

[Dear Reader: This following article was written by Melodie Baker, a member of the San Diego Guild of Puppetry and is provided through the San Diego Guild of Puppetry. Its principles are the cornerstone of good public relations and adherence to them is a must if you wish to maintain a professional and business oriented appearance. Having operated a successfully business for many years these concepts have proven to be true, regardless of one's level of expertise or the service one has to offer. Well said and well done, Melodie!]

## **POLISH YOUR PROFESSIONALISM:** ***Ten Etiquette Tips for Artists by Melodie Baker***

It is probably safe to say that, as artists, we enjoy being known as "Bohemians." However, what if we want to get away from other less attractive images like "starving artist" and actually profit from our creativity? This is why we artists need tips. Over time, we have gotten a bad reputation. Does "flaky", "spaced-out", "difficult" (i.e. Temperamental), ring a bell? Well, you say, "I'm not like that", and I say, "Well, I'm not like that either." However, the fact remains that the public, in general, seems to view artists as a separate, although interesting and maybe enviable group, over which this shadow has been cast. Remember, too, we now live in quite a rude society, where we have to interrupt many a cashier's telephone conversation to pay for our stuff.

As an artist, I was never introduced to the concept of "business" as a co-existing part of the picture. It was either be an artist or sell-out to make money. Any notion of "business" would send chills up my spine, followed by visions of bondage to a desk, strict conformity, no freedom, or at the very least, little flexibility. Worst of all, it included the concept of "selling-out" by producing something that was marketable and that would have to appeal to the masses.

Along the lines of conformity, the television makeover program, "What Not to Wear" has shown many artists and creative types, who in their attempt to be expressive and individualistic, have ended up being caricatures. However, when they transform into what they thought was going to be "sedate and boring" people, they actually discovered that the flamboyant dressing and hair was only a distraction from their true beauty and artistic flair.

It is difficult to suggest following convention when, as artists, we want to preserve our unconventionality. But the truth is, that the wisdom of combining art with business in order to create a way to make a living through our art, does suggest merging convention with unconventionality.

Etiquette is more than just manners. It is a way of being, and a "how-to" that incorporates the tenets of courtesy, consideration, appreciation and gratitude into our lives as artists. We always need to stand out in some way to be noticed. And at this time, the way to stand out may be by being courteous, keeping your word, and generally, being a mensch (Yiddish, loosely translated--a really good person). So, be a mensch, and see what happens!

1. **BE ON TIME, EVEN EARLY** - It is considerate and professional to respect your collector's or potential collector's time. Why not arrive early to give you some time to collect your thoughts and become more present in the meeting. Forget zooming in, for example, still thinking about the traffic you had to fight to get there. Arriving "fashionably" late can discredit your dependability and I assure you, word gets around. In business it really is who you know, in so many ways, and receiving positive referrals are all important. Of course, if you will be late, call and notify the people.
2. **BE ATTENTIVE** - First of all, turn off your cell phone. Unless you are on "baby watch", or something urgent, don't take calls during any business meeting with collectors or gallery owners, etc. Smile. Listen, with eye contact. Actually hear what the other person is saying, instead of concentrating on the next moment you can say your piece. Silence, for a second or two, isn't a crime! Whenever possible, remember names. It helps combat that sudden blank stare and frozen face, accompanied by the

unintelligible muttering of someone looking for the nearest exit. Oh, yeah, lose the gum, so they aren't distracted by that piece of something in your mouth that keeps moving around.

3. **DRESS APPROPRIATELY TO THE SITUATION** - Yes, we are artists. But, unless you are in your studio working, the paint covered clothes and often sloppy (sorry, not sloppy you say, but comfortable) attire is not the preferred advertisement. Show your work and let that speak for your authenticity as an artist. At an opening, dress up a little, or down a little, depending on the situation, (with your own special flair), and let your beaming smile draw people to you.
4. **KEEP PRICES CONSISTENT** - Collectors who paid full price at one gallery will not be happy to discover that you were selling your work for less at home or at another gallery. Giving reductions to family and friends can be tricky. Fifty percent discount is "Two for One" and cuts the value of your work in half. If you do decide to discount, just be aware of the pitfalls and set up some criteria beforehand for your policy of discounting. As an alternative, you can make the work a gift. If you are really moved that someone wants the art, but cannot afford it, offer a payment plan. Everyone should know the true value of your art. And if you want to be in business, you have to plan how the value of your work can increase not decrease.
5. **BE EASY TO CONTACT** - A good "rule of thumb" is to be present at your openings. Be there to greet your guests and so that people can point you out as the artist. Also, business cards/postcards are what people want to take away from a show if they are not ready to buy on the day. When you sell a piece, all your contact information should be on the back. In addition, include more information about yourself --resume, bio, etc., for your buyer. Keep your name out there.
6. **KEEP SOCIAL DRINKING TO A MINIMUM!** - Most of us like to "loosen up" a bit when facing a social situation. This can be especially true if you are the featured artist and will be the center of attention. Hopefully, you know your crossover point from being smiley and glib to REALLY happy and slurry. If not, enlist a friend to stand in front of the wine table and walk you over to the coffee section. You'll thank me in the morning!
7. **MAINTAIN GOOD ACCOUNTING** - Accounting!?! Suck at math? Let someone else do that for you, if necessary. It is good business to keep track of your shows; dates, collector's names/addresses/phone numbers, pieces they bought, plus any other notes on their special likes and dislikes, etc. Why trust your memory when you can keep it on paper, or the computer, which will make it available to someone else, if necessary.
8. **KEEP YOUR WORD** - When you do what you say you are going to do, you'll be known as a person who can be depended upon and trusted. Then you are more likely to be the one called upon when a new show is coming up, or someone else's commitment fell through. If you cannot do what you promised, notify the people in a timely manner, and offer to help them find a replacement.
9. **READ AND FOLLOW DIRECTIONS** - "Missed that deadline." "They couldn't read my writing." "Oh, darn, they didn't want slides." Yes, when all else fails, follow directions. Form-phobia can make a person put off filling out the show entry form for a very long time, and rules can all mesh together, appear and disappear before your very eyes. So, it may take longer to complete a form correctly and get it in ON TIME. Have a friend help. Don't be disqualified from a show or something you really want because of a technicality, where you could have aced it.
10. **WRITE AND SAY THANK YOU** - After an opening, take the time to thank anyone who bought your work, and any friends who helped, or came to support you. We feel the appreciation in our hearts, but it is important to let them know with a call or note. Why not print some note cards with your artwork and drop a brief (or lengthy) note to express your feelings. The expression of gratitude never goes out of style. And as an additional thought, if thanking someone is overdue, do it now!! It's never too late to say Thank You.

*[MELODIE BAKER is a native-California artist, born in Hollywood and living in San Diego since 1977. She is passionate about representing rich color, bold graphic designs, the play of positive/negative space, and whimsy in her work. Currently, she is working in paper collage and acrylics. Recently, she began doing life drawings, in a minimalist line drawing style.]*

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