, in front of the right people. Then selling is mere facilitating the process to its natural conclusion. If you have these tenants in place then

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you'll never have to hard sell anyone - the biggest challenge at this point is to not screw things up!

So there're several things that need balancing out:

- You need to be attractive, but you need to be authentic.
- You need to have a good story about you and your art, but you can't just B.S. either.
- And you have to create art that speaks to the people you're trying to connect with and have an irresistible offer, but you can't look too obvious about it or you look creepy and/or desperate.

This look a little daunting, doesn't it? But think of how much your artistic career will transform once you've figured this out! It's the difference between making a sale and making a career.

In essence, salesmanship - once you've got your message and art congruent with a responsive audience - becomes a non-issue. Now just don't blow it by being dumb...we've all had dates go south on us because we said something dumb, haven't we? :)

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Indiscrimination

Indiscriminate Showings

There's a school of thought that says "any exposure is good exposure".

- *"Any show is better than not showing and staying home."*
- *"If you're not doing anything with the time anyway, you'd better get in front of customers, so you might as well do a show."*

You know what? Most of this is dashed good advice. Yes, doing something is better than doing nothing.

The title of the topic is "Indiscriminate Showings", and the problem lies with showing your art willy-nilly. There are some situations where NOT showing your art has a net benefit to your career.

Except under some heretofore unforeseen and exceptional circumstances:

- You will not see me at a mall with a booth at Christmas
- You will not see me at a Community Center come and go tea
- You will not see me at a flea market
- You will not see my art displayed for sale in a restaurant
- You will not see my art in a communal 'art society' format
- You will not see my art in hospitals
- You will not see my art in art colleges

What's the big deal? Why leave your art 'unshown'? Just because you haven't got The Perfect Gig lined up, why not show anyway?



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Positioning

All of these are bad positioning.

You see, once people have you pigeonholed in their minds, it's virtually impossible to get them to change it.

Remember the example of Kramer from Seinfeld. That unfortunate bit of lunacy in that club a few years ago notwithstanding, he's never been able to shed the mantle of "being Kramer".

Why?

Because we won't let him.

If you become known as 'that artist who always does the XYZ event', those people will NEVER let you be anything else.

It's not that they're nasty, it's just human nature.

The artists that take the 'any gig' philosophy to heart anchor themselves in a market that won't accept them as anything else...which begs the question: *"If a market won't let me change...why not go for the market we should've gone for in the first place?"*

The Pencilneck's ® Soapbox Principal # 103

Start at The Top

Start where you want to be.

It's MUCH better to be the guy trying to break into the luxury sailboat market than trying to cross over from being "that dude who has his art hanging in the restaurant on 45th that closed a few years back."

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“Hold on - What about ‘paying your dues’? What about building up that catalog of experience? Shouldn’t we cut our teeth on the projects that aren’t ‘make or break’? It’s all fine to talk about going into big going into a market we aren’t ready for?”

There IS a school of thought which I subscribe too that says “there’s no use perfecting the marketing before you’re ready because that just shows the world how unprepared (or bad) you are.”

Yes. There’s lots of benefit in practice, and it’s prudent to practice in an arena that’s not vital to your success. Make your mistakes when it’s okay to make a few mistakes.

That’s not what this means...

We mean not showing any old place that presents itself. We still pick our shows, and it’s based on what we stand for, what we aspire to, and who we want to connect with.

If you want to do boat shows, then yes, do smaller boat shows until you figure out what the hell you’re doing.

But if you want to do boat shows, don’t do the children’s puppet fair in Colorado...because it isn’t the same thing, and the things you learn at a puppet show aren’t likely to help you much when talking to the Florida zillionaire owner of a one-of-a-kind yacht who wants to get a small limited edition for the builders and crew of his new blockbuster.

To that end, I know who my clients are, I know where they are, and I know how to find more of them...

- You may see my art at a high end charity auction
- You may see my art at an industry specific trade show
- You may see my art in a very specific, handpicked gallery who “gets it”

Do that too.

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Section Five: Screwing Up the Thinking

The Grand Slam

Home Run Thinking

Homerun thinking is also “If-then”. *“If I could only do that, then everything would alright.”*



It's a nice notion, but very misleading and ultimately disappointing if you don't understand it.

See if this sounds familiar...you've been thinking about your career for quite a while and are in a bit of a funk. Then you see something about an artist who's doing well and has something cooking and you think *“Boy, if I could just do one or two of those, I'd be set!”*

Here's a more concrete example, one I hear about all the time. An artist will hear about me getting \$38,000 for one drawing, or about the \$130,000 project I was working on, they say *“Boy, if I could only do one of those, I'd be set!”*

Home run thinking is day dreaming, and while I'm always up for a good day dream, it's really no different than fantasizing about winning the lottery...and it's a little bit more of the Magic Beans thing.

“All I have to do is...”

Have you ever said those words to yourself? Then be careful because if you mismanage the next step your career will falter.

When artists see me scooping in \$38,000 for a pencil drawing, they aren't getting the whole story. If you go to my commissions page, technically they're getting 100 framed Limited Edition Prints for \$379 each, and they get the original – appraised at over \$10,500 – for free.

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The next step is that the artist will wrinkle their nose and say – “*Oh, well, that’s no big deal*”, because they’ve misunderstood it and it wasn’t what they thought it was, and now they’ve been made to feel “wrong”. (Isn’t it funny that when you tell some people ‘how to do it’, if it wasn’t the way they fantasized about, they ignore it, and even become dismissive?)

But if they didn’t have the understanding of how I structure my offer so that it’s actually a great deal for my clients – they’re trying to figure out how to make the leap to \$38,000 and are getting depressed because they can’t figure out how to manage it.

Home run thinking is also a form of procrastination. If an artist is working under a false preconception about how a big success comes about, they’ll tend to use their inability to hit that homer as an excuse to inaction.

“Oh, I can’t ask \$38,000 for a painting yet – I’m not ready – I’ll get there someday though...”

And when does someday come? Right, never.

I’ve noticed that a lot of creative types have similar thoughts about their health. My Dad used to do this. He used a collection of health problems (both real and perceived) as the excuse he needed to avoid failure. *“Yup, I just have to get better, then everything’ll be better...”*

Yes, there’re tons of severe health problems that are a real issue, obviously, but that’s not what I’m referring to.

So Dad, and lots of others, use the “when I get better” excuse for not claiming title to their dreams, and they also tend to fall into all kinds of alternative medicine...and let’s face it folks, even though there’s some really good stuff out there, there’s a hell of a lot of snake-oil too.

But I digress...

A successful career is NOT a home run or two – it’s a whole bunch of base hits. Sure, we can develop ourselves to “hit better”, and once and a while we catch a lucky one, but the problem is that it’s far too inconsistent – you can’t build on it.

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And artists that delude themselves into thinking that there's a vaguely defined big break somewhere are doomed.

Big secret: The Universe isn't going to send you home runs unless you've got your act together!

Do you think a magical commission fairy will come to one of those cheap little art shows and pepper you with fairy dust and magically offer you a purse of gold for some reason?

Do you think you can charge into a Big Dumb Company and have them stroke you a five or six figure check without impressing them that you're a success already? What's in it for them?

Do you think some celebrity is going to stumble across you and 'make your career' by giving you a big break? Uh huh...you and everybody else.

And even if this somehow happens, can you sustain the momentum? Can you build on the cash surge to insure it keeps coming? What're the first three things you'd do with the cash to build your business to keep the cash flowing?

Honest, it's a much easier and surer thing to act like a professional artist and attract the prosperity through offering the world something specific and meaningful.

"Egad! That wasn't very pleasant, Owen." I suppose not. But I thought it may be time for a little tough love. It pains me to see so many people get this wrong. And to be honest, it kind of cheeses me off that so many artists, who, having their preconceptions dashed, get dismissive as to the accomplishments of those of us who 'have'.

False Prophets

Market research sucks. Asking people who've never given more than 10 seconds thought about halitosis and then bribing them to talk for a half hour in depth about the intricacies of your

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mouthwash isn't going to help you very much. Market research and focus groups muddy the waters because:

- People tend to tell you what they think you want to hear rather than their true thoughts and desires.
- Most people have no idea why they do what they do, but won't admit that, so they make up stuff that sounds convincing. To them.
- Lots of people like sounding important and having their ideas listened to, and they'll make up all kinds of stuff just to be able to keep talking.

Many, many years ago I noticed that, for some reason, I was getting lots of requests for Canadian Geese art (!?) When it got to be time to whack together a new drawing, I thought I'd do the shrewd thing and cobble up one of a Canada Goose. Research was easy; it was spring time and the geese around the lake in the city I lived in had just hatched a new batch of chicks, so I grabbed my camera and away I went. After tossing enough bread to soak up half the lake and a couple of rolls of film (remember film?), I dropped the film off for developing (remember developing?), sifted through the prints, found what I wanted, and did a drawing. And it was a nice drawing. I published just under 2000 prints of that drawing and I entered it in the largest wildlife art show in Western Canada, and it won a ton of ribbons including Best in Class and Best in Category in the professional division. Awesome!

Except that I can't give the thing away. In over 15 years, I've barely sold a tenth of them!!! We've even tried to donate them to various conservation charities and were met with polite and uncomfortable "No, thank you"s.

What's wrong?! It's a nice drawing with a terrific pedigree, I had a demand for them...but nobody wants them.

Two problems:

1. I didn't realize that people were giving me the Third Party Close. The Third Party Close is where they give you a reason that's out of their or your control (thus a third party, get it?) as the reason not to do something. They do this to spare us and themselves the

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discomfort of rejection. *“If you had any Canada Geese though, I’d TOTALLY buy one!”*
The people asking for geese were mostly just giving an excuse, and they didn’t buy anything.

2. There wasn’t as many asking for geese as I thought there were. It seemed like everyone was asking, but combing back through to recall exactly how did and when, there were only three!! I did ALL of that because THREE people gave me an offhanded comment about geese!!

So I was jaded and skeptical when I noticed that several clients began asking if I was ever going to do any oil rig drawings. At least I was smart enough to say “maybe” instead of scoffing and/or snorting and saying “no”. But after a dozen or more questions about it, the seeds were planted, and in one of those fortuitous coincidences that don’t feel very coincidental, I soon got the black and white vintage photo-looking idea that I spoke about in Chapter 12, and I decided to do a test and researched, drew, and published my first oil industry piece and it changed my life.

What was the difference? Why was one set of input a flop and the other invaluable?

It comes down to context.

The geese suggestions were from “suspects”, not prospects or clients. (Suspects are folks who haven’t been qualified as to whether or not they’d be good fits for us business-wise. Prospects are prospective clients, and clients are the highest forms of humanity!) ☺

The oil rig requests were from existing clients. They proved by their actions that they dug me, dug my art, and by digging into their wallets to pony up some dough, confirmed that their opinions had economic validity.

“Opinions are like assholes; everyone has one”

Art Blakey, Legendary Jazz Drummer, Sept 1984

“The squeaky wheel gets the grease”

Josh Billings, 1870

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We must be very careful not to let critiques or comments have undue importance. Upon hearing two or three negative comments, most people seem to throw all logic and common sense out the window to quell the perceived negativity. It's like a negative comment is like a fire that's broken out and everything else must be dropped in an effort to extinguish it.

If a client asks if an artist has anything bigger, the artist will change course and begin painting bigger. If someone asks for a horse, the artist rushes to do something 'horsey'. If someone flinches at a quoted price, the art immediately begins discounting.

And honestly, was it *really* negative...or just a question?

Two or three negative comments out of, say 100 clients is meaningless, 97 out of 100 may mean something. Don't fall into the trap of accepting 1 comment, 1 circumstance, or 1 negative experience as a reason to throw the pendulum and cause you to change a rational, well-reasoned strategy or tactic. People are allowed not to like everything we do. They're allowed to disagree with us.



Don't let your Grandma - who doesn't get this art thing anyway - talk you out of giving up on your series of medical pieces to market to ER staff – unless she used to be a nurse, she's not your market, so her advice is marginal at best. Don't even ask. Don't let the wrong people influence you.

You wouldn't ask Grandma if she likes your new speed metal band, so don't bother asking her about your new art career either.

The Pencilneck's ® Soapbox Principle #117

Don't give undo weight to the unqualified, whiners, complainers, or anyone else with poopy-pants.

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We tend to skew our perceptions towards “bad news” and/or negativity. It’s our wiring trying to protect us from danger (and why the news is chock full of bad news - we can’t help but take notice of it). But what happens so often is that we make mountains out of molehills.

The people I love most in the world don’t know a dashed thing about what being an artist really means, and to be frank, they often shake their heads at me – but that doesn’t stop them from wanting to offer their help and assistance in my career when I was starting out.

This is the same as a teenager asking Grandma what to wear to a party. Grandma loves her but let’s face it, Grandma isn’t likely qualified to give fashion advice to teenagers.

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Intimidation

Letting other's accomplishments demoralize you

We've all had this. The first time I came across Mike Sibley's pencil art I confess that I had a fleeting moment of defeat. I wanted to quit. He was, and is, so much better than me that it wasn't even funny. *"Thank God he lives in England"* I thought.

I've also experienced it when seeing the publicity and accolades of other artists. I'd see articles, write ups, interviews and think *"I'll just never get there"*. They were, like, "real" artists. They were in galleries. They had studios and didn't just work at the kitchen table. They had catchy sound bites and sounded so dashed professional.

This is completely natural; just don't let it get out of hand. As I spent more and more time with my eyes open and my mouth shut I came to realize something very profound.

The Pencilneck's ® Soapbox Principal # 062

Everybody's full of shit.

After reading and watching several of these artists I began to see patterns evolving...

- Their art was mediocre at best
- They couldn't sell any of their mediocre art
- They like to hear themselves talk
- Nobody in the real world knew who they were

I went from being demoralized to being angry, then to being encouraged.

"If an idiot like that can do this..." I reasoned. Then I did, and I'm proud to say that I've eclipsed every single one of those artists that used to intimidate me...except Mike Sibley, but we've



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become dear friends. And Mike is most definitely not full of shit. But everyone else that 'got me down' has turned out to be a complete drag once I got past the ad copy (no, I'm not naming names).

Don't sweat anyone else's accomplishments. Go ahead and get angry, just be sure you also get motivated. Motivation driven by anger is perfectly legitimate. Would Lee Iacocca have become such a dynamo for Chrysler if he hadn't been pissed off because Ford fired him?

The Pencilneck's ® Soapbox Principal # 228

If you can't beat em'...

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Just Too Cool for School

A stunning and shameful percentage of artists consider themselves to be “above marketing”. I think this comes about in several ways:

- The artist has come from an environment rife with elitism, where any commerce is looked at as some kind of evil (notice how that approach conveniently absolves them of taking responsibility for it? If they cop the attitude that marketing is beneath them, then they have a built in excuse for not getting good at it).
- The artist has dabbled in it, and due to no fault of their own, hadn't had the tools necessary to do well. As a result they feel like the experience has burned them, and now they're hesitant.
- Much like BBQing and sex, lots of people, especially men, feel kind of weird asking for advice and can be somewhat hesitant to jump in if they're worried they're “not doing it right.” And let's face it; there hasn't exactly been much in the way of role models or people they could ask.

Asking a successful artist how they did it is a lot like asking a porn star about lovemaking. What you see has very little to do with reality, and they want to keep the magic – if you saw how mundane and mechanical it was, all of a sudden it's not all that sexy.

And truth be told, most “successful” artists

- A. Have no real grasp on what really worked
- B. Had someone else doing the real work (publishing houses, galleries, etc)
- C. Don't understand that they may be riding a fad and are unaware that their “marketing” is going to give them a very big surprise in the not-too-distant future.

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There're lots of artists who look at how some "successful" artists conduct themselves; over-the-top, boisterous, annoyingly flamboyant, phony, gregarious, etc - and falsely decide that they're not going to do well because they don't want to act "like that idiot".

I can assure you that any success that sort has is in spite of their actions, not because of them – yet they're very probably doing a lot of other right things: systemizing their work and marketing, being proactive, building and maintaining a client list, etc.

Over the past few years I've spent well over \$30,000 a year on my education: books, audio courses, consultants, travel to seminars and retreats, subscriptions to newsletters, tutorials...you name it.

Now don't freak out at that – I'm not suggesting that you need to do that to have a career, but I'm astonished at people who bite their lip at the prospect of spending \$29 on a book! How do you think I got started? Yes, I bought a book, and then another *and the more I learned the more I earned!*

The Principle of The Slight Edge

I don't know ANY seriously successful person who doesn't subscribe to this philosophy; even though he or she may not name it precisely this way. In essence The Principle of The Slight Edge can be summed up in this famously tired joke:

"Two friends are out camping and step out of their tent to be confronted by a savage grizzly. The first friend starts to put on is running shoes and the second friend says "What are you doing? You can't outrun a bear!!"

The first friend says "I don't have to outrun the bear – I just have to outrun you..."

A slight edge is exactly what it says, and a slight edge is all one needs to succeed.



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Therefore, successful people are constantly on the lookout for that slight edge; that ONE little thing that keep them one-step ahead...and they realize that the way to get that slight edge to be in a constant state of curiosity and education.

The Pencilneck's ® Soapbox Principal # 558

If I can get just ONE thing out of this book/seminar/consultation/course, then it was more than worth the money.

I've heard variations on this from every millionaire I've ever spoken to on this topic.

So I get, frankly, pretty frustrated at people who complain that a book cost \$30. If you learn something, like for instance, what criteria to use when choosing what art show to attend, and you find out something that you didn't know about certain shows which keep you from attending a show that would've been a flop for you, what's that worth to you?

Let's see...

- The booth registration (\$200 isn't out of line, in fact it's closer to the bare minimum)
- All the prep work to have inventory for the show
- Travel (gas, airfare, car rental, hotel)
- Cartage/shipping
- Insurance
- The time away from more productive work
- Stress
- Physical work of set up and tear down

Even ONE poorly performing show could mean a loss of \$500 without cracking a sweat...and I've been at shows where the cost of admission was as much as \$50,000! (Disclaimer: I got a better deal than that, but still)

So what was that knowledge worth? \$100? \$200? \$1000?

And that's if there was only ONE thing good in the whole book/seminar/consultation/course!!

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The Pencilneck's® Soapbox Principal # 772

Education is way cheaper than the school of hard knocks...

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