

Harness Your Inner Artist

Make the power of the art world work for YOU!

"Art is a noble mission. Those who have been chosen by destiny to reveal the soul of a people, to let it speak in stone or ring in sounds, live under a powerful, almighty, and all-pervading force. They will speak a language, regardless of whether others understand them. They will suffer hardship rather than become unfaithful to the star which guides them from within."

These words were written in 1935, but they can still inspire *you*, today. How can art help me achieve my goals, you might ask? Well, just as we can learn from the example of the tomato seed or the mollusk, so we can learn from the art world. Artists are often goal orientated, driven to succeed, and innovators in their field: we can learn a thing or two from them about stickability and future thinking.

Still need some convincing? Take the example of pointillism, the movement of art where pictures are created from tiny dots of primary color, which blend together in the eye of the viewer to create the full spectrum of colors. Sounds crazy? Georges-Pierre Seurat didn't think so. In the 1880s, he decided to harness some future thinking. Inspired by the work of contemporary scientists, he developed his technique, putting in hour after lonely hour. He took plenty of negatives, including the rejection of his work by the Paris Salon. Imagine pitching a great new product idea to customer after customer, but never getting to close the deal: that's how Seurat felt. Perhaps his idea of painting with dots was just ahead of its time. You've heard that excuse before, haven't you? *It's a great idea, but it's just ahead of its time.* It's often the excuse that a guy uses right before he gives up. Luckily for us, Seurat kept on going, riding roughshod over the negatives. His greatest achievement, 'Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grand Jatte', took him two years to complete, and sixty attempts to get right. Finally, the power of his dots was revealed to the world. Dot people, dot dogs and dot sailing boats: all rendered in perfect detail. You might not go a bundle on it personally, but you sure have to respect the time and effort that went into it. Today, that painting hangs on the wall of the Art Institute of Chicago, and Seurat's paintings change hands for millions of dollars. How's that for a last laugh? Next time you're redesigning that new product, or overhauling your sales inventory process, remember Seurat: he had the vision to see things differently, but then the stickability to see them through. The big picture *and* the detail.

Speaking of the big picture, nothing gets close to Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel in the Vatican, covering twelve thousand feet of ceiling. You might already know that it took him four years, from 1508 to 1512. Although he was commissioned by the Pope, Michelangelo was in fact reluctant at first; he considered himself to be

more of a sculptor than a painter, and was initially paralyzed by the fear of public and high profile failure. Michelangelo was not the first painter to be let loose in the Sistine Chapel – many of the greatest artists of the age, including Raphael and Botticelli had already left their mark. Imagine stepping up to the plate with *those* guys pitching at you. There were also the numerous technical issues to be overcome; the last guy the Pope commissioned failed even to reach the ceiling. Michelangelo's doubts didn't last long though, before the power of positive thinking kicked in. With the invention of some innovative scaffolding, Michelangelo was away, and the rest, of course, is history. The technicolor result is one of Michelangelo's crowning achievements, and still draws huge crowds of paying customers today. All very well, you might say. *That's in the past, and doesn't mean anything to me now.* But hang on a moment: doesn't this have a parallel with the lives of many of us today? Allow me to explain - let me tell you the story of Warren, a talented young advertising executive who I ran across a few years back. He had bucked the trend of falling sales at his company, persuading some major clients to increase their advertising spend. Within a further year, he had led three major print and TV campaigns, which saw his clients' sales leap, in some cases by over one hundred per cent. If Michelangelo considered himself to be mainly a sculptor, then Warren considered himself to be an account manager extraordinaire; his work on the Oaty Man campaign was his David. Of course, this success caught the eyes of his superiors, who granted him a handsome promotion. But not the promotion he wanted: instead of being made Chief Account Manager, he was put in charge of the creative team.

It was around this time that I first met this young man, at a motivational seminar that I was delivering in Chicago. "Dr Elastine," began Warren, "your session has really fired me up, but I worry that when I get back to my office, I'll lose that confidence again." Just like Michelangelo, Warren was worried about the demands of a challenge that was outside of his comfort zone. His two immediate predecessors in the role had been a huge success, and had both been promoted on to Vice President roles. Warren was following a track record of industry award winning campaigns, and expectations were high. Again, like Michelangelo, Warren even considered that he had been handed a poisoned chalice, that there were those in his company who would enjoy seeing him brought down a peg or two. "Why don't you give me a few of your ideas for running the team?" I suggested. Well, with that simple question, I had opened the floodgates. For the next half hour, Warren enthused about the quality of his team, and his ideas for improving their productivity. He planned to cut red tape, free his guys up to spend more time on their core job, introduce a bonus system, give out awards for his top performing employees. At the end of that half hour, Warren's eyes were shining, and his voice trembling with excitement. "Warren," I said, "it sure sounds like you're going to shake things up. Do you still think you can't follow in the other guys' footsteps? Your story reminds me of that of Michelangelo." I elaborated, and in a moment of revelation, Warren realized that he had just discovered his own scaffolding. In what he had previously taken to be a finished work, Warren had uncovered twelve thousand feet of virgin ceiling, just crying out to be decorated. Happily, that was only the beginning of Warren's personal success story. You remember the Vegelite

family TV adverts? Mrs Vegelite bakes shortcake for Marcy Vegelite's beau, which is mightily appreciated. In later episodes, Marcy gets engaged, then married. In the final run of adverts, Marcy is given the secret cake recipe by her mother, and produces the Vegelite cake with a flourish to an admiring husband. That campaign put Vegelite into the refrigerators of eighty million Americans, and Warren into his very own Vice Presidential office. So when the Pope asks you to run the Sales and Marketing department, are you going to play safe and refuse? Or are you going to work out how to build some taller scaffolding, and get to work?

So we can learn a lot from the art world about future thinking, and in the process scotch a few myths about the so-called bohemian life of the artist. Perhaps you think the world of art is soft? That artists live with their heads in the clouds, sheltered from the real world of inventory, margins and targets? Many artists are more extreme than the majority of us office workers. When was the last time you saw a marketing manager cut off his ear, while desperately working day and night to create the perfect sales promotion? When did your business manager work such long hours in front of a screen that he made himself blind? Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec overcame congenital dwarfism - his parents were first cousins - alcoholism and syphilis: a knockout combination that would have floored lesser men. Though he died young, he threw himself into his art, producing over seven hundred canvases, nearly three hundred watercolors, hundreds of prints and posters, and over five thousand drawings. Have you ever heard a salesman make the excuse that he didn't make his target that month because he was laid low with a sneeze or snuffle? Ninety-nine out of a hundred syphilitic, alcoholic dwarves would use their physical ailments as an excuse to post inferior sales figures. Wouldn't you, like Toulouse-Lautrec, prefer to be in the one in a hundred minority, able to rise above the most extreme adversity? A lot of artists are true tough nuts - *they will suffer hardship rather than become unfaithful to the star which guides them from within*. We could all use a little of that.

All of which leads me back to those words which start and end this chapter. The artist has a destiny which drives him like a force. He doesn't wait to be told what to do: he takes the initiative. The artist has a vision, cutting beyond the narrow thinking of those around him: he speaks a language, regardless of whether others understand him. The artist, or business visionary, is often the voice in the wilderness - but like all visionaries, when the rest of the world catches up, he's ready to cash in. Great artists, like great leaders and managers, have stickability - they will suffer those hardships. But which artist or philosopher could have delivered these words? James Montgomery Flagg? President Hoover? Edward Hopper? In fact, they were spoken by none other than Adolf Hitler, at a keynote speech in Nuremberg. Shocked? Maybe so, but if Hitler, of all people, could see the value and inspiration of art, then surely you can too? It certainly goes to show that inspiration can be found in the most unexpected of places. Perhaps also, if Hitler's words can allow you to unlock the motivational power of the world of art, then some small good might yet come out of those dark days of the Third Reich.