



The Rise of the Business Artist

by Jeffrey Davis

The “artist” as we once conceived it is dead in the early-21st century. So claimed one journalist in *The Atlantic*. To which I would add, “So is business as usual.” These two deaths - of the traditional “artiste” and of the conventional bottom line-driven business person - are entwined.

For the past 100 years in the United States and in other countries, the business person and the artist seemed constantly at odds. One wanted to make money but liked art

to make business bearable. The other wanted to make art but liked having enough money to continue making art.

Those boundaries and those motives are dissolving. Shifts in the economy, it turns out, are giving rise to a different brand of people, business people and artists together.

The implications for you could be profound. You could experience a whole new way of growing a business, energiz-

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ing a team, captivating customers, and making a positive difference.

TWO DEATHS

The first death: William Deresiewicz of *The Atlantic* described the traditional artist’s death in his article from January 2015, “The Death of the Artist - and the Rise of the Creative Entrepreneur.” Deresiewicz confirms what we at Tracking Wonder Consultancy have been tuned into for a while – that the creative entrepreneur is rising and giving new meaning to what it means to be “an artist.”

How we define “artist” historically relates to how artists make money.

“Artist,” Deresiewicz notes, with its connotations of the solitary genius ensconced in a lair of High Art beyond us plebeians is 70 or more years outdated economically. “Artist,” he argues, was replaced by the “professional artist” in the mid-twentieth century supported largely by universities, grants, and other organizations. Before then, artists relied largely upon benefactors and galleries.

Within the past several years, a different breed entirely has emerged. Replacing “artist” is the “entrepreneurial self,” the person capable of making and producing art in ways that break through the institutional intermediaries to make a living.

The second death: Cut to the business end, and Whole Foods co-CEO William Mackey calls entrepreneurs doing business with a higher purpose today’s heroes who are making real change for the better in the world. A new generation of leaders plus a new generation of consumers demand more and more business leaders invent radically new business models with new principles – and the integrity to uphold them.

What does this movement in the early-21st century mean for you as a business owner, team leader, creative professional, or entrepreneur?

THE RISE OF THE BUSINESS ARTIST

There's a subtle movement brewing.

A growing band of us want to change the way we do business. We're not bonded by trade or profession. We're bonded by hunger. We hunger for something different.

We polled and asked our international Tracking Wonder Community what they most wanted in their work life. This was the most common response:

You want to craft your days, problem-solve with finesse, create incomparable & elevating experiences, and earn an abundant emotional and financial return.

Their biggest frustrations are in feeling as if they spend their days hustling and “to-doing” instead of creating, captivating, and elevating. They also feel as if they compromise what and who they care about to make a profit.

If you are hungry for something different from 20th-century business-as-usual, chances are you are a **business artist** - or are on the path.

Business artists are independent professionals, team leaders, and thought leaders. Even if they haven't stepped into full self-employment, they yearn to bring integrity and creativity to the work they do. They want to approach their daily business as part of a creative problem-solving and skill-building endeavor that brings them personal as well as financial growth.

Some of them are driven internally by the craft of their business. Some of them are driven externally by making a difference. All of them are driven to earn a return so they can perpetuate their work in the world and have exponential impact.

I've come to realize this: Business artists hunger for integrity. They hunger to live with excellence, not perfection, and to approach their business with as much creative as marketing aptitude.

The business artist movement is represented by Millennials, GenXers, and Boomers alike. People in the workforce across generations share core wants.

25% of Millennials, 21% of GenXers, and 23% of Boomers want to make a positive impact.¹

¹ IBM Institute for Business Value, 2014

FROM AVERAGE TO EXCELLENCE

20% of Millennials, 20% of GenXers, and 15% of Boomers want to become experts in their field. To become an expert and to contribute to the greater good means you and your team have to keep excelling.

But how do you get there? How do you and your team reach that place of meeting every challenge that arises with a bit more grace and a little less angst? How do you and your team muster the skills and resources and community to flourish as business artists?

The wide-eyed amateur is full of ideas and hope. The flourishing business artist shapes conditions to get in flow and make a signature life and business. Between the wide-eyed amateur and the flourishing business artist is the apprentice attitude.

Between accepting average and rising to excellence is the apprentice attitude.

How humbling. Or is it?

Try this: Imagine you're in a wizard's lab or a scientist's lab – and a whole new way of viewing and shaping your world could open up to you. It's possible.

First, take stock of the areas in your work-&-create life in which you have a

signature style of accomplishment (where you are an “artist” at what you do). Then, pull back, be honest with yourself, and list the necessary areas in which you lack even basic knowledge or competency (where you are an “amateur”).

If you manage a team, have them do likewise.

WHAT BUSINESS ARTISTS CAN LEARN

If you lean toward “artist,” you might be developing your signature way of making interactive sculptures or casting epic-sized canvases on red-brick canvases. But you might be an amateur when it comes to communicating who you distinctly are, what you make and for whom, and why it matters. And the ability to engage your audiences consistently with integrity completely eludes you.

Frida Kahlo, Georgia O’Keeffe, Picasso – they each shaped and protected their personas as part of “the whole package” that they “sold,” so to speak. I do not mean they were phony. On the contrary, from my studies of their biographies, I have learned that they knew who they were, what they stood for, what parts of their personalities enchanted people – and they knew how to present themselves accordingly and authentically.

Maybe you need a set of skills to help you understand your persona, how to shape it, and how to keep presenting it so that people associate what you want them to with your art.

Whether you are part of a team or lead a team, maybe your team needs to reassess its brand presentation - not to be phony but on the contrary to present to your community of customers more accurately who you and your business are from the inside-out and why it matters.

Maybe you have a signature set of services or products, a distinct brick-and-mortar store, or a distinguished online business - and yet you're still not gaining the traction you need for long-term viability.

What are you missing? Maybe you and your team cannot see your business with fresh eyes. Maybe you have forgotten who your customers are and how they see your business. Maybe you haven't kept up with how to broadcast your message on the most effective channels.

THE EXPERIENCE ECONOMY

The experience economy of the early-21st century demands you do more than make products and offer services. You might feel like a complete amateur in creating signature experiences with your custom-

ers - from the moment they contact you via your website to the moment they call your business to the after glow of making a purchase with you.

Within the next few years, one factor in your business will be the singular most powerful way to advance your message or mission as an independent professional, business owner, or leader: genuine and signature customer engagement through signature experiences.

Bringing forward your creativity does not equate with being selfish, neurotic, or self-absorbed. You can give your signature flourish to how you build your business and thought leadership. You also can give that flourish to how you make signature products and artful experiences.

Many of our clients at Tracking Wonder Consultancy convert safe businesses into signature businesses, and their return financially doubles, and their return emotionally quadruples.

Easy? Not at all. Satisfying? Yes.

I'm humbled and pleased that people [in our Quest Community](#) include executives and poets, entrepreneurs and artists - all business artists learning from and supporting one another during this transitional period in our culture and economy.

CREATE WITH INTEGRITY, NOT IN BATTLE

One reminder from our [Compass of Wonder](#) to help you keep on-track is

CREATE WITH INTEGRITY, NOT IN BATTLE. The “rest of” your life outside of creative work is part of your creative quest, too.

The artist doesn't have to die to birth the business artist.

Neither does the business person have to die to birth the business artist.

If something here provoked you in a good way, please forward this article to someone you care about or post it to your whole community on your favorite social media channel.

Thanks for running with me,

Jeffrey





Speaker, Author, Chief Tracker at
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