



Beyond the Book®



CLUELESS IN THE REAL WORLD: MANAGING EXPECTATIONS ONCE YOU GRADUATE

OPERATOR: Hello, and welcome to our second conference call. This is “Clueless in the Real World: Managing Expectations Once You Graduate,” and our speaker is John Schmelzer. John, among many other things, is the president of the Graphic Artist Guild, so this is hearing the word from the top banana, and he’s been involved with education and illustration for many years, having opened his own studio in 1969 and having done 35-plus years of experience with *Playboy*, *Esquire*, *Chicago Tribune*, *USA Today*, McDonald’s, United Airlines, many magazines, agencies, etc.

He’s also been teaching at Columbia College in Chicago where he is an adjunct with a variety of illustration and cartooning courses, so he has lots of experience with graduating students.

And without further ado, I will turn it over to John.

SCHMELZER: Oh, thank you, thank you, thank you. Hopefully, I won’t be clueless in here, but I’ve at the end of each course, I have to send the students on their way, and so I’m going to basically tell you what I tell my students, and I think that applies to anybody else who’d planning on getting into this wonderful world of graphic arts.

It’s always hard when you make the transition from school into the “real world,” and I guess expectations are the first thing we have to talk about here. This is a new phase in your life. If you’ve been in school for a while, it seems like all the projects you do are kind of at the behest of your instructors and what have you, and I know sometimes they don’t seem like they’re terribly important, but they’re actually a little primer on what you’re going to run into in real life.

You’ll be dealing with real life, and one of the things you have to remember is that it doesn’t get any easier in real life than it was in school. You still have multiple demands on your time, you’re still going to have things that you would like to do and things that you have to do, so things are not going to be that different in that

respect. You are, however, going to have to please an employer, hopefully, and this can be a little bit different than pleasing your teacher.

The first thing that I would suggest for anybody that's going to start out looking for a place for themselves in this business is to take a little stock of what your strengths are. Sit down with yourself and think about what you're good at and what you would like to do. I know this sounds pretty simple, but actually, you probably haven't thought much about it in the last couple of years, so sit down and kind of look over what you've done and decide where your strengths are, decide what you would kind of like to do.

You have probably been told to prepare a portfolio along the way. This is done in a variety of ways. Everybody has their way of doing it. My way of doing it is – and this comes from major experience. Don't make that portfolio too big, size-wise or page number-wise. I used to drag around a portfolio that was bigger than my head. Way bigger. It would get caught in the wind, it was so big. So try to keep that thing manageable.

Most art directors and most people that hire these days don't have a huge office. You have to show this to them comfortably, so try to make it something you can handle, 11x14, 16x20. I wouldn't go much bigger than either one of those sizes, because you're going to have trouble with it.

You need a portfolio to show when you come into a place. I know that there is the Internet and what have you and you can have a site on there. When you're going in, though, to talk to somebody, you need to have a portfolio.

And what I would suggest in a portfolio is never put in anything that you hate to do. For some reason, if you put in something that you hate to do, the art director or the person you're talking to will automatically find that and want you to do it. Now, I don't know why this happens this way, but it does, so try to avoid that. Put in what you like to do. Put in your strengths. Don't make your portfolio look like a scrapbook of the last two years or four years or whatever you've put in. Find the 10 to 12 best things that you have done and put those in there, and hopefully, those will be things that you like to do.

You can also have a couple of portfolios. You can tailor it, or you can move your stuff out and into it. But try to keep 10 to 12 things. That's plenty. You don't have to have a huge thing.

What you do have to have though is a leave-behind when you go to visit anybody. And that would be a resume or a sample, or maybe both. If you have a resume, for God's sake, make sure everything is spelled properly on it and it's in correct English. Don't make it a mess. There's nothing like getting a portfolio that has something really stupid on it, because that'll either end up on the blackboard or the

billboard in the office and all the mistakes will be underlined, or it'll end up in the circular file.

So you want to have that thing look professional. Get some help. Get somebody to proof it with you.

A friend of mine was talking about a class he went and looked at. It was a design class and they all had their things out and a girl had her samples and had the word design misspelled on one of her samples. This is not a good sign. Not a good sign at all.

Let's talk for a minute about how you look for a job. I've told you you need a portfolio, you need a leave-behind, you need a resume. If you are going out to look for a job, it's just what I said. You are going out to look for a job. You can't stay at home and mail resumes to people. It doesn't work. It's real easy to ignore an e-mail. It's real easy to ignore a resume. People get tons of them daily. They throw them away. You have to make yourself available. You have to show up where you want the job. You have to walk in. You have to call in advance to see if there's somebody you should see.

Even if they tell you you shouldn't see somebody, go over to the place and walk in the door with your portfolio. Either way, you need to get an appointment to see someone.

Don't sit at home and hope that if you send out 12 resumes, you're going to get somebody to call you, because you won't. You have to present yourself.

When you present yourself, look professional. Don't look like the cat just dragged you in. And you don't have to wear a suit or you don't have to become – or come into the place highly dressed. You just have to look semi-professional. Come in with something other than jeans and don't come in – if you're a woman, don't come in looking like you just got off God knows where. Wear something that looks like you mean business.

Once again, I'm not telling you to wear a suit, but at least look clean. Look like you're wearing something that hasn't been spending the previous night in a pile on the floor. Just try to look professional, because if you look professional, they're going to treat you in a professional manner, hopefully. But most times, they will.

When you present yourself, you may get criticized. Your answer, of course, would be, hey, I'm a student just out of school. I'm trying to learn here. I'm willing to get better, obviously. So don't take any of this too personally. Take it for what it is. It's criticism, and criticism is something that is good for you. It makes you better, so don't be deflated by having somebody tell you there's something wrong with something.

They'll probably also tell you there's something good about something, so put more weight on what's good and try to change. If it's constructive criticism, by all means, if you can change it before you visit somebody else, change it. Don't beat a dead horse.

I would suggest in the process of job hunting that you also join an art organization. Now, obviously, I'm president of the Guild, which I think is a great organization to join, but you could join any art organization that will put you in touch with people that are in the business. You could join a local art directors' club. You could join the AIGA. You could join the Guild. There's a number of organizations that you could think about. There's a number you could join. You could join more than one.

But you really should get as much information as you possibly can about this field, because if you are going out there to present yourself, you don't want to look stupid, and having information is power, and the more information you can get about this business, the better. So try to bone up on this stuff.

When you're thinking about going out for your first job, another thing I would consider doing – and this is for your own good and to remind yourself – is to sit down sometime when things are quiet and write up some life rules. These are things that you feel that if you did these things in your life, this is what you would like to do.

Set up some rules for yourself like, in three years, I want to be working in such-and-such a place, or I refuse to do something that would compromise my morals, or I would – I would set up things that I will do and that I won't do. Rules for life, and date the thing and keep it and refer to it every once in awhile.

Because sometimes when you're trying to get into business, you might forget that you wrote down these things. If you had a boss who is telling you to copy something and you know darned well you shouldn't be copying it, what would your response be? Would you do it to save your job or would you try to suggest something else or would you just go along with it and figure, well, it's not my keister that's going to get in trouble, it's my boss?

Sit down and think about this. Write them down so you remember them and keep it somewhere where you can find it.

When you go out and look for a job, you have to be willing to bend, but you don't want to be willing to break. Some of the things that you're asked to do is not that big a deal. Other things are just absolutely dumb, and try to make sure you know which is which.

When you go out to find your first job, chances are the first job that you will find – and I hope to God that you go out and find a job. Don't think about freelancing

fresh out of the box. This is a bad mistake. You need some more education. Once you get out of school, that does not mean that you're done getting educated. That just means you're starting to get educated.

A first job that you pick should definitely be a learning experience. What I would suggest when you get a first job is to not go into a place where they don't have somebody that you can learn from. Don't go to a place that says, oh, we're just thinking of setting up some kind of internal desktop publishing and we need a person to do it, because you will not learn anything there. All you will learn is that you have to get stuff done, and there's nothing wrong with that, but you're trying to improve your graphic arts skills and you won't be able to do that if you are the top dog doing this.

So always try to find a job where you're working under somebody who knows something. Don't go to a one-person place and be the one person. That's a mistake.

First jobs can be miserable. I know the ones that I had were fun and miserable all at the same time, and my suggestion always is to get a really bad job in the beginning because it makes you really interesting at cocktail parties. If you have some good stories about what went wrong, it makes you into a bigger person, better person, more fun person to listen to.

And it also shows you the way you don't want to be, and that's an important factor, because at some point in time, you may have employees, and if you've ever been in the position as an employee that is totally miserable, it's always nice to know that if you were in the same position, you wouldn't treat somebody the way you were treated. So, like I said, this is a learning experience.

When you go out to find your first learning experience, it depends on the city you're in, the size of the market you're in. Normally, you can go to the library and they have some kind of ad directory there. There's a variety of them. It works better than the Yellow Pages, but if the Yellow Pages is all you have, then you just have a lot more people to call because you never know if organizations are one-man shops or what have you.

So it's a little tougher, but if you go to the library and you ask the librarian, I'm sure they can point you in the right direction. You don't have to buy a directory.

If you're going to another city to look for a job, you could go online, too, I suppose, and see what you can find. But you don't have to spend a lot of money to find resources to look for a job.

One thing to remember in looking for your first job is there are the places that you normally would look. You'd say, oh, well, there's a studio here and there's this firm that does advertising and there's this ad agency and those are the places that

you would automatically think of. But there are also a lot of companies out there that do internal marketing, that do internal pieces, that have some sort of internal marketing and advertising going on.

Large insurance companies, medical insurance companies, there's a variety of companies. People that make widgets. There's always some stuff that is done internally, so you might find a job in a very strange place, and there's nothing wrong with those jobs. Those jobs will teach you something if there is somebody in there that knows what they're doing.

If you get that first job, hopefully you won't keep it forever. As you get it, take stock of where you would like to be. Look at that little list that you made and see how long your position there is going to last in comparison to where you want to be three years down the line, two years down the line.

It's not going to be the great job, I don't believe. Now, you may do well there or you may get fired. And God knows, I got fired from my first couple of jobs. If you're any good at what you do, chances are you will get fired because normally when you're in a beginning position, you see a lot of things that are wrong, and they may be wrong because that's the way business has to be done, but if you find compromising with things, if you find that you really object to doing mediocre stuff and nobody else does, then chances are you're going to get in trouble because you'll probably mention that to somebody who doesn't want to hear it and they'll get sick of hearing it and then you'll be gone.

There's nothing wrong with that. There is nothing wrong with getting fired from a job in the graphic arts. Normally it means that maybe you have higher expectations than where you're working. So consider that a badge of courage and go on.

If it happens over and over, then maybe there's a problem with you. Or maybe you're just really good. One way or another, you're going to end up in the perfect spot, so go in with an open mind and realize that this won't last forever.

One other thing I would suggest in that same mode is have a life besides being a graphic artist. Being a graphic artist is not a lifestyle. It's a job. It's a job. You don't have to get up in the morning and live and breathe it. You can do some other things on the weekends or you can do some other things at other times of the day, but – I know it's easy to get immersed in the graphic arts. I probably did it myself, but I also had another life. Don't combine the arts with your life to a point where if you lose your job you're totally devastated.

If that's your only outlet to meet people and to see them, then you're doing something wrong. Don't become totally immersed in it. You'll be devastated if you're out of that little cocoon that you put yourself in. You don't want to do that at all. Get some other interests.

I had a student one time who had been in the business for a long time. She was back being a student. She was very capable at what she was doing. I said, why do you want to do this? Why do you want to go to school after you've spent time in other businesses? And obviously, she was making it her life and she was becoming so obsessed that she would end up getting fired from these jobs.

So I said, why don't you find another interest? And she said, well, I do quilting on the side. Aye-yi-yi. I said, find something beyond the arts that doesn't involve any of that stuff and see if you can put a little bit of that in your life. You might do better.

Let me see here. I went over your first job. What you should learn there is you should learn how to deal with other people. You should learn expectations on the job. You should learn about real, genuine deadlines. You should also learn that just like in school, life gets in the way of doing a good job.

A lot of times, you have a really good job and you don't have a lot of time to do it, and other times, you have a really rotten job and you have plenty of time to do it. This goes to my first life lesson that I think everybody should learn. I always put this up on the board for my students from Day 1 in the course, and it's very easy to remember.

The little thing is, life is not fair.

I know that doesn't sound democratic and it doesn't sound like fun, but it's true. Life just isn't fair. That doesn't mean you can't do something about it, but just remember that, OK? It brings everything into perspective.

Any questions so far? Did I bore anyone to tears yet? I don't hear anybody. Maybe everyone died here.

I hope that when you start, you really and truly go out and find a first job. I am very serious about this. This is not the time to start freelancing. Freelancing is a totally different animal. I have been doing it for a long time. I got to the point of being a freelancer because I did a number of jobs and I got fired from a number of jobs. And I got fired because I wasn't satisfied with what I was doing there and I thought it could be done better. And like I said, nobody likes to hear that.

So I decided at a certain point in my life that freelancing was for me. Now, I certainly wouldn't have done that immediately out of school without any sort of other experience, because frankly, I would have been just a wash.

I did learn how to charge, I did learn how long something should possibly take to get done, I did learn about deadlines, I did learn the little adage that – and I tell my students this, too – a career in the graphic arts is a story of 25 years of sleep deprivation. So chances are, if you're in as a business, you won't get a lot of real

decent sleep. But that's OK. If you can't hack that, then you've got to move on to something else.

But when you're dealing with deadlines, you have to get things done. It's just the way it is. It's just the way it is, and in this business, you don't have to be outdoors in inclement weather doing your job. This is not brain surgery. Nobody'll die if you get it wrong, hopefully.

This is not the hardest job on earth. This is a pretty good job, because normally, you get to work indoors. You get to work sitting down and there's not a lot of heavy lifting involved if you do it right. So this is a good place to be.

But along with that, I have to tell you that the world of business looks upon graphic artists as being somewhat troublesome and they aren't too happy with us, so it's hard to gain their respect.

And whatever you do, the respect for you and the respect for this business is on your shoulders. You are the ones that can get other peoples' respect. You are the ones who can do the work to make sure that this business is still around 10 years from now or 20 years from now when you're still plying your trade, when you're still hawking your stuff, when you're still illustrating, designing, or doing whatever you're doing. You've got to make sure that your business is healthy. It's up to you. Nobody else does it for you.

What I have found with business is, business looks upon you as – first of all, you don't have a huge commitment to equipment. You don't have a gigantic factory. So that's kind of strange to businesses, because they feel if you're producing something, you should have this huge outlay of cash in order to do it. We don't have quite that problem.

That's not to say we don't have to invest in whatever we do here, but we don't have huge machinery and what have you, so they look a little askance at that.

The other thing is, we look like we're having too much fun doing this, and this is not good. And I don't know exactly how you can get around that except you can look serious sometimes, I guess. But what you don't want to look is you don't want to look like you're flighty or you don't care, because that does not work for you.

What you have to do is you have to present yourself in a business fashion, and I realize this is very, very difficult for illustrators and designers because most of us think of ourselves as little free spirits. But I have news for you. If you don't have anything to eat and no place to live, the free spirit is not going to carry you through.

We make graphic art for money. This is a service we are providing. We are not manufacturing, as some people like to consider design and illustration. We

perform a function in a set amount of time. We deliver a service in a set amount of time. We are basically professionals providing a service. If we consider ourselves to be anything else, then I think we're fooling ourselves.

This is not something – when you're making an illustration for somebody, the last thing they want to hear from you is how good it makes you feel or how bad it makes you feel to do this. They don't really care. They want the thing done. And when you're working for somebody, you have to understand that, too.

What you do is a job. That's why you get paid for it. You aren't doing it for fun. You're doing it to do a service. So forget about the fun. If fun happens to come along in the process, good for you. My theory was one out of 10 can be fun and I'll be satisfied. But that's not my top goal. My goal is to make sure that what I produce is a good thing.

You always have to have an eye for if what I produce today, let's hopefully make the next one better, and that doesn't always happen. And especially in a first job. You're there because you're new in the business. They're picking your brain as much as you're picking theirs. They like your outlook because you're new. You don't know what's impossible yet. You're going to find out real soon, but you really don't know what's impossible, so you can come up with new ideas, and for God's sake, do come up with some new ideas.

The worst that anyone can do is say no. No never killed anyone. No just means think of something else. And you can do it.

The other good thing about being young and starting in the business is you can take a hit and get up again. After awhile, it gets harder to get up. So remember that. You have something that the rest of the people you're working for don't have anymore. You have the ability to take a hit and keep on going.

Now, that, of course, depends on how personally you take some of your criticism. There's good criticism and it only makes you better. If everything you did was great, then you're a genius. But there's always something that could be improved, so when you're working and when you're doing your job, always remember that that job –

Sometimes you'll do it and it'll look great when you get it done and you'll look at it two weeks later and you'll think, that's terrible. Other times, you'll do a job and not be quite satisfied and you'll look at that one six months down the road and go, hey, wait a minute. That was pretty good.

You have to remember that every job is not the end. It's only part of the process. You finish a job so you can move on to another one.

Sometimes you have multiple jobs going, and most of the time you'll have multiple jobs going. You have to keep all those balls in the air at the same time. Sometimes it's tough. It all comes with the job. It all comes with the job and you either learn to enjoy it, or if you don't enjoy it, for God's sake, call it quits. Don't beat yourself if you don't find this to be satisfying.

Any questions so far? Does anyone have a question?

OPERATOR: I think you're doing great, John.

SCHMELZER: I'm doing great. Oh, thank you.

OPERATOR: I just wanted to let you know we're not dead.

SCHMELZER: The peanut gallery is not dead, and I'm glad to hear that. Let's see what else here I wanted to – OK. Let me see what else I've got. Just bear with me here. I want to see how far I got through all of my little stuff here.

Let me talk just a little bit about freelancing, because many times when you get a job and you're working, and I find most people that get a gig, as they like to call it these days, are doing freelance on the side.

Now, in some business situations, you will find that maybe you signed a contract when you took the job, and the job will prohibit you from doing freelance. Now, that probably doesn't mean that the thought police are going to come to your house.

But what it does mean is if you are prohibited from doing freelance and you are doing some little thing on the side and you're doing a card for your Aunt Susie who has some kind of little business going, don't bring it to work to work on. Don't let it end up on the workplace computer, because guess what? That belongs to whoever you're working for.

If you are doing something like that, you have to do it all on your own time. That means don't bring it into work. That means don't be working on it when you should be at work. That means you do it totally divorced from your job.

Now, some places do not care if you freelance, and in those instances, I would make a couple of suggestions.

First of all, if you are doing freelance work for somebody, don't do it on the cheap. And that means, don't work for spit, because here is the problem. I find that a lot of people that have a gig, that have a job, that are working with somebody, suddenly find themselves without work. Either they get laid off, they get fired, or the place closes up, in which case, they either have to find a new gig or they are going to have to live off of their freelance work.

Now, if you've been giving away your freelance work for beer money and dinner or a little gift to yourself every now and again, you are suddenly going to have to live on that money. And if you have been giving away your services in the past, it's very hard to go to somebody and say, look, I'm without work so now I have to charge bigger money. That does not work well. That does not work at all, in fact.

What you have done basically is cut yourself off at the knees. I'll give you a little wonderful example of this of a student I had one time who was doing posters for auto shows where people would show custom cars and what have you. And apparently, in front of their cars, they would have a show card that said something about them and their car. And he was doing these show cards in his spare time when he wasn't going to school or bartending.

I said, well, that's nice. You get a little something to do. Where'd you find out about that? Well, he was involved in this and he said, normally, they charge about \$500 for one of these posters. I said, oh, that's nice. And he said, but I do them for \$300. And I said, why would you do them for \$300? And he said, well, I want to get them and mine are better than the other ones. And I said, well, then you have just ruined the market.

And he couldn't understand what I was telling him so I sat down and said, people are willing and expect to pay \$500 for these and you didn't come in saying you were just starting and say because I'm just starting I could do them for that or I could do them better or I could do them for even \$50 less. I said, you have given them a \$200 break, which means that you have in effect brought the value of that thing down if what you say is true and you do them better than the other people. I said, see what you've done? You've killed yourself here.

If you're doing freelance outside of your regular job and you do something like that, if you charge \$500 for a \$1000 project, you are in effect making yourself worth a lot less. People do this all the time. This is so stupid. You're better off not doing the job than to do it for half of what it's worth. You are not doing any good for yourself, you're not doing any good for the profession, it'll come back to haunt you the day you lose your gig. In essence, you're just ruining things for yourself and for everybody else.

So if you're going to come and swim in the pool, don't do something bad in the pool and then get out. That's not nice. This graphic arts pool, they don't close it while the pool gets cleaned out. It just keeps rolling. So you can see the damage that a bunch of people who have gigs, as it were, doing freelance for cheap, you can see what it does to the market. It drives it down. This is not a good idea.

If you are going to freelance and you have to rely on this, you have to be very businesslike about this. You have to set up systems. You have to set up a billing system. You have to set up a way of keeping track of everything you've done. You have to be able to sell yourself. You have to be able to be the one that is

responsible for the job. If nobody else is in your particular studio, you are it. If something is wrong, it falls on your shoulders. You can't blame it on your boss, you can't blame it on the guy down the hall, you can't blame it on the guy sitting next to you. You're the one.

Which means that if you're taking responsibility for what you do, total responsibility, then one of the systems you ought to set up is you ought to set up a sign-off system so as phases go along in the job that you're doing, you get the client to sign off on it that it's OK at this point, that they have checked it for spelling errors, that they have checked it for what other information may possibly be incorrect or missing or what have you. You have to be able to cover yourself and you have to have checks on what you do as you go along.

The least you can do is look at the pricing and ethical guidelines book that the Guild puts out with the sample contracts, or you have to be able to at least, if nobody is going to give you a contract, you could at least send a letter to them stating how you understand the job will proceed, a letter that says, we had a meeting, that recaps the meeting, that explains what you feel your job is and what the amount that you have agreed upon is, and how many layouts you're going to do if you're going to do layouts, and how many corrections you're going to do. Just send a letter stating it if you don't get a contract from whoever you're working with, even if you've asked for a contract and you don't get one.

It's very difficult when you are running the entire show to keep all the balls in the air. Once again, it's the balls in the air. You just don't have various projects. You also have the paperwork and the clerical work that goes along with each project.

This is difficult. It's especially difficult if you don't know what you're doing. If you sign a contract without reading it or if you sign a contract without understanding it, you may be indemnifying your client. You may be saying that the job that I was given by them, I warrant it to be not copying somebody else's work or infringing on somebody else's work.

I don't think you're in a position to warrant that, especially if somebody is doing some heavy art direction on a job. If you are acting as primarily a rift for them, if you're somebody who's taking an idea and making it look nice rather than starting from the very beginning and kind of formulating it, you can't indemnify them against themselves. How do you know they didn't go and copy this from somewhere?

I've had examples of this myself where I've done jobs for people. I've gone through a book later on and here is the idea that the art director swiped from somebody else, and you do it honestly. You've never seen what they've taken it from. It's hard to figure out and it's hard to keep track of everything. If you aren't in charge, do not indemnify anybody.

Your job is to merely do the job. Contracts are made to have things x-ed out on them. A contract is an agreement between two people. It's not an agreement that one person makes that the other person signs. It is a back-and-forth situation. If the contract is too odious, don't sign it and don't do the job. It's very simple.

If there is no contract, also remember that you're not free and clear. That's why your letter of intent should be – or they should send a letter of intent or you should send a letter to them saying what you understand the job to be. Otherwise, who knows, who knows.

When you're freelancing, you have so many things to keep track of. You have to promote yourself. You always have to remember that the job you're doing for somebody is something that is going to help sell the next job.

Unfortunately, people that hire you to do things look at your samples, which is a good thing. But a lot of times, you end up cloning your previous jobs, and you're not necessarily copying them, but somebody will see something that you did and that'll turn on a light in their head because they need something done. It could be repositioned.

I know that when I started out, I did a poster that there's a whole bunch of stuff going on on it. I did it over two or three times for different people. I did a very similar thing for Pabst Beer. I did a very similar thing for PaperMate pen. It was basically taking that particular thing and redoing it over and over. It gets tiresome after a while, but you can also make money doing it. You're cloning your own work so you're not really copying somebody else's stuff, but it gets boring after a while.

Have a number of samples in your bag so that you don't keep doing the same job over and over.

Once again, freelancing is an alternative. It's not the first choice until you have put some time in, until you understand what is expected of you. It's premature to go out and freelance directly out of school. It's just a bad mistake. You won't last if you do it, or if you do last, you'll make so many mistakes you'll wish you hadn't lasted.

So be careful. Be wild, but for God's sake, be careful. Be wild on somebody else's time. Let them pay for the wildness. Let them fire you. It's easier to bounce back from that than it is to go out and freelance and do something wild and stupid, because chances are, you'll be out of business if you do that.

I can't stress enough to stay away from freelancing straight out of the box. And I can't stress enough that if you do have a job, if you're doing some freelance on the side, charge the best money you can. And if the best money you can charge is still not enough, then don't do it. Don't do it. It'll come back to bite you, guaranteed.

Are there any questions at this point? Oh, I hear music. What is that?

SUSAN: I had a question.

SCHMELZER: Sure.

SUSAN: I was thinking about in terms of like your first job. In my first job, I had a really tough art director, and I still carry some of that criticism around with me while I'm working. And the same thing can hold true in terms of when you're freelancing in terms of what you charge, that both things – it takes a lot of confidence to persist in this business. It's something that I admire about you and I've noticed about you is that you have a lot of resource there, and I wondered if you could talk about staying confident when you're starting out.

SCHMELZER: Staying confident. I actually think it's easier to be confident when you're young because for some reason, you have a – you do a job and you go, OK. I've got this one done, but boy, I'm going to be doing this for a long, long time. And I think when you're looking at the rest of your life to make sure that you get it right, I think you have enough confidence so that if somebody rains on your parade, you can just say, oh, God. And you could take that as a learning experience and go on.

I know it's hard to deal with people that are totally abusive. I know when I first started in the business, there was a lot of drinking going on and there was a lot of altered perception going on in those people that bought art, and there were people that you actually had to reach before 11:00 or you were going to get some crazy stuff after 2:00.

So I think real, genuine criticism is a good thing and it makes you into a better person. I think insane criticism is something that we all have to deal with, and the best thing to do with insane criticism is to get away from it.

I recall when I was starting out, I had an art director at one of the big agencies that was very anal about every job I did, and I would do layout after layout after layout for this person and I would start the jobs. I used to have this drawer and my wife called it the Drawer of Floating Heads, because I was so convinced that I had to get this exactly right that I would start doing a drawing, and normally it would start with the head and I would get to a certain point and go, no, I can't fix it, so I'd throw it away and start again.

After a while, I finally learned that this guy could not be pleased. So I made sure that I did as little as possible for him and I tried to make as few choices for him as I possibly could.

A lot of when you're selling yourself out there, if you give them a choice of two things or one thing, it's better than giving them a choice of three things, because with a choice of one, it's yes or no. With a choice of two, it's either/or. With a choice of three, now you've opened Pandora's box.

So if you're selling to somebody like that or you're doing something for somebody like that, the best thing to do is to limit their choices, and then if that doesn't work with them, then let them beat up somebody else. Go and find somebody else to work with. Not everybody is like that.

This person that I'm talking about eventually got some junior art directors to work for him, and I worked for one and it was worse than working for him directly because this junior art director was full of doubts. Then he got another one, and I remember the guy calling me up one time and he said, we just have a couple of changes on this job. It's not many. It's minor.

And I went down to pick up the job and it was delivered on a flap and it had a slip sheet over the art, and it was just when Post-it notes were real popular, and there were 17 Post-it notes on that flap. I thought, well, thank God they didn't have a lot of changes. There's only 17 here. It's very easy to deal with.

But there are people like that, and you just have to avoid them. And like I said, the only way to work with somebody like that is to either overpower them or to limit their choices to a degree that they know that beating on you is not going to get them any more. I don't know what else to say about people like that.

Does that clear up that question, or does it make it worse?

SUSAN: Yes, John, that was very helpful.

SCHMELZER: Oh, it made it worse, huh?

SUSAN: And those were great anecdotes, so thank you.

SCHMELZER: Oh, you're welcome.

OPERATOR: Do you have any other questions, Susan?

SCHMELZER: Anything else, Susan? Are you taping now?

OPERATOR: John, before we get to (inaudible), I'm going to ask some questions from Wanda, who was not able to make this call but who wrote in with questions.

SCHMELZER: OK. Why don't you do that?

OPERATOR: Wanda says that she has a new website to do over the summer, and what is the best way to lay it out?

SCHMELZER: Oh. The best way to lay out a website, to my way of thinking – and I don't have the best website on earth, but it does have the pictures on it. I think a website, the best thing you can shoot for is simplicity and the fact that the thing works.

So I would make a website simple. I would make three or four buttons, show a portfolio, show some small pictures, some thumbnails of what you can click on. The most important thing, to my way of thinking, is a website that works well and pops the pictures up quickly.

If you're going to design a website, I don't think anybody wants to see anything moving. I don't think they want to hear funny music. They just want to look at what you can do. So keep it simple. It's the KISS thing, Keep It Simple Stupid. You just really got to make these things work properly, even for the worst computer. So don't load them up with a bunch of bells and whistles.

A website is primarily a catalogue, and you know when you get a catalogue, you know which ones appeal to you and you know which ones don't. So I think you have to make sure that the website looks nice but is simple as possible. Show as much as you can. Don't overpower them with a bunch of fancy stuff. Just get right to the point. This is what I do, this is the areas I work in, this is my contact information.

I don't know what else you should do beyond that. I think that's the thing you really want to do and then try to get some good position so your website will pop up for people.

OPERATOR: OK. Second question. A printer-designer told her that she needs a self-mailer and that she should send it to all the printers in her area. Is that the only kind of company she should market to?

SCHMELZER: Oh, no. I think you should market to anybody who you think could use you. If you put up a website, I definitely think you should market your website. You should always have a leave-behind piece.

If you're going to do a mailing, there are a variety of lists that you can buy. If you're primarily doing print, I think you should be talking to book publishers, magazines, printers, anybody who does print. Like I said, there are a lot of companies that you would never think of when you're looking for a job that you might sell to. There are so many companies you can work with directly now.

I wouldn't limit to just printers. Printers these days – from what I know of the printing business – and I've dealt with the printing business for a long time. The

printing business has changed radically since I started. So much of it has gone overseas. So much of it has gone from direct to print.

Most printers don't have the luxury of generating graphic material any more. I think they're so busy just printing what they get that I don't think that's a good place to put all your eggs. I think I would go to other places to find business. That might be an afterthought, but I certainly don't think that that would be the best place to go look for stuff to do.

They may have a referral that they would refer companies to, but chances are when it comes to them generating things, I don't think they're the ones that generate anymore in the way they used to. So I think I would look into some of the lists that you can buy or –

OPERATOR: Well, that ties right into the third question, which is, how can I go about getting business contacts outside of Michigan, and the fourth one, which is similar. Are there certain database websites that I can I should be listed on to broaden my client base?

SCHMELZER: Oh, most definitely. It's the Wild West out there when it comes to promoting yourself. There are various websites and ones I probably don't know, and there are a lot of lists. There's – what is it? ADBASE that we deal with, and there's the Bikini Lists that come to me. I think that one's out of Britain, isn't it?

There are a lot of different ones. A resource like the Graphic Artists Guild or some of the other arts and design organizations are a place to start looking for those. I'm sure if you just did a Google search, you'd probably find some places that might be interested in trying your work.

The world's wide open on this one. I wish I was a better expert on this, but I don't think I am. I think the more people you ask about this in the business, what do they rely on and organizations like the Guild and like the AIGA and like some of the other arts organizations, I think they're going to give you more information that I can on this particular one.

But you need to do direct mail. You need to make sure that your site shows up in search engines and what have you. It's the Wild West, like I said.

OPERATOR: OK. Next question. I have heard everyone has a specialty, but at the moment, I haven't figured out mine. Is that a good thing or bad? Do I need to have a specialty?

SCHMELZER: That's a good thing in a way, but I have seen people who have books that are so all over the board, they actually scare people, because the art director doesn't know what he's going to get from you.

I think in a way, you have to limit what you can do because I'll tell you, if you look like you can do everything, you will be called to ape somebody else's work. You will be called as second or third choice on a job because you can do a fake so-and-so, where you can do a fake so-and-so. While we can't get the real thing, we'll get this person that can mojo it up.

I don't think that's what you want to do, but there are people that make a living doing that.

If you have a real voice, I think you can kind of hone in to two or three ways of expressing yourself and if you really can't make a decision, then either put together a couple of different books and present yourself differently to different clients, or spend some time and really figure out what is the way you should go. There's always one way that's going to serve you better than two or three, I would think.

But if you have too many, like I say, you're going to be called to do fake work. You're going to be the second and third choice. I don't think you want to do that, but it's up to you.

OPERATOR: OK. Last question. Since new media is the thing, where and how do I get more information and experience using the software, i.e., become stronger in the medium? I know Flash and Dreamweaver, but what else do I have to do?

SCHMELZER: Oh, brother. This is tough. Being in the business since all art directing was done on stone tablets, I'm real bad on this one.

Even when people are working with the new media and working with a lot of the stuff online and stuff on the computer, there's still a need for designing that stuff. A lot of the people that make it work on a computer aren't necessarily designing it. So I think in that respect, you have to figure out what you're happy doing. Are you happy being the one that takes somebody's design and puts it to use, or do you think you can actually design it and make it work?

I don't think there's that many people that can do that. I think there's creators that design what is going to be done. Even with Pixar and DreamWorks and whatever else, they still hire a lot of illustrators to conceptualize what they're going to move, and there's a clear delineation in a lot of those places between the illustrators and the people that make this stuff work on the computer. I'm sure in smaller shops where they're doing commercials for TV and people do a little bit of both, I think that kind of works.

But if there's something you really need to learn, then you've got to find somebody who can teach it to you, I guess. I don't know if courses are as good at teaching you.

When I needed to learn about a computer, I went and found somebody who is young to teach me how to do it, because that's the way I could learn it. Now, everybody has a different way of learning, and if you can learn in a class fine, or if you can learn from a book. I can't. I took the Photoshop book and the InDesign book and the Quark book and looked at them and threw them away because I just couldn't get it from there. I could learn it from somebody else and I got proficient enough so that I can carry myself, but in terms of going out and learning each and every new media, by the time you learn one, you're passé because there's something new.

So I think you kind of have to zero in on one area and keep up to date in that area. I don't think you can totally flip-flop from one to another because I don't think there's any way to possibly keep up on everything.

Does that answer that?

OPERATOR: Yeah, I think so, and that's all the questions that Wanda has. Susan, do you have any additional questions?

SUSAN: I have one more question, which I'm not sure. Feel free to say it doesn't belong in this discussion. I was wondering, John, if you thought that if digital media has changed the situation with deadlines, that we're under tighter deadlines than we used to be. Do you think so?

SCHMELZER: Oh, I know so. I know. This is a bad situation. I think the deadlines have gotten tighter and tighter and tighter and tighter. I always would tell people anything worth doing can be done in three days, because that seemed to be what the deadline was. When it shook all out, you had about three days to just burn like an idiot and get it done.

There are certain areas where people make allowances for illustrators that have more time-intensive painting and what have you that they do, but even a lot of the painters these days have learned to do a lot of what they did in the traditional manner previously, they've learned to do it on the computer.

I don't think it makes things better. I think it probably makes things worse. I think it probably leaves the door open for a lot of people to use stock because they don't feel that they can get something done in the time allotted, which is too bad. I think a stock answer for some things is OK if your budget is minimal and you are working in a very small area or what have you. But if you're out dealing with the general public –

And I know the worst example of this is to go to the Yellow Pages and you see a stock illustration that is used for psychologists and lawyers and what have you. I've seen the same family used and it'll be within 20 pages of another one. It's not ideal by any stretch of the imagination.

I realize that a lot of people that work for companies in the graphics business, in the advertising business, are just running like they have no time because they don't have any time, and it looks so easy to do things and redo and all the things we used to charge for and spend a lot of time fixing and a lot of time proofreading. All this stuff has gone out the window.

I know at some publishers, they've gotten rid of the proofreader because they've decided that they have to cut corners. And this has changed things a lot. I think there are those odd situations where you do get time, but like I say, they're odd and they're not the rule anymore.

I think that the reliance on computer art has kind of run its course because I think everybody saw that the same bells and whistles can be used and it doesn't look any different. I think that kind of went with the dot coms and a lot of that stuff has passed and I think we're going back to looking for individual kind of artists and individual styles again, and I think that's a good sign.

I don't think the field is ever the same. I think it continually changes. It continually flip-flops. If I quit every time they said illustration was dead in the last 30-some years, Christ, I would have quit about 10 times.

It always changes. You can change what you do a little bit and hopefully that'll get some renewed interest in what you do. I don't think you totally give up, but this reliance on being able to do everything at a moment's notice has got to stop at some point. I know when I read the newspaper or even a book or some advertising piece, I find the misspellings and the miswording and the mistakes to be abhorrent.

I remember days when they would throw away millions of copies of things because there was a mistake, and that doesn't happen anymore, and it's a sad state of affairs. I don't know what the answer to that is at this point.

Is that an answer?

SUSAN: Yes, that was a great answer, John. That was great. Thank you.

OPERATOR: Do you have any other questions, Susan?

SUSAN: No. That's it.

OPERATOR: OK. Then I'm going to say thank you very much, and I'm going to jump off to stop the recording and you two can feel free to stay on and chat, but for everyone who was attending and who will be downloading this, thanks and we thank John very much for his time.

SCHMELZER: Can I say thank you one more time?

OPERATOR: Yes, go right ahead.

SCHMELZER: OK. Thank you for coming and listening to me. Don't believe everything you hear from anyone, and don't believe everything you see because you know how Photoshop works these days. If you're an artist or you're a designer, for God's sake, don't just listen to one person. Be a little creative in who you go and find your information from. I certainly am not the last word and neither is anybody else. Listen to everybody and make your own decision. Don't be a follower. Be a leader, OK?

Is that all right for a little ending statement there?

OPERATOR: That's great. Thanks a lot, John.

SCHMELZER: OK. Thank you.

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