

Chapter 8

The Long Haul—Setting Goals and Fine Tuning

“Success seems to be largely a matter of hanging on after others have let go.”

—William Feather

“I have learned this at least by my experiment: that if a man advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours.”

—Henry David Thoreau

So how did you like it? How was your first show? Good? Bad? To some artists, a good show is one in which they made a reasonable amount of money and they didn't have a flat tire. To others, a good show is one in which they made a predetermined amount of net profit and didn't have a flat tire. And yet to others, a good show is one in which they made a predetermined amount of net profit, bested last year's show by a reasonable percentage, got a bunch of repeat customers to come by, lured a couple of gallery owners into considering their work and...didn't have a flat tire. The difference between those groups of artists is crucial to understand in order to progress into the land of success. No approach is “right” or “wrong” and everyone in this business needs to find their own definition of “good show,” and, while they are at it, their own definition of success.

At this point, every artist should know whether they are cut out for this life or not. I admit it is a hard life, especially starting out. In ten years in the business I don't think I have talked to anyone that said: “Oh yeah, that was easy money!” When I tell my husband that my job is easy he reminds me that I often come home sore and tired and work 12-14 hours a day pretty much every day and a bit more during the actual festival. If going for the long haul, goals and improvement are essential to make this tough life a

happy tough life. First you have to decide if you are going to embark in the adventure and then how you will approach the many challenges.

Endeavor to Persevere

Refer, if you will, to the first quote under the chapter heading and you will have the first secret to being successful in the art festival business. I don't know how many times I have been talking about the business with someone who "used to do art festivals" only to find out later that one fine spring they did a whole two festivals in their home town, got sunburned in the one in the parking lot of the Church and got insulted at the one in the mall and subsequently hung up their tent poles and got a "real" job.

When I decided to take the plunge I dove in head first; my usual m.o. for most things I do in life. After the first few festivals, hard as they were to swallow, I knew I wanted to be an art festival artist *for a living*. Having been in the corporate business world in a prior life, I set out rather impulsively but with a good business head on my shoulders. Selling art at art festivals is a business, whether you do it full time or part time, and a business needs time to fine tune, grow and ultimately succeed. I personally have only two goals set in stone for each festival: first, make it back home safe; and second, learn something new. The business goal is, of course, always to make a profit, but that profit goal remains flexible because I know how fickle the business can be. The learning part is tough because you slowly learn that you are never really done learning. But I like always keeping an open mind, learning sales tips, display tricks, phrases to say to customers (I am really BAD with people), motels to avoid, good places to camp...if anything at all, I will for certain learn that either I need to do that festival again or I will never return. Learning is learning.

That constant learning eventually translated in virtually imperceptible changes in demeanor and display. Soon those shows that used to be mediocre turn into pretty good shows and the pretty good shows turn into awesome shows. What changed? My husband asked me that question once when I told him I was finally making good money in my home festivals. What changed? The answer was: a thousand things. I honestly tried to pin-point what I had done differently from one year to the next but my space had changed, my display had changed, I had more diverse choices of offerings, more size choices, fewer larger works but more originals, many more matted works in nicer bins, higher end stuff, a new tent, floor covering... I simply could not figure out the *one thing* that made a difference; everything makes a difference.

Most importantly was the fact that I stubbornly continued to do the shows. In a recent festival a customer walked into my booth, grabbed one of my larger original blocks and said to me: "I have been looking at this one for three years and I am finally going to buy it before it is gone." Know what? Fine with me. I silently applauded myself for my stick-to-it-ness; I came back to the same show, I persevered despite poor sales the