



## Crap in Your Way

As a creative, you probably put up with more “crap” than the average person. Generally speaking, creatives tend to try and avoid conflict and try to make people happy. While those can be positive attributes, the creative often goes too far and ends up actually doing more harm than good. In not wanting to be selfish or pushy, the creative often ends up being a bit of a doormat--and that leads to some serious resentment and negative outcomes.

My personal theory is that this often derives from some underlying sense of guilt that you don't have to “work” in the same way others do; you get to create art, and you get paid for it. How lucky is that?! Somewhere, there's a tiny voice telling you that you don't deserve to set limits on how others treat you because, well, you are just so lucky to be doing what you love for your career. You may even get some external approval of those thoughts via clients who complain about how you're “making so much more than they are for a day's work” or a family member (or friend) who says “Yeah, but it's not like you've got a REAL job or anything.”

The thing is, if you hold this assumption up to the light of reality, you'll see that it itself is crap. We all know the fallacy of the “you make more money in a day than I do in a week” line, since you may only work that one day that week, etc. Besides, in some ways the work you do is harder than the work of the general population. Yes, you're not laying asphalt in 100°F weather, but you are not only creating art (a pretty difficult thing for most people), you're managing a business and, as anyone teaching an MBA program will tell you, being an entrepreneur is some of the hardest work out there. You have to wear about a billion hats more than the average employee, including ones like “healthcare benefits coordinator” and “contact person for state tax entities” and “A/P manager,” etc. I'd like to see your cousin Bob the Middle Manager do all that you do AND make art--he'd be on his knees in less than a week, for sure!

So, instead of being less deserving of setting limits, you are, in fact, more so. Repeat after me:  
The best thing I can do for my business, and for myself, is set limits and say “no” when I need to.

That's called an affirmation. Flaky or not, I don't care--repeat it to yourself as often as needed to make yourself believe the truth of it. I used to laugh at affirmations (think Stuart Smalley) but now I'm a big believer in them. They work, and there's a ton of articles out there to prove it, if you need that kind of reinforcement. Besides, they work best done in private--they are for you and only you, after all--so who is going to know if your chanting them anyway? Give it a shot.

Even if you still don't fully believe you should set limits (yet), try it anyway. Make a list of 20 things you are putting up with in your life. These can be directly work-related or not. For example, maybe you are putting up with your life-partner calling several times a day while you're working or you don't get to work on time every day or you have clients who owe you money or you waste too much time surfing the 'net. If it's something that you put up with, write it down. Now, look at your list. I bet most of the items are things you actually can control or at least influence more positively. If your life-partner calls too much, tell him/her not to (though I suggest doing it politely) and suggest that s/he email you instead, with the understanding that you will answer the email when you can, not necessarily on their schedule, but on yours (of course, if

it's an emergency, then s/he should call). If you have clients stringing you out for payment, call them and insist on a check today. If they aren't willing to pay you, as agreed, then they aren't the kind of client you should work to keep anyway. If you're distracting yourself by playing on-line for hours, schedule yourself your "online time" and stick to the schedule.

The point is, you do have control over a lot of the crap in your life, you've just let yourself believe otherwise. If you take steps to reduce the crap, particularly by setting limits and saying "no," you'll find that not only will you accomplish more and feel better, you will be more respected by others (for example, clients). We teach people how to treat us; if you let yourself be the "nice guy/gal" who gets dumped on and used, you will just get more and more dumped on and used. And all that negative will build up in your system, affecting your creative product as well as your state of mind. Better to stop it before it becomes a problem or to start fixing it if it's already one.

One last thought: though you should definitely stand up for yourself, you shouldn't go to the other extreme and become a jerk. Say "no" when you need to, and be firm, but do it with compassion and understanding. For example, if a client says "I need you to do it for half what you quoted" you can say "I'm sorry that your budget doesn't match my needs for this project; if we can find a way to change the parameters, I'd love to work with you, but if it has to be this way, I'm afraid I'll have to take a pass on this project." That's still a firm "no," but it does leave the door open for changes that will make a healthy "yes" possible.

