



A Teaching Moment About Careers: Follow the Bliss, Money, Experience, or What?

The sculpture is called "A Teaching Moment," in which, to make a critical point, Abraham Lincoln tells a story to his secretary John Hay. The sculptor who created the bronzes is my brother, Michael Martino. In helping me advise a promising artist, Mike created his own teaching moment about finding a career.

Career counselors tell us to follow our bliss. Our family or friends may tell us to follow the money or the experience. Dwight Turner, an actor friend told me he does the work that energizes him. Good advice. I think Mike's advice is even better...

Yes, I think we are genetically pre-ordained to feed people and encourage their art careers whether they want to eat and paint or not. I try to see what the person's passion is and where their strengths are and encourage them.

I explain that art is like learning another language and whether you make a career out of it or not, it is another way to observe and communicate the pain and beauty in life.

I think it is important for someone looking to improve their skills to draw from life at least

15 minutes a day. Each artist has their own strengths and blind spots so their experience is unique. After learning the basics, observing other artists and doing the work of honing their skills it is up to them to create their own path.

I try to encourage kids to keep drawing if they like it. When they reach the time to consider a career path, they can choose art and not be behind in their development. As for art as a career (job) or pastime I compare the difference to "liking to cook" and making a living as a chef. There is more to the career of cooking than just "liking to cook". Do you want to run a Mc Donald's or do you want to run a 5 star restaurant? All of the small business skills either need to be learned or hired out.

I use the cooking analogy to explain the myth of the "starving artist"... If I liked to cook when I was a child and nobody taught me anything about it, or discouraged me when I showed an interest in it and the schools never taught me anything about it and then I reached the end of my college education in some other field and decided that I really want to be a cook, I would starve until I went and learned and developed my skills.

To me, she shows strength in her brushwork (bold, fresh and confident with a high degree of control when she needs it as in the lettering) She has a good value structure, the pattern of dark and light reads well. If she can spend time drawing people from life and studying basic anatomy and perspective it would improve her figure painting even if they are from photos.

If she enjoys adding lettering to her paintings it would be good to understand principles of design like "graphic relativity" (placement and spacing) and how the weight (bold or thin) of a font can change how they are read. Experimenting with color and observing from life how rich in color the actual environment is would be a good exercise for her. i.e. Playing with complementary (opposite) colors adding some reds, oranges or purples into the green corn.

She should keep her unique vision and technique but use more of the basics of the language of art to communicate her ideas thoroughly.

Much of Mike's advice can be applied to any career, even engineering. Working in art and engineering, I feel the need to dispel another myth. It's the one that goes "Engineering is harder than making art." I've made a living both ways. For me, both are difficult and time consuming. Both can be frustrating and satisfying.

Which reminds me, listen up guidance counselors. If you want to herd kids into STEM careers, don't ask them if they like to solve puzzles. It's human to want to solve puzzles. Instead, ask them if they like to solve puzzles that someone else gives them and that they may not like. Then ask them if they're okay with losing a job if they don't solve it.

Having switched careers six times, I discovered why it's hard to know if you've found a

career that suits you. It's like adjusting a bicycle seat. You have to get within a fraction of an inch of the right position before it feels even remotely comfortable. In the job you're in right now, you could be miles from the right career or really close and never know it. All you can do is try a new thing once in a while and see how it feels.

It can be frustrating, but when you get on the right career path, wow.

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Trivia: Mike and me both got our BFA degrees from the art school at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Mike had a few classes with Jim Rygiel, the Oscar winning special effects artist. I went back for a engineering degree, as did Satya Nadella, CEO of Microsoft.