

The Creative Process by Russ Adams

Creativity doesn't always come easy. It does come with sacrifice and can take an emotional toll on an artist. When it comes to stressful career fields, craftsman can be easily overlooked. Apparently, some blindly mistake creatives for carefree souls. Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, the more artists I talk to, the more normal I feel about the emotional cataclysms I deal with on a daily base.

From the moment a project is submitted to an artist, to the instant the finished work of art is delivered to the client, creatives can endure an appalling volume of self-inflicted stress. I am maybe generalizing here. I am fully aware there are some artists that may have a particular set of skills they have come to master and they stay within their comfort zones. There is nothing wrong with that.

Wimps!

There are also artists who will claim to be 100% confident in their abilities and never stress about the projects they work on because they are hardcore. These guys are probably lying and unwilling to admit they cry themselves to sleep every night with a thumb seated firmly in their mouths.

For the rest of us, we like to test ourselves. In essence, we challenge ourselves to a creative duel and lay waste to our sanity in the process. It's how we roll. It's also the reason why so many of us are twitchy. Below are what I like to call the 6 Steps of Creativity.

STEP 1: Taking on the Challenge

It all starts when a client calls to propose a project to the artist. I get all kinds of projects from animatronic animals to futuristic military gear. Each gig comes with its own set of challenges which I am thrilled to take on. It's like getting psyched up for a battle before you even see the frontline.

"I can do this! Of course, I can do this! I am Russ 'Freakin' Adams!"

STEP 2: Preparing

The confidence doesn't waver as I move through the design phase. I pull pages and pages of reference materials. I research what has already been done, how they did it, and how I can improve on it. The project's outlook is good. No! It's looking amazing! I am ready to fight having only seen photos and diagrams of the battlefield.

STEP 3: Self Doubt

As I start to put the project together, things aren't quite as positive as they were. Most things work out nicely on paper but not so much in the real world. I've gotten my first real look at that frontline and I am soiling myself.

"The project looks like crap! I am going to have to give their money back."

STEP 4: The Pit

This usually lasts a few days and in my shop many, many, violent things have occurred in the meantime. This is usually where artists start to question their abilities and self-worth. This is where the fear of failure has an artist firmly in its grasp.

"What was I thinking? I don't know if I can do this..."

The client won't stop calling. Now they want a design change and some photos of the progress.

"Are they crazy? PHOTOS? I can't show them photos. It looks bad man—it looks so bad."

As the deadline approaches, that battlefield is getting really bloody. Despite the crippling fear, the annoying client, the tears, and the belligerent voices in my head, I push through and deliver exactly what the customer wanted on schedule.

STEP 5: Gleeful Disbelief

I sit back and let out a well-deserved cleansing sigh. As the shippers pick up my work, I smile and reflect.

"I can't believe I pulled that off..."

STEP 6: Gloating

I usually spend the next few years gloating about the project and disregarding all that fear. Like a good soldier, I embellish the stories to make the victory that much more thrilling...even more so if there are ladies around to listen. And if those ladies are exceptionally cute, we might just have lost a man or two during that build.

This is the process for most artists. It's a twisted mixture of excitement, crippling self-doubt, utter despair, relief, and gloating that drives us. If we are lucky, we may have five to ten of these battles a year. Bet you're glad to be an accountant now, aren't you?