

**A**fter having worked as a designer/illustrator/writer/photographer for 30+ years, I've come up with a bunch of thoughts and ideas about the whole business of being a creative professional. **The first is that you pretty much have to be crazy to want to be a designer, an illustrator, a writer, or a photographer.** The trick, then, becomes learning to surf the inevitable waves of crazy-making clients, bosses, deadlines and project goals in ways that keep us not only sane, but also keeps us from leaving the creative careers we've chosen. Here are some thoughts. First of all, the stresses in our biz seem to come mostly from issues related to these five categories: **time, money, people, creativity, and health.** As far as **time** goes, it's worthwhile to really master the art of the to-do list (personally, when it comes to lists, I like to put hard tasks before easy ones); to find your ideal working pace—a pace that will be neither so fast that it wears you out, or so slow that you don't get things done on time; to seriously avoid time-sucking entities like Facebook and email; and to try to get your jobs done early whenever possible since having things done a day (or even a week) before a deadline reduces stress and also gives us calm opportunities to evaluate and fine-tune our work prior to delivery. **Money** (and the lack thereof) is a stressor that can kill creativity and really mess with our lives. The best advice on the matter I've heard is simply this: Spend less than you make and try to set aside about 10% of what you earn to build up savings. Beyond that, there are plenty of books on the subject. Dealing with **people** isn't something that's usually taught in design school, but it's one of the major make-or-break components of our work as commercial artists. The development of good people skills goes a long, long way in attracting and keeping clients, avoiding sleep-depriving worries, and reducing workplace distractions. Ever read "Nonviolent Communication" by Marshall Rosenberg? It's good stuff for everyday people skills. **Creativity** is what drew us to world of design in the first place, and it's also what can drive us crazy when we feel like we're not being artistic in the ways we want to be. Some tips: never stop learning (simply put, creativity, like living organisms, is dying if it's not growing); if your job isn't providing you with satisfying creative opportunities then take matters into your own hands and do your preferred creative projects on your own time (not only will this expand your skill-set, it'll also provide you with calming reminders that art can be both fun and rewarding); and if you find yourself stressed over not being able to come up with a creative solution for a project, stay calm, keep at it, and know that "creative blocks" are only as real as unicorns and magic beanstalks. Good **health**—both mental and physical—plays a big part in making us happy in our creative professions. After all, it's hard to work at our best levels without fully functional minds and bodies—our two main tools of creativity. So, eat good (do a Web search for Michael Pollan's 7 Rules for Eating); don't sit too much (sitting, according to many, is the new smoking); and exercise a little or a lot—but do exercise. Thanks for coming to my talk at this year's HOW Design Live!

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