

## Productivity for Artists with Charlie Gilkey

Cory: Hello everybody! Let's like scare the crap out of everybody. Hi, if you can hear me type hello or hi and let us know where you're from. What's up Brian, Laura, Lana, hello everybody! I'm Cory Huff, I am the founder of [The Abundant Artist](#) and I'm here with my buddy Charlie Gilkey, founder of [Productive Flourishing](#), and we are here today to talk about being a more productive and prolific artist. If that's not what you're here to learn about, you're welcome to stay but you may or may not find it interesting. Okay, super excited about all of you who are calling in from all over the world. We've got people from all over the United States, England, I saw somebody from Australia, it's like 8:00 in the morning there right now so good for you, and hello from BC, more Canadians, awesome! Excited that you're all here. Just a couple of housekeeping things, as usual if you've never attended something on CrowdCast before, sometimes the audio will drop because the internet is very complicated and we have 600 people attending this webinar, so if you have some audio issues, first thing to do if you're in a browser is to just hit refresh. If you have any other problems you may need to like start your computer over or whatever. But hopefully that all works out and we don't have any technical problems. Salt Lake City, go Utes! We're gonna win the PAC12 Friday. Alright, nobody cares. Okay, let's get into it. What are we going to talk about today?

We are going- so over the last, I've been running The Abundant Artist, helping artists learn to sell art for nine years. And last year I did a private presentation for members of our program The Abundant Artist Association, where I interviewed twenty successful artists to ask them "What are you doing that's making you successful, what are your day to day work habits?" And then I sort of put that together into a presentation that I just gave to our members last year, and it was one of the most valuable things that we did and we referred back to it over and over again all throughout 2018, so I thought I would give a slightly different version of that presentation this year so that our community as a whole can sort of set up where to go for 2019.

And I've invited Charlie here today because Charlie is my productivity guru, so I'm excited to have him here and learn all about his tips and tricks for productivity. And we're gonna get beyond tips and tricks. We're gonna get into the meaty strategy of what it means to actually be productive, because when I say productivity for artists what I don't mean is teaching you how to hustle and grind and do all those things that artists hate about being an entrepreneur, but instead teaching you how to live with more ease and more productivity in your life while also making more art and having a better experience doing that. So the other thing that I'll point out is that the information that we're gonna present today is really intended for professional artists. So if you are a hobbyist artist and you make art as a way of relaxation or you make art as a way to deal with some sort of therapy or something, that's great and art is definitely great for all of those things, but that's not what we're here to do today. We're here to talk about how to make more art and how to run an art business, okay? If you are a hobbyist, again you're welcome to stick around, but this is not necessarily for you.

So I want to start out, I'll have Charlie introduce himself and tell us a little bit about him, but I want to put a question in your mind, because I know that a lot of you are gonna be thinking about this, and if you're not I want you to be thinking about this. So your desire to make art

creates a conflict, right? One of the things that you want to do is you want to express yourself and you want to get all of that creativity out there and make the best art that you can. And of course you have constraints. Those constraints are the amount of time you can spend making art, the amount of money that you have to pay your bills so that you can continue making art, as well as the family or other relationships that you might have in your life that are constraining you. So as we are thinking about productivity, these are the things that we're thinking about, is how do we tackle all of that? So if you don't know me, I run a company called The Abundant Artist, and we run a professional trade association where we help professional artists learn how to run a business and make money from their art so they can make more art. You can find out more about us at [theabundantartist.com](http://theabundantartist.com) and we'll have all of our links up and everything at the end of this presentation. But I want to give Charlie a minute to talk about his background, how he became an expert in productivity and tell us what the Wayfinding Academy is cause we can see it on your shirt.

Charlie: You like that product placement there? Alright, so thanks Cory and I'm super pumped, they may not know this behind the scenes Cory, but Cory and I hang out a lot. We do a lot of really fun things. And so you know when you're saying we're here to talk about productivity I was like "oh man I thought we were gaming today!" But aside from that I am Charlie Gilkey, I am the founder of Productive Flourishing, and what we do at Productive Flourishing is help people start finishing the stuff that matters, right? And I have a love hate relationship with productivity, to be frank ya'll, because so often it's you know, 72 ways to hack a shoebox and no one really cares, right? Or it's how to hustle harder, which is what Cory mentioned. And that's not really what we're talking about, right? When I talk about productivity I mean doing the stuff that matters that helps you become the type of person you want to be in the world.

And what's super important to remember is that as creative people, as we create stuff, we are also created at the same time. There's this relationship we have with our work. And so we start talking about doing or not doing, it's not just getting stuff done in the world, it's about who you are becoming or not becoming in the world. And you know, as we go and as we talk about productivity you'll hear me talk a lot more about that from that from that sort of philosophical bit, because I think that's what gets lost sometimes, right? Cause it's not just about one more piece of art shipped. It's about taking that piece of living energy inside of you, doing the crazy work of pulling it out of you and showing it to the world and saying this is for you, here, I made this. Do you like it? And there's a bit of insanity that happens with that.

So I got into this craziness because like many of you polymaths and renaissance people out there I was doing way too much. And all the different domains of life sort of fell in on me, I was simultaneously pursuing a PhD in philosophy and I was an army joint force military logistics coordinator. So you're gonna hear both of those come up in this call, I can't help it. And so I figured at a certain point I like had to really figure out how I was gonna ship this work. And when I say ship I know you know that's familiar for some of us, but I'm stealing it with permission from Seth Godin and it's basically taking our ideas and producing something that has market place value and putting it out there in the world. And that's where our conversation is constrained on professional artists, because if you're a hobbyist that's great. You know, you're using that talent. But if you're a working creative professional you gotta ship. You just do. You can't sell something you haven't created. Well that's not true. But you can-

Cory: That's a long conversation Charlie.

Charlie: That's a long conversation. Back up. But eventually you do have to make something to sell it or you have to, you know, you have to make something. Let's put it that way. And so I've been doing Productive Flourishing, I think you know we're going up on eleven years now. And we create a bunch of tools between our planners, which is hiding behind my mic here, I'll show it to you later. The planners that we have which really help creative people focus. Use the constraints that are gonna help them really make progress in the world and start doing more of the work that matters. And so Cory mentioned something really quick and I'm gonna riff on that to start with. He mentioned the amount of time, he mentioned constraints. And he mentioned time, he mentioned some other things. I like to think in terms of time, energy, and attention. Because the reality of it is yes, you have twenty four hours in a day. We all have the same hours a day as Beyoncé, right? But we have a limited amount of time in which we can do the creative work that matters most. And if you have life waiting on you in a certain way, right, you're going through a hard time, so and so forth, you may not be able to ship nearly as much work because part of the alchemy that makes creative work is being tied up into that other stuff. And so really what it boils down to is when you look at professional creatives across industries, there tends to be an upper limit of about six hours a day of focused creative time that outside of that you start going into burnout, you're not really doing anything, you're looking at the painting but you're not actually painting, you're looking at the screen but you're not actually typing, you're looking at the sculpture but you're not actually sculpting.

Cory: Guilty, guilty.

Charlie: And so that's really, when I start thinking about productivity and when you start thinking about how to do some of the stuff we're gonna talk about with time blocking and constraining, I want everyone to think about, it's not that you have 8 hours a day that you can do whatever- you really have like four, maybe six if you're really in a good zone to do your best work. And if you're not doing that best work, you're doing other things, right, and that's the rule of displacement. We can only do one thing, well, not true, but still. Go with me on this one. Anything you do displaces something else you might do. And so if you spent four hours a day messing around on Facebook and being mad that your friends are having better lives than you are, that's four hours in which you're not creating your art. And you don't get that time back.

Cory: And I want to point out Charlie that that four to six hour time block that you're talking about, for the most part when I think of how artists use that time, it's not necessarily time actually putting paint to canvas or actually chipping on a block. It's that four to six hours, is the time you're actually conceptualizing, when you're doing the deep work necessary to make something that is extraordinary, because the actual mechanics of putting the paint on the canvas don't actually take very much brain power. It's more, so when Charlie and I start talking about this four to six hours a day of golden time, it's really the deep thinking, deep meditative state that your brain can't sustain for longer than that time.

Charlie: Yeah, and I'm also including planning as well, right? People put planning sort of in like "Ah, I'll get to it," and sort of admin, it's not. When you do strategic planning, when you think about what it takes to take your art from idea to done, that's some deep work too. And we under allocate the amount of time that it takes to keep the momentum by planning and seeing where

you are and coming back to it. And so that's all the ideation definitely, like I've been, I'm on revisions for a book right now ya'll, so it's frustrating for me because there are some chapters that I have to work out, and there's a lot of deep work, I'm like I should be typing! But I can't do the typing because I haven't worked out the model in my head. I'm just sitting looking at the screen. And so it's like how do we create that space to understand that actually me sitting and looking out the window and playing with a model as I'm doing it is actually part of the creative process. And it's not just when I show up. And so I think that's where we get into trouble a lot of times with productivity and when it comes to creativity, Cory, is that we are dramatically overoptimistic about how much we will actually produce because we are under aware of how much non-producing time it takes to be productive.

Cory: Yeah. Yeah, that's absolutely true. Okay. And the planning thing, the strategic planning thing is actually a really good segue, because I want to talk about some of the things that came up as we were, last year when we were interviewing our members and talking to artists who were sort of at the beginning stage of their career and haven't figured out how to be really productive. And there were some really sharp contrasts between what they had to say, how they spend their time and what they focus on, and what they think their problems are, versus the habits and daily efforts that really successful artists have. So you don't have to say, you don't have to raise your hand and say this is you, but as you're listening I want you to think to yourself, does this reflect where I'm at or not?

So this is some of the things that people told me were their real challenges. They said "I'm working more or finding more time to work, and have fewer distractions." That includes doing all the courses that they signed up for, or even just finding one thing that they need to focus on and running with it, right, like if this is a struggle for you, this is something that a lot of people told me. Another productivity struggle was "I don't know what to actually sell. I make a lot of stuff, I make a lot of things in a lot of different areas in a lot of ways and lot of media, but I don't know what I should actually sell." Another one is it's all variations of "I already know this," and it's basically like, "I already know how to do that," or "I already learned that," or "I took a class on that," or this is specific to the art world, "I'm beyond that. I'm beyond coffee shops. I'm beyond showing my work in restaurants." And they're sort of trying to follow a pre-set path that maybe they don't even realize they've been told they should follow, but isn't the only way to go. And then the big one or one of the other big ones was wasting massive amounts of time on things that don't move your scales forward. And a couple examples of this are learning to custom code a website from scratch. Like if you're building a WordPress site from scratch and you're not a developer, you're wasting your time. You're gonna make mistakes in your business, so you just need to pick something that's gonna work and isn't gonna take up so much of your time. Like letting the imperfect be good enough. Yeah. And then, so what I usually tell artists is make compromises in your tools and your business tools so that your art doesn't suffer. So that you're not spending 80 hours building a website. And then the other one that people told me was they struggled with time blocking because it dictated how much time they could spend making art and Charlie, I'm sure you'll have lots of insight into why maybe they're doing time blocking wrong.

So contrast all of that, and then I said "Okay, what are the things that you do to overcome your biggest challenges, what do your day to day productivity and work habits look like?" And this is

feedback from artists who are all doing 6 figures or more in sales. And these are either people who are already in the Association or they're friends of mine or colleagues that were able to contribute to this. They said, so one artists said "I decide how much revenue I want to bring in every month per revenue stream, and how I will do it." So basically, at the end of each year he looks at his sales and he looks at paintings, prints, and licensing opportunities, and everything that's happened that year, and then he says "Okay, well I want to grow this, these sales by 20%. And so in order to do that I'm gonna do these things," right? And that's sort of a high level way that planning works and I think a lot of people identify and get that. Another artist told me "I make small lists of action items and I try to limit it to three-five things." Another artist said "I update my sales spreadsheet for the next year." Meaning they look at all of their income streams and they set out who they expect to sell to. And then another one says "I outline a plan of attack for my sponsorship needs." This is from Matt LeBlanc who runs this big art show called Fusion every year. And he, at the beginning of the year, he actually writes down all of the sponsorships that he's gonna need for that show and he goes after them that way.

Matt went on to say from a productivity standpoint "I always like to give my office and my studio a good major cleaning. I typically try to do this during the holidays so when I'm back I feel like it's a brand new year. Which it is." So we are coming up on the beginning of the year. So Charlie, as you are thinking about yearly planning, whether you like yearly planning or not, I'd love to hear your thoughts on how you make the transition from the end of one business year to the beginning of the next.

Charlie: Yeah, those are all really great tips. I love them too, you see me over here nodding. Also I put a [link in for time blocking](#). Something that I've written on that which is super helpful for a lot of our tribe over at PF. But to answer the question, you know, I always take a look backwards before I take a look forwards. Because what so often happens is we end up making BS goals, just pulling a number out of the sky like, "I want to hit that!" Without any basis for reality. And without really celebrating the hard work you've done this last year. And using that as a footing, right? And so the first thing is start looking backwards and saying "What's happened this year that I need to know- what were the wins, what were the challenges, what were the surprises?"

And I'll pause here, because, and I'm stealing this from Peter Drucker. It turns out that in business, and art business oftentimes growth happens from unexpected things, right? It's the stuff you didn't expect to happen, or stuff that surprised you that creates a wedge into opportunities and marketplaces that you might not otherwise see. Now what gets tricky for those of us who are creative. We want our vision, we want our thing to be the thing that the market wants. We want my plan to be the plan, that you know, we want my vision of reality to be what reality shows up with. And we miss the opportunities that happen when you make this thing, right, whatever it is, thing and stuff and art, I'm gonna use it all interchangeably, right? I'm a writer, so that's my modality. But I'll write like a throwaway post, or I'll be like I was just thinking about this, I don't care, I'm just gonna publish it. And then I'll write a post that takes me three months to write. And inevitably it's the throwaway post that people love, and the one that took me three months, they're like eh, crickets. And so that happens so frequently. And you probably have that happen too, where there's just this doodle that you were making, that you were never intending on showing anybody and somebody walked into your studio and they go "What's that?!" And you go "Ah, that's just this thing!"

Cory: It's like half hidden under a sheet, you're not planning on showing it to anybody and some snoopy person's like digging through your canvas.

Charlie: And it's embarrassing and it's like it's not done and it's ugly. But it's like we don't hear, oftentimes, "There's something here that I really, really like." Right? Because we're over on the other masterpiece that we've been working on. So really paying attention to the unexpected wins and the unexpected challenges is a place too often overlooked when we're doing our annual planning. And then based on upon that, I'm glad you mentioned breaking things down by revenue stream or by area of business as the way to go forward. Because again, it's easy to say "I made X this year and I want to make X times two next year." Easy to do! But when you start looking at revenue streams, when you start looking at actual efforts you can say "Oh, that's how I'm going to do it." And strategies naturally fall out of those things. Right? Strategies naturally fall out if you say you know, I want to increase my licensing sales by 20%. Okay! There are certain ways you're going to be able to do that. It naturally sort of falls out. But if you say "I want to increase my revenue by 20%," there's like a gazillion ways that could happen, and then you go like into artist fun making land of all the things you might do, which is our happy place a lot of times. A month later though, you've gotta be shipping work, you've gotta be doing stuff that does that.

So last thing that I'll say is yes, it's great to make annual goals, if you're not making quarterly milestones or quarterly benchmarking though, it's going to end up- usually it ends up in a really upsetting scenario where you wake up in April and you're really not moving towards that goal. And then you've lost part of the year and then you're demoralized. So if you make a goal of, you know, revenue times twenty percent, which I don't think is a great goal, but let's play with it, it might be very good for you to say "Okay, that means in quarter one I need to be here. From quarter one, how am I gonna bridge this gap?" Right, and so let's talk about wayfinding. Not the Academy, I realize that I skipped that question because I started rambling about stuff.

Cory: We'll get to it later.

Charlie: Sort of four different things you gotta know about wayfinding, and this is the general process of going from one place to the next. One, where you are. Two, where you're trying to go. Three, a plan for how you're gonna get from point A to point B. And then four, how you're going to course correct when your plan is not working, right? And you're going off track. Those are the four things you've gotta know. And that's why when you ask, Cory, what I think bout annual planning, I always start with where am I and how did I get here? Okay, based upon that, where do I want to go? Okay, that's creates a gap. How am I gonna fill that gap? Great. Now how am I gonna keep up with where I'm going? That's where the quarterly thing comes in. Keep up with that so I know where I'm going. The last thing I'll say about quarterly planning is I've learned throughout the time of doing this work that when you start being able to shape a quarter and shape the quarters of a year with some degree of confidence is when really magical things happen. Really truly magical things happen, cause it's that middle. Some of us like to do top down planning. Others like to do bottom up planning. And if you don't have that middle gap, you don't have a way of feeling for that air sandwich between stuff at the top and stuff at the bottom. So that's the other advantage of sort of walking backwards in that way.

So what's coming up for you Cory?

Cory: Okay, so what I hear you saying is you gotta look back and see what you did, and if you are a beginner, like maybe you've only been in an art business for a year or two years and maybe your sales are just getting underway, it's still useful to look back and say "Where did those sales come from? Who bought from me? How did it happen?" And then you kind of look at what are the one or two things you did that generated 80% of your revenue? And then you look at it and say "How can I do more of that and less of the other things?" Right? So there's one particular show you went to that did well, how can you do more shows with that group? Or with that gallery, or how can you do more shows like that? And if there are shows that you went to that didn't produce, how can you not do them again? And it might just be as simple as deciding you're not gonna do them again. I had a call last week with a member of the Association who did a show the previous year, didn't sell anything, and she was getting ready to do the show again, and I was like "Why are you doing it again? Stop doing things that don't work!"

So Charlie, you have this great quote in a blog post that you wrote. I'm gonna share a link in the comments, but you talk about strategic planning or why strategic planning is so hard for creative people. And what we're really talking about right now is strategic planning. So I'll post a [link to the blog post](#) for people to read it later. But you said, this quote really jumps out at me: "What makes strategic planning hard for creative people is that when you do it right it comes with some sadness, frustration, and regret. Given the real constraints of time, energy, and attention, some projects will lose out when they're in the project cage match when you're trying to decide what to do. But we're often not ready to accept that we can't do them." So several people have asked things like how do I handle multiple income streams, how do I juggle my day job with my you know, with my art business, all that kind of stuff? How do you give yourself permission to just sort of embrace the sadness, the frustration and regret and realize that you can't do everything?

Charlie: So part of it is the upside. The upside of picking projects that matter most to you is like, you gotta think about the fact that there's going to be some reckoning. Whether it's the end of the year, whether it's the end of three years, whether it's the end of your life where you look back and you say "What have I done with my time? And what have I not done with my time?" Right? Understand the reckoning is coming at some point. And so what we start thinking about is yes, we can't do everything and it's this weird thing about being human, in that we are these beings that have the potential or have the capability to dream up an infinity of things that might be done. But we're bound by finite space and time. Right? And that's just part of the human condition in general. And I don't have a whole lot to say besides it sucks. Right? That's why we have, that's one of the reasons why there's so much of this throughout religion and spirituality and things like that- all coming to grips with this limited nature of ourselves when we're in a finite body. But we haven't talked about the five projects rule so I'll slide this in real quick cause the cage match comes up. So something that I work with a lot with people is what I call the five projects rule. Now it's super nerdy in the sense that I have to give some backup, but basically in any given slice of time whether you're talking about month-sized projects, week-sized projects, quarter-sized projects, you get no more than five of them at any given time. Why no more than five? Because you can focus on them, that's one, but two is when you think about how much time it actually takes to do work that matters, at that time slice, you literally cannot do more than five projects at a time, five month-sized projects in any given month. Now ideally, you

would want those five month-sized projects to roll up into a quarter-size project, and relate to that. And that's how we start making this win. Sometimes as artists we don't go that way, where we're just out doing stuff and chasing bright shiny objects that go nowhere. But ideally, you would want making your ten pieces for an art show this month as a monthly project to tie in to executing the art show or something related to the art show a quarter later. That's how that works.

Cory: I want to interject and say I think like if you're doing a solo show where you've got ten to twenty pieces, for most artists that's probably a quarterly project. And so breaking that down where you might be doing two or three individual pieces of art each month especially if you have a day job, that's probably more what a project looks like.

Charlie: Absolutely, thanks for the context there, right. Obviously if you're making mini art then you can do different things. The point is how you're gonna break that down so that you're looking at the smaller list going back to what the successful artist does- you're not looking at "Oh my god, how am I going to make twelve pieces of art in a quarter?" You're looking at "I got to make three pieces this month, right? I'm gonna make one one week, and I know it's gonna take me a week and a half," because that's just how shit works, right? So you know, that's how you can break it down. And so when we start looking at the cage match that's where the sadness comes up. Because if I were to ask you what all your month sized projects were, you'd probably give me seventeen different ones. I know Cory does every time I talk to him, right? And I do it myself too, but it's like no, you have at most five. And really, so in my world anything that takes time, energy and attention is project. So if you're moving or you're going through the holidays, that's a project. So that takes one of those five slots automatically.

Cory: The holidays kill productivity.

Charlie: Well holidays make you productive in different areas, right?

Cory: I guess if you want to look at it that way.

Charlie: But that's part of my rant about productivity. Back on topic. When you start looking, I really give people five, but when we start talking about personal projects and life, normally it whittles down to three that you can do for your profession, for your work. And if you were to roll that up and start looking at it at the yearly horizon as well, there's three major objectives that you're gonna be able to get done this year. And people are like "I can't do it Charlie, I'm done! I can't get it done in five or three, screw you, I'm gonna go do my own thing!" Except when you look at successful artists and you ask them what major things they've done last year it's typically three at most five things where they're like "Oh I finished a book this year," "Oh, I had this amazing art show this year," or "Oh I launched a podcast," like they're big projects like that. And that's where they're winning. But they're choosing not to do all other things. Right? They're choosing not to do all the other stuff. So that's where I want to say you have to start looking at the upside. What I would want everyone listening to say is we all know what I call best work, right? There's that best work that you do when you're in that zone, you're standing tall, you're being courageous, you know what that is. Everyone knows that that is when I talk to them. Now imagine three of those best work projects happening by the end of next year. How would that feel? Look at where you were this year, did you get three major things done this year like that?

Right? That's I think where we can let go and say you know what, the reality is I want to do seventeen things. The reality is if I try to do seventeen things, I'm gonna do one and sixteen mediocre. That's not the game I want to play here, right? I want to be masterful, I want to win. I want to be proud of what I've done at the end of next year. And I'm choosing to do three things that really, really matter, and focus my time around that and wake up in the morning and not be a crazy person trying to pursue seventeen different things. And I'm willing to trade off. All the things I might not be able to do in that time, because you know what? It's so much easier to build from winning than to build from mediocrity or obscurity or failing. Right? So if you land those three major things this year, next year you get to do three more, bigger things. But if you don't get your butt on base this year, you're still going to be struggling next year.

Cory: Yeah.

Charlie: And I can't help with the sadness, frustration and regret. That's just being human. And Stephanie says "Picking three things is hard AF." Yes, it is hard. But what I would want to ask you is what's the cost of not choosing three things? Right? I talk a lot about creative constipation. That's what it sounds like. It's when you have ideas, when you have this work inside you that wants to come out, and it's not, and you know it's not. And it's like constipation, physical constipation. It makes you toxic, it makes you frustrated and it makes you not want to take on anything. I think we too often as creative people don't pay enough attention to creative constipation until it gets so bad that then we want to burn things down, find a new partner, buy a red convertible, do all sorts of crazy stuff because fundamentally we're not doing the work that wants to be let out.

Cory: Yeah. Okay. So Charlie, we know that we need to be strategic. We know that we need to look back on what we did last year, we know we need to think about what we want to have happen this year, we need to pick three things that we want to have happen this year. And we need to break those things down into what we can do in the next quarter, right? So what am I gonna do between now and March 31<sup>st</sup>, right? There's thirty one days in March? Between now and March 31<sup>st</sup>, so once I've done that, I say okay, this is what I want to do. What's the next thing that I do? I've heard all about all these different productivity techniques, time blocking and accountability groups and all that other stuff, what do I do?

Charlie: Simply put, start doing it. But that's not helpful.

Cory: You mean just sitting down in your studio and just doing the work isn't the answer?

Charlie: It kind of is. But I'm gonna give more. So we talked sort of at that quarterly level. I think that's when you start thinking about shaping your weeks. I put a link way early up about thinking of, I'll do it pretty briefly, the 4 different kind of blocks you want to be thinking about that you can sort of make a template of your week. And I know this is a really foreign thing for a lot of creative people, to say you know what, I am going to do my art from 9:00-2:00 every day, or every work day. And then I'm gonna do admin stuff after that. That's really foreign for some people and it feels constraining, but remember, creativity thrives with structure.

Cory: Can I just say, early in my business life I had my email open on my desktop all day long. And when I decided to not open my email during the day and I only opened it first thing in the

morning to see if there was anything urgent, I didn't even answer all my emails, and then at the end of the day I would answer all my emails in the last hour of the day, and I just answered what I got done. I just used that last hour. My productivity went through the roof. So that's just one example of that kind of stuff.

Charlie: Yeah. So let's talk about productivity but also let's talk about your satisfaction with your day, right? Cause that's really what I'm talking about, cause you all know when you're in flow, you all know when you've done the hard work, hard beautiful, messy joyful work of creating something, and you step away and you're like "Man, I'm worn out," because creative work can wear you out that way, "But man am I glad, am I happy! I got to do that today," right? So that's what I want to put in there at the same time. But yeah, it really does come down to time blocking, which time blocking is a way of talking about boundaries, guys. Setting up boundaries that enable you to do your work. And setting up a boundary, I could go to positive and negative boundaries but I'm not gonna go super technical here. A boundary is just you setting that intention for that space and firewalling other things from out of it, firewalling saying "You know what, for these 90-120 minutes I'm going to be making art. I'm going to be doing one thing for these 90-120 minutes. After that I can do something else. I can take a break, I can scratch my cat, I can be scratched by my cat," whatever the case may be. And so the trick is like, it's not a trick.

The reality, I'm gonna sidebar here into distractions and interruptions, cause this is super important. Distractions are things you choose to have your attention go to. Interruptions are things that impinge upon you. YouTube is not an interruption, it's a distraction. Facebook actually is a distraction, it's not an interruption, because you could turn off all the notifications. And guess what, Facebook is gonna do what Facebook is gonna do. Your email is a distraction. And if you choose to go do those things, you're choosing not to do your art. Because you could choose otherwise, and you're not making that choice. An interruption is when your cat literally comes in and scratches the crap out of you and then walks out, right? That's what Cory's cats do to him all the time. I have docile cats, he has some maine coons over there.

Cory: I've got... yeah, anyway. They've all seen 'em.

Charlie: Family interruptions and such, those are interruptions and you have to have different strategies for those. But when I've talked about the blocks, the blocking strategy helps you with distractions and interruptions, because again you probably heard me say focus blocks, there's four kinds of blocks. 90-120 minutes of time where you focus on getting your work done. You might call this deep work, you might call it creative work, you might call it whatever you want to, but you know what kind of time that is. Coffee shop time, studio time, where you're just uni-tasking, doing that thing that makes you come alive, finding flow. So that's focus block is one. Two, social/service blocks. If you're in an art business where you do service work for other people, which a lot of people do.

Cory: Charlie, I'm actually gonna share my calendar while you talk through this so that people can see an example of what this looks like.

Charlie: I appreciate that. So social time- right, these are when you're fit for human consumption, both because you're in a good mood, but also because other people need you for different things. So

social blocks, those tend to be, believe it or not, 90-120 minute blocks of time, cause you gotta think about all the time it takes to get there, to have a successful meeting, go out after a meeting, all those types of things around meeting with other people, tend to be 90-120 minute blocks of time. Even though we have our appointments standard at an hour, if you've ever gone meeting to meeting to meeting to meeting and you realized all the residue that's left from that. That is why it's 90-120 minutes of time.

So admin time. Thirty minutes to an hour. Why thirty minutes to an hour? Because after an hour folks want to start doing things like jumping off bridges, and want to start doing something else. Seriously, after like an hour of doing email, after about an hour talking to the IRS, you're done. You are done. Like if you ever scheduled that morning to go through email, you notice how that morning comes, and everything but email gets done, or maybe like an hour of email gets done? So thirty minutes to an hour, really great here. If you're ever heard of the Pomodoro technique, super great for admin blocks, not so good for focus blocks.

And lastly, recovery blocks. And these are the blocks of time in which you treat yourself like a human who needs attention. You work out, maybe you pray, maybe you eat, maybe you, you know, go sit in a hot tub, you run, whatever recharges your body is what you do, body and soul is what you do during this recovery time. Now why is a productivity guy talking about recovery times? Because we don't put enough in our schedules and we run ourselves like we're robots until we burn out. And that's not how you do your best work. You all know that you can't do your best work when you're depleted as hell, right? So you gotta recharge then. Those are the four blocks of time, so you can think about your week and how you can get those in. We have a tool on our website, here I'll drop the link and I know Cory is probably gonna follow up. If you go to [Free Planners](#) you'll see the weekly block scheduler that actually gives you a template for how you create that model for the week and then you do exactly how Cory has done, or one way of doing it, is then you go in your calendar and you block it out. So for instance, Cory knows this, after about 7:00 at night you know, I'm not my best version of a human. So my social time, unless it's game night, I mean even that's a challenge, right? Should be like winding down. I'm also not very good with people before 11:00 in the morning. Now that's because before 11:00 is when I am at my peak. And if I, I've just learned the hard way if I don't do the work I need to do I'm pissy and frustrated for the rest of the day and I'm still not my best version of a human. But that gives me between 11:00 and 5:00.

Stephanie asks "What if I have a full time job?" It turns out that unless you have a boss looking over your shoulder, you can usually make your own schedule and propose times for meetings, propose times for different things, and the people, remember this, the person who proposes the time is far more likely to get their time than waiting for someone else. So if you're like "Oh, when can we meet?" You're likely to meet when it's convenient for somebody else, which may not be convenient for you. If you say "Hey, I'd like to have coffee, can we have that at 1:00?" Then people start moving around that 1:00 time. Right? Now if you do have a boss looking over your shoulder, tracking your time, then unfortunately all throughout your work day is probably what I would call social time, because you're just keeping up appearances and you're doing all that, and you're probably going home and actually doing your focus blocks. That's the reality in a lot of jobs. However, if you have a significant degree of autonomy, in a lot of places you don't have to show up and be anywhere before 10:00 in the morning, right? Meetings that get

scheduled at 4:00, super rare in a lot of places. Right? Because they know people are checking out. That's when you can do your admin time and that's when you can do these sort of times. If you, you know, take a break for lunch and it depends on what your context is, but there are a lot of folks, a lot of people who do their best work during a lunch break. Right? Just cause they've chunked it down, they're like "I've got thirty minutes to write this code in," or "I've got this much time to make this drawing, and that's what I'm going to do."

Cory: Can you have an easel and a sketchbook in your locker, can you go up, like there used to be people at my last job who would go up on the rooftop and do creative work during their lunch break, yeah.

One of the things I want to jump in here and say, Stephanie, is there are some day jobs that are not compatible with trying to become an artist.

Charlie: Straight up.

Cory: Like if you have a job where you're working 60-80 hours a week, it's going to be almost impossible to make that time, right? You work in the entertainment business. Steph I think I remember talking to you before that you work in film. So if you're working in film you're working sixteen hours a day, you just straight up don't have enough time to work on your art business. And that's unfortunate. So you might need to consider getting a different job that will support your ultimate goal of being a full time artist. Now if you really love your full time entertainment job then you just fit in your art and stuff wherever you can, but there are some jobs that just don't work, right? And that's the way it is.

Charlie: That's the way it is. And nothing wrong with that. But what I would say is this is where we start getting to values and priorities, right? Because one way or the other, however we want to cash that out, your job has, it needs both a value and you're prioritizing that particular job. And that's taking up a lot of your time. That's a choice you made. If you want different outcomes, you have to make a difference choice. I'm not saying quit your job. What I am saying is acknowledge the choice that you're making there, and when we start talking about five projects per month and five projects per quarter, you don't have that. You have one at most.

Cory: Yeah if you've got a full time job you've got one outside project.

Charlie: One, maybe two depending on if you can really pull in your weekend and you're really harsh with your weekend, like a lot of people do. You get up early, which is why you hear so much about people saying "I get up early," or "I stay up late," or "I work the weekend, cause I got a full time job." I want to pause here though, because Cory has seen this a lot, I've seen this a lot. So many people who are creating side hustles or part time businesses get frustrated when they get locked into comparitis because they're comparing their results and their progress with people who are working full time. And that's just a bridge for frustration. And not only that, they compare their results and the amount of time they can put in with people who have been doing it for 1five years. Right? You gotta watch your own lane here, and you gotta really use your own focus cause really what I would want you to be thinking about in that scenario is alright, I'm seeing somebody and they're doing all those great things. What would a fifth of that look like? Oh! That's closer to where I am because again, time energy attention focus blocks. What I

typically tell most people is that if you can't fuel a project with three focus blocks per week, it's not likely to get done in a way that's going to be satisfying to you.

Cory: That's really practical, I like that.

Charlie: Three focus blocks a week. And so you might be like "Dude, I've only got two." Well you gotta make some different choices, you gotta set your schedule up a little different, maybe you get up earlier, maybe you get up late, maybe you do the weekends or maybe you just say "I don't have time for that." And this is where again coming back to the five projects rule, like we don't have an infinite amount of focus blocks. You gotta think, if each one required at least three focus blocks and you're doing three, that's nine focus blocks throughout the week that you have to find. And have to create.

Cory: This is a great example: "I take trains instead of driving and I use that time to sketch or plan or do social media for my business on the train." That's a great example.

Charlie: What's great about it though and I'll say this, I was actually in many ways a better writer when I had more constraints, when I did have a full time job, right? Because I didn't have time, no I'm serious, I didn't have time!

Cory: I'm laughing because I know exactly what you're talking about.

Charlie: When I was on a deadline for my book, I was the most productive I'd ever been cause I was like "I gotta get this damn thing turned in." A lot of times we fight those constraints but I want a lot of people to think about it. If you took it seriously and you prioritized your best work and the fact that you're becoming yourself through your work, and you said "you know what, I've got 9:00-12:00 every day and that's when I'm gonna do my work," if you're a morning person, right? When 11:30 starts to roll by you start to get pretty excited about things cause you know you're done at 12:00, right? And also, it just provides that constraint for you to know I have a limited amount of time here, and I want to make sure that I focus on it as opposed to give it all day to work on this! And probably not gonna do your best work.

Cory: Yeah. And I love this so much, I feel like this is a topic that we can go on about for a while, there's one other thing that I want to mention here, and then I want to move on. But one of the things that happens a lot, we have a lot of women in The Abundant Artist Community and there is, I want to acknowledge the reality that there's a second shift for women. And if you are a married woman with children and you're trying to build an art business then you have that second shift as an additional constraint. And I often find myself in the position of encouraging the artists that I work with to talk to your husband, talk to your children, talk to the other people in your life and tell them hey, this art is really important to me. I need to set aside this time, whatever that is, one night a week and Saturdays, or one night a week and Sundays, to do that and get them to buy in so that they will support you, so they can make their own dinner and they can do their own thing so that you have that. So yeah, I just want to-

Charlie: Man we gotta roll from this rant, I'm keeping it in, but what I would say here, and this is for reals for the business side of things, I get super cross because if, you know, a lot of people are going out and hiring VAs and support and things like that, and you're paying someone \$35, \$45, whatever amount per hour so that you can focus on your work. But when I start having

conversations about hiring a babysitter for the evening for \$15, it creates a whole different dynamic. So sometimes the best thing that you can do by taking your work seriously is actually invest in the support you need. And it may not be a VA. It might be a babysitter that you can hire for the day for \$15 so that you can take that Saturday and do your work as opposed to hiring a VA to give you four hours back but you end up paying you know, \$80-\$120 or whatever that might be. But again, to do that though, I realize the priority, you want to be with your kids, I understand that. But I think there's also, what I've experienced from creatives is an unwillingness to pay for someone to do that particular type of thing as opposed to paying for someone else to do some other type of work. So just be clear about how, and that's just a great way to free up those focus blocks. Right, friend swapping is another great example. So, and talking to your partner and saying like "hey, how about rather than you playing video games for 4 hours, you get to play it for two hours, and you watch the kids for the other two hours, and I get to do what I want to do for two hours. How about that?"

Cory: Yeah, totally. So we're coming up on an hour and I know that we're gonna lose you at some point Charlie, so I want to dive in to some of the specific questions that people have. Before we do that, I do want to mention that Charlie has an awesome course called Start Finishing, and I'm gonna, there is now a link down at the bottom of the CrowdCast that is a green button that says Start Finishing. That is a link to Charlie's awesome course where he actually walks you through the specifics of how to implement all of these time blocks and other things that he's talking about. Charlie, can you tell us a little bit about the class and then we'll jump into everybody's questions.

Charlie: So the course I believe that you linked to is actually [Start Finishing Your Projects](#), and the important bit is about your projects. So remember guys, you don't do ideas. You do projects. And so what the course helps you do is take that idea and work it into an actual goal, an actual project, think about your derailers, think about the people who are gonna help you, think about the time and budget and actually converts that idea into a project. So when we start talking about the three projects rule, it gets to make the deck and you know how you're going to go through that in time. So very much project focused because I've learned again, we don't do ideas, we do projects. And it's really about, the other thing I'll say here too is instead of thinking about project load, which is all the things you might be doing at a given time, I want you to think about project velocity, which is how quickly you can get those projects done. And so really, the course helps you start thinking in terms of velocity rather than load. Because if you carry seventeen projects and you still only gonna do three, you're carrying fourteen projects, you're basically gonna use that as a tool to whip yourself. And so might as well focus on the three and let the other fourteen go and really pick the right three, so that's what the course helps you do. It's interactive, it's got workbooks, video, so it really has helped a lot of people go from that idea to done.

Cory: Yeah. And I've sat through Charlie teaching this workshop a couple times, and this is why I called him my productivity guru at the top of the hour, because we hang out a lot and I always learn a lot about this stuff, and I love the way that Charlie thinks. So let's get in to everybody's questions, and Charlie, you can bail whenever you need to, I know you've got some time constraints.

Charlie: Well hold on, I can tell you how much time I have so that we know, I'm here to jam as long as I can, to be honest. I'm with a good friend and I'm with a topic that I love to talk about so let me give you a hard stop time, so I need to stop at like 3:30, we got plenty of time man.

Cory: Oh we got plenty of time, okay let's do it. Alright. If you do have questions, please post them in the Q&A section. The chat moves so fast that I may not catch all of them, so do post it in the Q&A. Gwenn says "Can you post the link to the course again?" Yes, absolutely, it's still there at the bottom of the page, it's a green button that say start finishing. I will also post it again in the chat. So first question is from Marie Sand, hey Marie. She says "As a creator I tend to rebel and do the opposite of what I have planned." I am familiar with this. "For example, I will block two hours for painting, but then at the moment I feel an urge to do marketing stuff, and then vice versa. So is that a real pattern, what's your advice to manage this kind of behavior?"

Charlie: First off is to get real about your work. And I say that because here's the thing. We don't need a productivity system, we don't need an accountability buddy to eat ice cream. We just don't. We need accountability systems and productivity systems to not eat ice cream. Now my point with saying that is that there's something innately enjoyable about that thing that we want to do, and that's itself enough of a motivator to do it. So that always, always what comes up when I see people rebelling against what they've said they'd do. As we asked thirteen questions, it ends up coming down to: you're afraid to do the work, you're afraid that it won't be good enough, you're telling yourself you should do something that you don't want to do, and you haven't acknowledged that. It's never about the work. It's always about the other thing. And you know, I might- since it's Q&A time I'll turn my desk over here, right? Cause that shows up all the time.

Cory: Alright, here we go! I love it when Charlie goes into coach mode!

Charlie: Ok. So imagine you had the entirety of energy it takes to get something done. Right? That's the big circle. In the little, and this is way too big. Here's the actual amount of work it takes to get something done. Everything else is the story, the feelings about it, how it's coming up for you, like you know, the head trash that you've got about it. It's not gonna be good enough, I'm not ready, this is just like somebody else, somebody else is doing this, does this even matter, I'm not gonna be able to sell this, right? This'll be just like it was last time. All those types of stuff get in the way, that lead to a lot of the rebellion that happens, cause again if it's something you really really wanted to do, then you would do it. And especially, especially for creative folks. You know that there is going to be some amount, there's some time where you're going to finish a piece of art and you're going to have to show it to the world. That terrifies a lot of people. So what we end up doing is collapsing to things that we can create that we don't have to show people. Marketing plans. And you know, all the other things that are safe, and they're a good use of your creativity, but they're really us hiding from the fact that at a certain point, we're gonna have to do that courageous act of taking what we have and showing it to the world. So that's what I would say on that one, I don't think it's a systems thing. I don't think it's a productivity hack, I think it's a mindset piece, because again, when we really want to do something, when we really love that thing, we do it.

Cory: That's absolutely right. The only other thing that I would add to that, Marie, is I'm guilty of the same thing. I'm guilty of looking at my calendar to the day and being like, "Nope, not doing that." So what I will do is I'll let myself off the hook and say I don't HAVE to do this right now, I

don't have to do this today, as long as I get it done by the end of the week. And so I might literally just take that block in my calendar and move it to a different day. And I'm fine with that. You know, as long as it gets done it doesn't really matter when you do it, particularly.

Charlie: You can absolutely trade blocks. At the end of the week though, what I want people to think about is would you make those same set of choices again? Cause we tend to think... here's what we do, and I'll talk about this real quick and then we'll come back. One is, we assume that two weeks from now is a blank slate, like where we won't have whatever's on the schedule this week, or what's on the schedule two weeks ago, and then that's when we can put all the stuff. Cause we have a bunch of free time in the future. But the reality is two weeks from now your schedule and your calendar is gonna look pretty much like it does today, unless you're in holiday mode or there's something special like that going on. So I want you to think about whatever constraint, whatever feeling you're feeling now, you're likely to feel that two weeks from now. You're likely to feel that two months from now unless you start making some changes to make it different than what it is.

Cory: Yeah, okay. So Nacim says "It's easy to get overwhelmed by options. A whole day can go by just researching this and that and not getting anything meaningful done. And then you combine that with perfectionism, how do you get around this issue of getting too involved in low value activities so that you don't get the big stuff done?"

Charlie: So what does this work that I'm doing lead to? Does it lead to a decision? Does it lead to me being able to use some work? So start thinking not just in terms of the process but the outcome that you want to have from that. So that's one piece to start looking at. Two is constraints my man, constraints. Here's what we do, and I think I've talked to Cory about this a few times, but I've done it myself. We'll spend like ten hours trying to find the best \$12 a month solution, and we end up spending like our working hours on a dollar twenty. And it's like, you know, any of those solutions probably would have been better than spending ten hours of doing that. So when you start dollarizing your time, which is the idea of if you're paying yourself a standard salary, would you pay what you just paid to do what you just did? A lot of times you wouldn't. And so you can say "I'm going to give myself an hour to research this option. At the end of this, I'm wanting this particular type of thing." Now people, they always bail on me on the research, cause they're like "but what about the spontaneous finds and serendipity and all those types of things." That's going to happen in an hour. Right? At about three hours you're jumping back and forth on Twitter to Facebook to YouTube to whatever, cause that's just the way our minds and bodies work. So a time constraint really, really is helpful. The constraint of the goal of what you're doing is super helpful. And I think the third thing is really valuing your time and saying "would I pay someone \$20 an hour to do what I just did for the last four hours?" And if you can't say yes to that, then I hope you start making different choices. Cause you did just pay someone \$20 an hour.

Cory: I have an app that I use that, one, because I'm trying to take care of my eyes, it reminds me every twenty minutes to look out and focus on something for twenty seconds so that I keep my eyes from getting killed by the computer screen. But I find that setting timers for this kind of activity, for low value activity, because I am the same way, I can get lost in it. Tracy literally just asked "do you set a timer? Yes, I set a timer."

Charlie: I don't so much for focus blocks, but that's because of the way that I've built my days. So that, for instance, I do most of my creative work between 8:00-12:00, and I listen to my body enough to know when I need to get up and use the bathroom and stretch and things like that, so I don't need to program those breaks. But I also know that when I'm working at the coffee shop and I'm meeting someone at 1:00, then I need to leave the coffee shop by 12:00 or 12:10 so that I can make it back to home. So I have those natural constraints that put it in there so I don't need a timer. But if it's email, you better believe a timer's going. And just cause I both want to be done, so that's one, but two, I also know how easy it is to start with email and end up somewhere else that's probably not taking me where I wanna go.

Cory: Somebody's asking me what the timer is, and I don't have it off the top of my head so I'll find it later.

Charlie: There's another great timer for Apple called [30/30](#). And what it does- I've told Cory about this, but you haven't heard it so Imma tell you about it! 30/30 allows you to set sequential timers so you might be like "I'm going to warm up for fifteen minutes and then I'm going to read for thirty minutes and then I'm gonna do art for thirty minutes," and it buzzes you at the end of it so you can set up a whole series of timers and just go off of that. You get a buzz and you get a notification, you know it's time to move on and it just helps with that. I can get into deep reading mode where I'll start reading something and three hours later I'll look up and be like aw crap I had thirty minutes to do that. So it's super good for things like that when you do find flow but you know that thing that you're doing is not the entirety of what you need to be doing that day. So 30/30 is a great app for that.

Cory: Okay. Next question is from Debra. Debra says "How do you circumvent procrastination or fear when it comes to commission work? Particularly when you've never done what you've been asked to do in commission?" Okay, so I have some thoughts on this and then I want you to jump in with anything you've got Charlie. So one thing is I've had a lot of artists do commission work when they don't actually want to be doing commission work, and procrastination is usually an indicator Debra, so that's one thing. The other is make sure you're charging enough. If you're being asked to do something new you need to be up front with the person that is commissioning you and saying I definitely want to do that, I've never done that before, it's going to take extra time, the commission's going to cost more. You don't lose money because they ask you to do something new. You either charge more because it's going to take longer or you let them find somebody else. Because if someone wants your particular style, they want what you have as an artist, you need to be confident enough in your work to demand that you get paid for it and if it's so far outside of your experience or your style, you need to decide for yourself whether or not you're willing to make that change and then you need to charge accordingly. The last thing I'll say is sometimes you're just afraid of whatever it is, and in that case you just need to make that first move of the day and give yourself a time constraint around it to try it and see whether it's actually was scary as you think it is. Okay, Charlie what else you got?

Charlie: Yeah. Let's see if it went through, I'm gonna share a link to frogs because frogs are just those tasks, sometimes projects you don't want to do, and it comes from Mark Twain; if the first thing you have to do in the morning, basically if you have to swallow a frog a day, do it first thing in the morning. If you have to swallow two frogs, swallow the bigger one first. That's what he said,

so it takes from that. Yeah, sometimes it just that you've just gotta do it. Too, again going back to this whole thing, I've seen and worked with enough creatives where we get in this whole existential crisis about paid work like that, where it's like "This is not really the work I want to do and I'm better than that" and we go into all that sort of whatnot, but it's like no, you were paid to do a job man, that's it. You accepted money to get a certain result done. Whether you like it or not, whether you want to do it or not, that's actually neither here nor there. Are you going to do the work or not? And I know that sounds super cold, but it's the reality of it.

Cory: This is why I say a lot of artists do commission work when they shouldn't be, because a lot of artists just want to make what they want to make and commission work is not compatible with that.

Charlie: Not compatible with that. And what I've learned is that a posture that really helps people is to start from the standpoint of you're already good enough and they hired you to do the work. You don't have to prove something, you don't have to make something completely different, you don't have to fit some sort of mold, you were the mold they bought. So create what comes out of you and approach it from that perspective. As rare as I get paid to do something that I don't want to do because I know all the things I'm going to do to rebel against that, but even in those things I get devious or whatever you want to call it. But I find those places to make it art for me, I find those places to either decide something in there that's provocative, find something in there that's subversive or whatever it is, I find that place to make it my own art and to put my stamp on it. And largely what I find in the process is when I do that, that creates enough motivation to do the project that the rest of it becomes a wrapper or a container for it because I can walk away and say you know what, I got paid to do that, this thing that I didn't want to do, but that piece, that's still me. It's still mine, right? My soul is still on that work, this thing that I didn't want to do, but that piece, that's still me. It's still mine, right? My soul is still on that work, and I'm okay with that, it's alright. It's alright just to know you took on work you didn't want to do. The question then becomes are you gonna do it or not gonna do it? But that's sort of the existential worry and brash and your creative integrity and all those types of things that come up. And I'm being tongue in cheek because it's a real thing, but at the same time it doesn't matter. You took money, you've got a deadline, are you going to do it or not?

Cory: Okay. Next question, Beverly Garland says "I have a hard time sitting down to make art, it's like one painting every six months. What's one small habit or behavior I could adopt that would spark more productivity?" So two things Beverly, I posted a link to [Melissa Dinwiddie's Creative Sandbox Rules](#) as a comment to your question. Melissa has been in the same situation as you and this is how she got out of it. The other response I have to that is are you sure you want to paint? If the answer is yes, then I would go check out Melissa's Creative Sandbox Rules. Charlie, do you have any other thoughts on being stuck in that way?

Charlie: Not so much, like again examine the story. Just because you were an artist in a certain way doesn't mean you are now. And the other thing is you might have different priorities now. And creating art may not be that priority. That's okay.

Cory: Alright. Let's see, Marie has a secondary question. "Can you talk about ways to plan the right amount of time for an activity? I systematically underestimate the hours in a day." Welcome to

my world. “Does that sound familiar? How do you plan the right time for things you are doing for the first or second time?”

Charlie: So I'll start with the general guideline. If you haven't done it first, take how long you think it's going to take and multiply it by three. It tends to be a closer estimate to it, because what we don't think about is all the setup before the work and everything that it takes to do to ship, publish, process, edit, share, promote, whatever it is on the backside of the work. You're just thinking about the work, and it's those bumpers on both ends where a lot of time we get stuck. So take the time, multiply it by three, and also be thinking- this is what the Start Finishing Your Projects course does help you do is think about those bumpers- what needs to happen first.

Another thing that we don't think about is when we start a project, we go to that blank slate thinking thing, where it's like “oh this is the only project I'm working on, so I should be able to do this in a week.” Guess what, tomorrow morning it's going to collide with the other seventeen projects you've got going on that are taking up all those focus blocks. So when you make a plan, especially if you have a deadline and you think it's going to take this amount of time, also think of how this project fits in the context of other projects. And it might be yes, if this was the one thing you did and you had 8 hours a day and no one interrupted you and you were not distracted, sure. You could get it done in a week. In this world, it's going to take you a month. You gotta win that game with the focus blocks. Last thing I'll say on that: I find using a two hour rule, which is basically the focus block, is super helpful for people because we're terrible at knowing what we can do in an hour and were terrible at estimating what we'll be able to do in a day. But what I've found through a decade of doing this is that people can tell you about how much they're gonna get done in two hours. So if you know that you can start thinking in two hour chunks. You can say “how many of these two hour chunks do I think it's gonna take me to get this done?” And then you can start to apply the triple rule, right? And so you can go that way and it's super helpful for a lot of folks. Again, know that if you have some sort of plan where you're like “this is gonna take me fifteen or seventeen point two minutes,” you're feeling yourself a whole lot of smoke that's not going to turn into anything because that's not the way that we actually work.

Cory: Yep, yeah. Most of us are terrible at estimating time, I just want to throw out to everybody in the comments that's like I'm terrible at estimating time, so am I.

Charlie: Look. So here's what we have to remember about time. Time is a convention that we've only created for the last 300 years. It's just not one of those things that's an innate, natural sort of thing for most of us. We don't do well with that. Why we do so well with two hours, I didn't go into this, is because we do have bio rhythms that refresh about every two hours, which is what makes it so natural for so many of us. But we don't have something that refreshes every five minutes. We don't have something that refreshes every hour. So after about two hours you're gonna have to pee or you're gonna get hungry or you're gonna have to stretch or your mind is going to wander. All those things create a natural constraint, so use that because that is the human clock. Not the artificial clock driven by atoms and factories.

Cory: Yep, I wish I were better at that. Instead I just trap myself to death. Like I have, the iPhone, the newest version of the iOS has an app built into the iOS that actually sends you a weekly report

on how much time you spent on your phone, and which apps you spent the most amount of time on. I spent an embarrassingly large amount of time on social media.

Charlie: Yeah, and I'm just sharing a worksheet called the individual project planner. And what it does, what people do is they take the rows and they hack it so the rows have the task, how much time you think it's going to take, and then how much time it actually took. And if you use that enough you'll start to see- wait a second, I am consistently this much off. So going forward, you can say okay, I know I consistently underestimate this by this much. And so the thing is, it's alright if you're consistently off in your estimations, if you apply that planning factor to it. You can know you're always gonna be wrong and then correct it. It's when you don't know you're wrong and you don't know how far off that you continually get in trouble.

Cory: Yep, totally. Okay, next question. "How do you balance productivity and repetition with maintaining evolution and creativity in one's work?" In other words, how do you produce while also continuing to be more creative and move forward? So there's, separate them, first of all, there's the deep work time that Charlie's talking about, that four to six hours a day, that's when you're going to move forward and lean forward and work. All the other time is when you're going to be doing the repetitive stuff or just producing, right? So you have to plan for it. So you basically say "I'm gonna give myself X amount of creative blocks each week to do that deep thoughtful creative work, and the rest of it is production," or however much of the rest of it is production. Is that what you would say there Charlie? I spoke for you.

Charlie: I was gonna say the same thing. When I have worked with artists- I normally tell them go talk to Cory cause he's way better at it- and when I have worked with artists, I work with more writers, I'll actually encourage them and say "You know what, make a focus block that's just experimental time where you get to do whatever the hell you want to do." Because the point of that block is process, not outcome. And you can say "I have that much time in my week where I get to make art that goes nowhere," excuse me, let me put it this way: that doesn't have to go somewhere.

Cory: That doesn't have an attached outcome.

Charlie: That I don't have to sell, that I don't have to like, it's just me having that space. So when you go into that space and you go "Ahhh, this has to be productive!" Well, what do we mean? This is your R&D time, this is your exploration time. Do it, you have that hour, you have that two hours. And why I say to do that is so many artists, so many creatives are like "I don't have time just to play." Make time to play. If you need to call that play hour, great.

Cory: Call it research and development.

Charlie: Call it research and development. Call it play, call it fun time, call it flow, whatever you want to call it. And just do it. Be there and have fun with it and then move on to the next thing.

Cory: Yeah. I have to say, I work with a handful of artists that are doing a lot of volume and production, we're talking five hundred to a million dollars a year in sales, five to ten major installation projects, things like that. And these artists, they can fall into that trap to a degree that is a little scary. So it is even more important for artists to create that studio time where you're just working on stuff that is creative and personally fulfilling, because when you start

running a half a million dollar business, you need to know how to have time for your art to evolve.

Okay. Chelsea says "I'm trying to do the math on how I can build my very traditional art career into a six figure business but the math is scary. That's one four hundred dollar painting every work day, or two large four thousand dollar paintings a month. How do you do that, essentially? How do you accomplish your financial goals without hustling to death? So talk about the fear, Charlie. I want to build a six figure art business but it's scary.

Charlie: So the scary piece of it is first off, be clear about your no-win scenarios. That often time comes up, where one is that if I do that then I'm selling out, I'm not creating really good art, I'm going to have to be a slave to somebody else, so on and so forth. So that's one of the pieces that you really have to work on, is that mindset piece. Now I'm actually gonna turn it over to you Cory, cause this is one of the reasons I've seen before, the art world was really strange around pricing, in the sense where an art piece could go for four hundred or it could go for four thousand and he knows more about how to make that, but be careful. Here's what I'll say, cause this goes for all entrepreneurs and creatives. Be careful, because your assumption that a high volume, low value strategy is going to win is often false. To make fifty things that cost four hundred is considerably harder than making five things that cost four thousand. Right? Or whatever the math is. So art prices is crazy, but be aware that a high volume strategy is usually a sign of self-doubt.

Cory: Yeah. I only know like two artists who do that sort of high volume strategy that have built a significant business. And they hustle like crazy, and one of them, his children do all of the work, like the shipping. He makes a lot of low cost original pieces and then his children handle the shipping, it's a whole family thing. But there's a happy medium somewhere in there. So Chelsea, it depends on who you're selling to, right? Who your customers are. If you're selling at farmer's markets and craft fairs, then yeah, like a hundred to four hundred a piece is what you're gonna be able to sell. Maybe the daily painting movement, yeah, Malcolm just said that. But if you are selling to like tech executives in Silicon Valley, you're gonna be selling a very different price point, right? So I would look at who you're selling to, who you want to be selling to, can you network your way into a higher end gallery, can you network your way into a big show, or just can you network your way into a group of wealthy people? And it's not as hard as it seems when I say that. So I would think about who you're selling to before you try to decide four hundred or four thousand. And then the other thing, you mentioned that the math is terrifying and having a six figure business, like unless you are already in a position where your monthly spend is more than six figures a year, you don't actually need a six figure business. You need to make enough money from your art, you need to make enough profit from your art to pay our bills, right? To replace your day job. And a lot of times it doesn't even have to replace the day job. A lot of times you can take a pay cut because you just need enough money from your art to pay your bills. And then once you're out of the day job your business will grow a lot because you're spending all your time with it. So before you get locked up trying to generate six figures, instead say "how can I get out of my day job? How can I get out of whatever I'm doing now?" And what's the number that you need to make that happen? Because once you've gotten rid of distractions your core business will grow a lot.

Charlie: Yeah, I'm glad you mentioned that Cory, especially if it's away from the specifics of our business. But I think if you're a new entrepreneur, new small business owner, new artist, a far more useful question is how can I make \$5k a month from this business? Why \$5k? Because unless you live in California, New York, and some of the really high end places, that amount by the time you take out the taxes, is enough to replace most peoples' day jobs. Right?

Cory: Yeah. And for most artists, \$5k a month profit means eight to ten grand in sales, because you gotta take into account material costs and gallery commissions.

Charlie: So gross profit that's what you're looking at there.

Cory: Alright. Let's see, Melissa says "How to be productive when you're feeling blocked?" What do you do when you're feeling blocked, Charlie?

Charlie: Stop trying to be productive. I'm being dead serious.

Cory: No, you're absolutely right.

Charlie: Find something that you would not count as productive and go do that. So maybe it's walk in an art gallery. But again, going back to those recovery blocks. That why I mention that so frequently. I've found that a lot of people say they're blocked, when they're either scared or depleted. Right? So you wake up in the morning and then you go to bed, get three hours of sleep, you wake up in the morning and you're blocked. No, you're tired. Do something else. And so that's where those recovery blocks come in. Most people that I work with find that they get unblocked when they go work out. When they hang out with their friends. When they go to the park. When they go on a hike. You'll notice that a lot of these are really about getting your body moving. One of my favorite quotes is by George Patton, which is "An active mind cannot rest in an inactive body." It's rest or exist, one of the two. So get moving. Because that is going to unlock a lot. And just sitting there in your studio looking at the board or you know, looking at the pattern or whatever often times is not going to do that. Now what you have to be careful about with that is I don't like this whole idea that we only do creative work when the inspiration strikes us. Because sometimes inspiration follows you sitting the hell down and deciding to do it. And sitting there long enough to figure out what's going on. One of my favorite tools is [Cold Turkey Blocker](#). It's an app for the Mac, I think it's for Windows, that will literally lock you out of websites, it'll lock you out of apps. So one of the things I love about it is it'll let you set schedules. So I hack it so that my focus block time will start at 6:00 am in the morning, and end at 10:30 or 11:00, so what that means is sometimes I'll wake up in the morning and I'm like "I'm motivated!" And I'm blocked! And I'm distracted and I'll go to one of those things and I literally can't do it, I have to sit there long enough, and lo and behold an idea will come to me! But it's just because I haven't let myself be distracted and interrupted by other things, and I'm just giving it time to warm up. The other thing I'll say here, we haven't talked about routines. Have a creative warmup routine. Seriously, create one, and I was going to say this when it comes to the experimental time, what I've found is a lot of people give themselves experimental time that is also a warmup time, and it solves two things. Because the point is not to be blocked, it's to show up and get those muscles going. I'm a writer which means I've gotta get the head to finger connection going. And sometimes that's not jumping right into the hardest work that I have in front of me. Sometimes it's writing about the color of the dog that walked past me that caught

my eye or how my coffee tastes. Or what I'm going to do to subvert Cory's DnD plans. All sorts of things like that is what I'll write about. And then transition 15 minutes later into actual writing for a purpose as opposed to writing just to warm up.

Cory: Yep. Sweet. Thank you. So as we're coming up on 2:30 I just want to mention, if you're getting a lot of value out of this and I know a lot of you are, click on that Start Finishing button down at the bottom of the webinar and sign up for Charlie's course. It's only \$25. So go check that out.

I've got a couple questions left. We're gonna wrap it up in about five minutes. Punam says "How would you advise us to be more proactive in creating multiple income streams so that we aren't totally reliant on one? I struggle with commissions, painting for me, marketing, social media and doing all the other stuff. So how do I build a bigger income?" So my first response to that is don't build multiple income streams until you have one reliable income stream. So I see a lot of artists like "I'm gonna commission this, then I'm gonna make these paintings for me, then I'm gonna try to sell prints," and no. Do one. So there are five business models for artists. There's making your original art and selling it through galleries, making your original art and selling it direct to collectors, there's selling prints and products, there's doing commission work, and there's licensing. Pick one of those five, do it until you make a good amount of money, and don't try to do more until you've got that income coming. Until you're at that \$5-10k mark. Because all the marketing and all the social media and everything that you have to do is all completely different for each of those five. So you'll really benefit a lot if you just focus on one. That doesn't mean you don't take the windfall that falls in your lap. If you're selling original works and someone comes to you and wants to give you five grand for a licensing deal that you don't have to do anything for, then yeah, say yes. But just focus your efforts on one of them. Anything else, Charlie?

Charlie: I put a link in for my book called [Small Business Life Cycle](#) that talks about creating a beachhead, which is basically you create a prominent foothold in a marketplace and you grow out from there, as opposed to trying to create a foothold in so many different markets and so many different revenue streams that you can't actually make any momentum. So yeah, he covered it.

Cory: Yeah. Number five, Julie, is licensing deals. Okay, this person says "How to approach productivity when working on independent projects?" I feel like this was what this whole thing's been about so I'm not really sure what that means. If you want to repost or clarify your question, that'd be good. Paul says "What social media platform do you recommend for artists? Is posting art on social media without sales links and pages where customers can buy the work a good idea?" So Paul, always do the best you can to send everybody to a shop on your own website. Instagram is the best social network for artists right now, and Facebook is the second best. Don't waste your time with anything else and go from there. Sarah says "Would you say more about what to top down versus bottom up planning approaches are?" Charlie, that was you.

Charlie: So top down is when you take your five year vision, your three year vision, your one year vision, basically those big ideas and you start there. You start planning going down, like "What am I gonna do this quarter, what am I gonna do this month, what am I gonna do this week, what am I gonna do today?" Bottom up is when you look at what's in front of you and you try to figure out how that adds up to a bigger strategy. Both work, both have limitations and some people have an affinity for one versus the other, right? And so realize that if you're a top down planner you

do actually need to get down into the details of how that top down strategy is going to work. If you're a bottom up planner, realize that at a certain point you're going to be doing too many different things because there's no decision framework that has allowed you to do all those projects. But they're just different ways of going about that planning. When I work with people on this, sometimes I literally have to say "What are you doing this week? How does that tie in to what you want to do this month?" How does that tie into what you want to do this quarter?" For many creative people this seems to be upside down, but it's the only way that bottom up planners can start to get any grip, because they literally can't think about the bigger picture because they get torn down by all the smaller things. So it's just a different planning perspective. You get to the same place, you just have to know how to ask the questions to get there.

Cory: Cool, thanks Charlie. I think we have time for one or two more. This is a good one because I think it reflects some confusion. Brian says "When you say actual paint to canvas time isn't brain demanding, then what are some things that fit beyond those focus blocks?" Or what are the things that you should be putting in those focus blocks? I think that's what you're asking Brian, so if paint to canvas is not time that goes in a focus block, what do you put in that time?

Charlie: Well, it is time to go in a focus block but it's not the entirety of the time. So a challenge for people with a focus block is, let's say it's for 8:00-10:00, they think at 8:00, that's when I start paint to canvas time. Actually that's not what I'm saying. At 8:00 is when you start sinking into that zone. And you might do whatever you do to start getting paint to canvas that happens at 8:45 and you literally do need that forty five minutes of grounding time, incubation time, figuring out what you're going to do time that's all part of that block. Then you might paint for thirty minutes and be done. And all of that goes in there, but I've seen from creatives across all walks that if you don't have that transition and buffer time, that you don't get there. And this is why it's super hard to do deep creative work in a thirty minute time slice, because about the time that you're getting into it you gotta get out of it, and psychologically most people don't even start it because they know they won't be able to finish it and they don't want to get distracted.

Cory: Yeah, so I talk to a lot of artists who say "Once I'm actually painting, once I'm in the flow I can go for four to six hours." We're not saying here that you need to constrain yourself to only painting within those two hours. It's more like you need to give yourself that amount of time to get yourself into the state of flow. Is that a fair response to that, Charlie?

Charlie: Yeah, to get into the state of flow. Also the two hour limit is, again, so that you can start thinking about your body recycling, and you might need to eat something, you might need to go to the bathroom, you might need to stretch. So yes, you can be in the studio in deep work focus mode, maybe for six hours a day, but throughout that six hours you're gonna be transitioning, you're going to be doing different things, you're going to be going to get coffee. But it's when you switch contexts, which I know is one of those things that productivity people say, when you switch in between to go check email, you're done. You're out of that mode and everyone knows what I'm talking about. You're done because there's some headline or there's some subject or there's some what the hell just happened thing that happens, and then your mind's there and it's no longer on your work. So what I'm saying is yes, stay in the zone, understand that you may

be able to roll from one two-hour block into the next one pretty easily, understand that you may not be able to, right? For instance, if you're writing; I'm a writer, so you guys know that, you might be writing two different sections and spend the whole morning. But when you switch to that second section it's a different landscape. You're trying to tie it together, you're not in that flow anymore. And that's a second block switching in there. Although you might have spent the whole morning, when you look retroactively you might say I spent the whole morning just writing. Actually, you didn't. You spent the whole morning at the desk, you spent the whole morning doing that, but during these natural two hour blocks came up.

Cory: Yeah. Great. I see a lot of artists tell me "I get up and I paint from 7:00 or 8:00 in the morning until lunch, and then I do whatever else in the afternoon." Do all the business stuff in the afternoon. And that's just taking two focus blocks back to back.

Charlie: Pretty much. And we typically think about it this way, guys. Throughout the day you're going to have to go to the bathroom at some point. It never is on anyone's schedule. I've never seen a daily plan that's like bathroom, 8:17-8:34 in the morning. Doesn't happen. But we know that stuff happens. Or at least we hope that stuff happens, otherwise go see your doctor. Right? And so there's just those things about being human that don't show up in the way that most people talk about time management. The block planning strategies help build in some of that flex. And yes, that means there's some flexibility around whether bathroom time is counted into a focus block or not. But that's the point. You have to make some room for those and if you're planning your life in six minute increments you're probably not gonna be putting in the mini increments of you doing things like going to the bathroom and eating and cleaning up cat hurl and whatever else comes up.

Cory: Brian says he used to be a teacher and bathroom time was scheduled, so boom! In your face.

Charlie: In my face, everything I said is invalid, just go home.

Cory: Alright, thank you again everybody for taking the time to be here with us today. Again, if you've gotten value out of today's session click on that Start Finishing button there at the bottom and check out Charlie's class [Start Finishing Your Projects](#). Thank you very much for being a part of this webinar. I'm Cory Huff from The Abundant Artist, that's Charlie Gilkey from Productive Flourishing, and have a great day everybody!

Charlie: Thanks you all, it's good fun.