



Creativity and Mood

Most people are well aware of the idea that many great artists and creatives of all stripes have suffered from some form of depression or significant mood disorder. We all know the story of Van Gogh and his ear or maybe Virginia Woolf or Diane Arbus and their suicides. The connection is very real. Luckily, the connection is not that one *must* have a mood disorder to be a creative nor is it that getting help for the disorder will somehow make one less creative.

In other words, you don't have to suffer to be an artist.

Now, I should make something very clear: I am not a psychologist or therapist. I have, however, done a lot of research on creativity, productivity, anxiety and other related issues. Please keep that in mind as you read this. If you have concerns about your own feelings and think you may be suffering from depression or any other mood disorder, *please get professional help*. There are lots of very qualified professionals out there who can make a huge difference in your life. If you'd like to see if you might have depression, there are several anonymous online tests you can take, like http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/depression/MH00103_D. Google "mood disorder test" and you'll get loads of hits for other issues like anxieties--I suggest, however, sticking to ones from sources you trust like the Mayo Clinic or the American Psychological Association.

That all being said, there are things you can do on your own to help you improve your mood, be more productive, and generally make your business life a lot more enjoyable. We're going to cover one of them, a biggie, here.

One of my clients contacted me recently as he was feeling like he wasn't getting anywhere with his business. His creativity and thus his product were just fine, and he still had passion for his work, but because he wasn't booked solidly, he was frustrated and down. Another photographer I know also loathes not working every single day. If he doesn't have a project for more than one or two days, he gets extremely antsy and worried. Some creatives, a lot of them, in fact, are this way--they need to be working every single day or they feel there is something wrong.

This attitude is a case of unreasonable expectations. Let's look at the logic:

I'm not working (almost) every day for a client.

I'm not happy.

Therefore, I must be working for a client every day (or almost every day) to be happy.

The logic works structurally, but the very first premise is a problem. Is it reasonable to expect to work almost every day? Is that something that happens with any regularity in our fields? No. No one works every day or almost every day for a client. Sure, there are those periods where the phone seems to be ringing constantly and you are booked solid, but it never lasts. Not for anyone.

Instead, look at it this way: why aren't you happy if you are not working all the time? What is it that is really going on inside? Often, the answer to that is "I'm afraid the phone will never ring again" or "I'm afraid I'll never get another project and my kids will starve" or "I'm afraid I'll fail."

Those are some heavy-duty thoughts! But, how rational are they? When you set aside the fear, what are the realistic chances of these things happening? What are the chances of the phone never ringing again? 10%? 50%? 90% What about not ever getting another project? What are the real chances that you will fail? The possibility exists for all of these events, sure, but the probability is that none of them will happen. You're basing your fear on something very, very unlikely to happen.

And yet, so many creatives set up unreasonable expectations in their minds, and when they fail to achieve those expectations, they get frustrated and down.

If you're one of those creatives, you need to manage your expectations.

Instead of setting an unreasonable goal of working for a client almost every day, why not set a goal of billing \$X (specific) in the next quarter or year (and make it a reasonable goal--not \$1 million--why not start with what you *need* to make)? By setting reasonable goals, you are making their achievement possible. Unreasonable goals are (almost) impossible to achieve--you are then setting yourself up to fail. Who wants or needs that?!

Now, what can you do to give yourself the best chances of being successful, of achieving those goals? Of making that phone ring again and getting your next project? Are you working your marketing plan? Are you calling your targets and having meetings? Are you doing the work? If you are, then you have to have the faith that the odds are in your favor, you've done everything you can, and that you will probably succeed.

Once in a while, okay, fairly often, my clients will ask for the "secret" to marketing; what is the magic formula that will make them successful. The thing is, there isn't one. Each client has his/her own context and there is no magic bullet. Instead, figuring a plan to give you the best odds, then working that plan, is all you *can* do. Control what you can (your actions) and let go of trying to control what you can't (your targets' actions).

Remember, you cannot control everything. There is always going to be some tiny, random chance that the worst will happen. People get hit by buses or ice from a plane crashes through a roof and takes out power to a city block or whatever. There is nothing you can do to change that or prepare for it fully. You have to accept that you can only do what you can do, and have faith that, with the odds in your favor, things will work out.

Come see me in person! I'm speaking in several cities in April and May. For more information, check out burnsautoparts.com, where you'll also find more Manuals and links to my blog and podcasts.