

TEN TIPS FOR HANDLING “CREATIVE DISASTERS”

Eric Maisel

OVERVIEW

Let's say that you had high hopes for your current painting and it turned out so poorly that the only word that comes to mind is “disaster.” What can you do to deal with the angst welling up in you? Here are ten tips that will help!

TIP ONE: MIND YOUR LANGUAGE

Is it really necessary to call it a “disaster”? How does it serve you to use such a harsh word on something you created with genuine love and real sweat? How do words like disaster, failure, mess or mistake help you? You are in charge of the language you use and employing the most self-disparaging language available can't be a good idea!

TIP TWO: INSTANTLY FORGIVE YOURSELF

All right, something unfortunate happened. You can pile a ton of guilt and an extra thousand pounds of regret on your back because of this unfortunate occurrence or you can forgive yourself right now, without a moment's hesitation, before the weight of your guilt and regret drop you to your knees. Self-forgiveness is not the same as not owning your part in what you've wrought—rather, it is simple kindness and the only way to guarantee second chances.

TIP THREE: ENGAGE IN SELF-SUPPORT

Do you deserve the good chocolate or the deep massage only as a reward for some success? Isn't it just as sensible to treat yourself in soothing, self-supportive ways when something is making you feel miserable?—something that has the potential of lingering on as a permanent source of unhappiness? If

you haven't learned how to genuinely support yourself, this is an excellent opportunity to figure out how!

TIP FOUR: TAKE A BREAK AND REAPPRAISE

Maybe it wasn't a disaster at all!—or maybe it was only a limited disaster. Take the weekend off and then look at your painting again. Bravely return to the scene of the disaster and see if it really *was* a disaster. Very often it wasn't!

TIP FIVE: REFRAME IT AS A LEARNING EXPERIENCE

It is genuinely the case that we learn best from our “mistakes and messes” if—and only if—we can find the courage to look our creative project in the eye and see what worked and what didn't work. If you make this brave effort, then this creative project, no matter how poorly it turned out, becomes a real learning experience and maybe one of your most profound ones. It is not a mere mental tactic or a play-on-words to reframe disasters as learning experiences—they are exactly that, if you treat them that way.

TIP SIX: SALVAGE THE GOOD PARTS

A given creative project may “fail” in its totality but still contain many “good bits” that can be salvaged. For instance the imagery you chose for your painting may still appeal to you if only you had executed it differently or better. Look at your creative project with fresh eyes, maybe after a weekend away from it, and focus on what can be saved rather than on what must be discarded.

TIP SEVEN: GET BACK TO WORK

A “disaster” is a perfect excuse to stop creating altogether. You get it in your mind to lick your wounds, you take a break from the hard work of creating, and you find that days, weeks, months and even years are slipping away through avoidance. Even after the worst “disaster” get back to work! Maybe you need a weekend away; maybe you need a week. But don't let it be too long. We can lose vast stretches of time if we allow our “failed” creative projects to become excuses for not getting back on the horse and trying again.

TIP EIGHT: EXORCISE LINGERING REGRETS

It is one of the unfortunate habits of our mind to return unbidden to our “disasters,” including those that happened years or even decades ago. For some evolutionary reason we are build to dwell on our failures and not on our successes. You will want to counteract this natural but unfortunate habit by mindfully “letting go” of regrets the moment they arise. When you hear yourself beating yourself up about that ruined painting from twenty years ago, say to yourself, “Nope! Don’t need that thought.” Exorcise it instantly.

TIP NINE: GET FEEDBACK

In certain circumstances it may pay to have a second set of eyes take a look at the supposed “disaster” and give you feedback on what he or she sees. This may be especially true when you yourself aren’t sure if the painting in front of you is or isn’t a disaster and if there is someone in your life whose opinion and judgment you respect. Use feedback wisely, circumspectly and only occasionally—but if this right moment for feedback, seek it out.

TIP TEN: HONOR THE PROCESS

Once you deeply understand the realities of the creative process you will know in your bones that “disasters” are to be expected. Only a naïve romantic thinks that everything he tries will turn out beautifully. In fact, the more ambitious your efforts the greater the likelihood that you will stretch yourself to your limits and sometimes exceed your grasp. Honor the creative process by embracing the idea that “disasters” come with the territory—we do not love them, but they shouldn’t surprise us or they mustn’t derail us.

ABOUT ERIC MAISEL

Eric Maisel is the author of more than 30 books. His recent books include *Brainstorm: Harnessing the Power of Productive Obsessions*, *Mastering Creative Anxiety*, and *Rethinking Depression: Shed the Label, Reclaim Your Power* (2012).

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