

TPS Tech Sheet 24

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Managing to Succeed by Ann Daly

Introduction

Whatever your personal goal as a photographer (to earn a living, to merit a reputation, to share your passion with friends and family—or all of the above), you need to manage your photographic practice.

What that means, simply, is organizing your work so that you are both efficient (giving minimum effort) and effective (getting maximum results).

Most of us are very efficient. We're getting lots of stuff done. The question is: is it the right stuff? Are we actually being effective with our energy and accomplishing the most important things?

Sooner or later, we all get to the point when we outgrow our old office habits. The most obvious symptom is exhaustion.

That's the most common problem presented by my individual clients. Everything that's supposed to support your photography (like sales, accounting, portfolio development) turns into its own burden. We get worn out by outworn practices.

That's when you know it's time to get a better system.

I was raised on color-coded file folders, the daughter of a project engineer. His mantra: "Nothing ever happens without a budget and a deadline."

Money and time are certainly two of the essential ingredients for a successful management system. And I'll add a third: relationships.

Forget all the complicated, one-size-fits-all formulae for running your studio. You need to remember only two things. First, you define your own vision of success. Second, the route to that success is through the strategic management of money, time, and relationships.

Of course, management is secondary to the work itself. But if you are committed to photography, thoughtful management will actually help you to further your creative achievements, and maintain your sanity in the process.

Money

It's a reality of human nature. We think that, if we ignore the elephant in the room, it will go away. If the cake is eaten at a birthday party, then the calories don't count. And if we don't keep track of our expenses, then they really don't cost that much.

You may consider money a necessary evil. You may consider money a divine necessity. Whatever your relationship to the green stuff, the fact remains that it is a fundamental ingredient in your photographic practice. Money buys the equipment, runs the darkroom, and pays

for the electricity. Money deserves your respect, and your attention.

No matter what your particular financial goals are, one principle holds true: you've got to maximize the money you already have. In order to do that, you need information.

Do you know how much money you have coming in and going out each month? Have you looked ahead toward your immediate and long-term goals, such as a doubled income or a new darkroom?

By regularly keeping track of your money, you are gaining the information—and control—that you need in order to achieve those goals.

Begin by asking yourself:

1. Do I keep an up-to-date income/expense statement?
2. How effectively do I use that statement to guide my financial decisions?
3. How often do I assess my financial picture for ways to improve the bottom line?

Time

Our culture spends most of its energy rushing after money. But think about it. Your stocks may rebound without any effort on your part. You may hit the lottery. Your long-lost Aunt Greta may leave you an unexpected inheritance. There are always ways to pick up more cash. But that hour that got away from you yesterday? You will never, ever get it back. The clock doesn't permit do-overs.

Time is your most precious resource.

How do you spend yours?

Murphy warned us: All tasks expand to fill the time allotted to them—and beyond. If you don't limit a task to the time it deserves, then: 1) you will give it excessive attention, and 2) you will be unable to control the results you receive.

As much as we may bristle at the thought, the best way to manage time is to schedule it. Do you have a daily schedule? A weekly schedule? A schedule for the upcoming year?

A schedule isn't about lacing yourself in

a straightjacket, or becoming your own best drill sergeant. A schedule is about keeping a rhythm going. A schedule is your personal rhythm. It's not rigid. It breathes. It has a consistent shape, but it can expand and contract to accommodate the flow of real life. Without rhythm, music loses its forward motion. Without a schedule, we lose our forward motion, too.

What drives that forward motion? Goals. That's what they mean by "prioritizing." Planning a weekly and monthly sched-

ule ahead of time ensures that you spend your best hours on the things that matter most. It's about distinguishing between what's actually important, and what's merely urgent. Oftentimes we spend so much time on what seems "urgent" (usually to other people), that we postpone the activities that will move us toward our own truest desires.

Relationships

How do you grow your photographic practice? One relationship at a time.

"Sales." "Marketing." "Branding." It all boils down to individual people: buyers, patrons, curators, dealers, vendors, and journalists.

The beauty of the internet revolution is that it permits you to initiate, and develop, a large number of significant relationships for ridiculously small amounts of time and money. A website, its guest book option, an e-newsletter— all enable you to nurture those connections.

In fact, the web has made the personal touch mandatory. People expect to see

Begin by asking yourself:

1. Have I structured my day so that I do my most important work during my peak hours?
2. Is my space organized so that I can lay my hands on anything I need within five seconds?

your photographs online, to read your resume and artist's statement, to see your picture, and to make immediate contact with you.

But here's the rub. It's not just about the old model of mass advertising "push"— pushing your work one way, out into a presumably homogeneous world. Rather, it's about understanding the needs of each particular buyer or dealer and positioning the benefits of your offering in dialogue with their needs.

That's the two-way "relationship" part, and the particularly challenging part for artistic entrepreneurs, because creativity

3. Do I have a written list of goals (for example, overhauling the billing system, or expanding my gallery network) each one assigned to a different month of the upcoming year?

is often so internally focused. The question is, how do you connect to your partners on their terms as well as your own?

Begin by asking yourself:

1. What people are important to my success?
2. How mutually beneficial is each of those relationships?
3. What can I do to develop those relationships?

The last word: Ambition

To make any of this work, you need to begin at the end. What is your personal vision of success? Where do you want to end up? Without a clear sense of where you are heading, you won't have any way to map your journey. You won't be able to make distinctions between what is more or less important to achieve in a given day, week, month, or year.

Lately I've been noticing that, while artists and creative professionals are publicly sharing their deepest artistic visions, they are very shy about publicly stating their professional ambitions. Won't such revelations sound arrogant, or naïve? And what if I end up falling short?

"Ambition" has gotten a bad reputation. It conjures up images of Icarus or Lady Macbeth.

But what ever gets accomplished without ambition? The ambition to wipe out poverty drove Mother Teresa. The ambition to release the space of the flat canvas drove Jackson Pollock. The ambition to become president drove Bill Clinton.

Take some quiet time to consider your own lurking ambitions. Acknowledge them, and honor them. They will fuel your practice management. They will remind you of why you want to keep going, even if you're tired and discouraged.

And they will help you to prioritize.

When you start out, everything needs to be done. When you are (finally) up and running, you are (happily) offered more and more opportunities. In either phase of your photographic career, how do you know how to spend your time, where to invest your money, and which relationships to develop?

Your ambitions will tell you. Use them as your guide for prioritizing, by simply asking yourself in every instance: "How much will this activity/investment/relationship advance me toward my ambitions?"

About the Author: Ann Daly

Ann Daly (www.ann Daly.com) is a consultant, author, and speaker specializing in the arts. Based in Austin, Texas, she teaches in the College of Fine Arts at The University of Texas at Austin. As a coach and workshop leader, she helps artists to develop

the skills they need in order to achieve their artistic goals.

Editor's Note: This is the first in a three-part series. Next time: Tips for managing your time.



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