

TEN TIPS FOR KEEPING FAITH IN YOUR CREATIVE WORK

Nancy Middleton

OVERVIEW

On those wretched, unrewarding days when you receive yet another rejection of your short story, when the painting you've been laboring over takes a turn for the worse, when anything---even doing the laundry--seems more rewarding than pursuing your creative work, how do you keep going? The day-to-day business of creative work is difficult, and the rewards slow in coming. Why, then, should we bother? It's a valid question that deserves meaningful answers. We need to know that our work is important, that our efforts matter, that it's all worth it. Here are ten reasons to keep the faith:

TIP ONE: TO FALL IN LOVE AGAIN

One of the joys of doing creative work is that you get to experience deep emotion on a much more regular basis than people doing "normal" work. Do you remember the enchantment you felt when you began your most recent project? If not, try to rekindle that feeling. Passionate, euphoric, enchanted, besotted--this is not a bad way to live.

TIP TWO: TO INSPIRE OTHERS

Each of us has been inspired to do creative work by a combination of internal desire and the examples set by others. Think of all the artists that have paved the way before you, then think of how bleak and difficult your road would be without their example as a guide. Consider the possibility that your work is lighting the way for other artists coming after you--it's not as farfetched as you might think.

TIP THREE: TO CONTRIBUTE SOMETHING ORIGINAL

The world needs new art and new ideas. It's not as if it can have "enough," or reach a saturation point. There will always be room at the table for new voices, new visions, new approaches. Know that what you are trying to say through your creative work is important. Your voice counts.

TIP FOUR: TO DEVELOP SELF-AWARENESS

One of the side benefits of creative work is the deep insight you can gain from the process. Novels, sculptures, and poems often grow out of deep places in our psyches--places we want to explore and know better. This requires some heavy lifting, but the self-knowledge you gain is invaluable.

TIP FIVE: TO DEVELOP SELF-DISCIPLINE

Creative work requires enormous amounts of self-discipline--a rare and valuable trait in these distracted times. It isn't easy to cultivate, but the self-discipline you develop in order to produce creative work is likely to spill over and help you be more focused and productive in all aspects of your life.

TIP SIX: TO LIVE IN A STATE OF DISCOVERY

To work with the unknown, always seeking and discovering new connections and ideas, is one of the great intangible rewards of creative work. The work is yours and yours alone to discover, and you can question and wonder as a child does--without the requirements of "right" and "wrong."

TIP SEVEN: TO GIVE LIFE MEANING

We all want to know that our lives matter, and creative work helps us in this desire. When you write a story or paint a picture, you are expressing in your own way what it feels like to be human. Creative work helps us "see" and understand the importance of our lives through details large and small. It is important because it shows us who we are.

TIP EIGHT: TO GAIN FREEDOM AND FLEXIBILITY

The freedom creative work offers is both thrilling and terrifying. No other work allows for such open-ended imaginative romping. What color? Which word? What next? It's all up to you. If you can wrestle the anxiety such constant decision-making stirs up, you can actually come to enjoy the ride.

TIP NINE: TO CONNECT WITH OTHERS

To some creative work may feel like a selfish act. It requires solitude and a certain amount of separation from the everyday world in order to "see" it anew. But rather than disconnect you from the greater world, creative work binds you to humanity in deep and long-lasting ways. Your book or painting or play will

connect intimately with every person who experiences it, and will continue to do so in years to come.

TIP TEN: BECAUSE NO OTHER WORK WILL SATISFY

This is probably the primary reason to do creative work: because you don't really have a choice. As an artist, you are different, set apart by your desire to create. You might try other work, but nothing will satisfy like art. This is the hand you were dealt, the straw you drew. And while it might sometimes feel like a cruel twist of fate, in truth it's the ultimate lucky break.

ABOUT NANCY MIDDLETON

Nancy Middleton was born in Rochester, New York. She received her BA from Allegheny College and her MA from Georgetown University. During her early career, she worked as a freelance book editor and writer in the Washington, D.C., area. More recently, her short stories, author interviews, and travel essays have appeared in such journals as *The South Carolina Review*, *Glimmer Train*, and www.besttravelwriting.com. Her most recent short story, "Departure," appeared in the Spring 2010 issue of *The South Carolina Review*. She teaches English as a Second Language (ESL) in Pennsylvania, where she now lives, and is currently at work on her first novel.

