



Transcript *for* Episode 32

SUCCESS IS COMPLICATED

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The word “success” is a minefield. We readily throw it around without defining what it means for us.

I am guilty of the same.

My business is Art Biz SUCCESS.

My signature program for helping artists build their businesses is the Art Career SUCCESS System.

But what does Success mean to you and to me?

You are listening to the Art Biz Podcast, where I usually talk with committed artists who have a studio practice and a business lesson to share. I’m your host, Alyson Stanfield.

In this bonus episode, I want to explore the word Success.

I’ve been thinking about this on my own for a few months now and, confession--or perhaps it’s a warning—I can go a million different directions on this topic. I’m not going to give you a nice package so that, by the end of the episode, you’ll know exactly what success means to you.

I ask you to go on a messy journey with me. One that takes twists and turns and definitely doesn’t end where it begins.

And, I’ll ask you to contribute your voice to the conversation.

Maybe ... just maybe ... hopefully ... it will serve you.

First, full disclosure.

I haven't been feeling successful lately (which is probably a big reason I wanted to explore this topic). In the last year, we upended the way we worked with artists for more than a decade. I looked at the coaching model that was taught to me by my coaches and decided it no longer served me because it didn't believe it was serving my clients.

So I'm still grappling with this success thing.

WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE TO ME

Here's what I know. I know that *my* success is tied to *your* success. I feel successful when I inspire, encourage, or motivate you to:

- Take action on something that's important to you.
- Breathe a sigh of relief because you know what your exact next steps are.
- Have an aha moment about the big picture of your art career or business.
- Conquer a challenge that has been keeping you stuck and unhappy.

I've been helping artists build their businesses since 2002.

All of my work with artists centers around 3 values: commitment, community, and clarity. Commitment (to yourself and to your business - and my commitment to you), community (because we all need one another ... no single person can provide all of the answers), and clarity (because you won't be successful until you know what you're looking for).

The result of integrating these three things is, my clients tell me, a massive increase of confidence.

Confidence and commitment. That sounds like success to me!

My success is evident every time I:

- See a social media post that recommends [my book](#) or the [Art Career Success System](#).
- Receive an email or card that expresses gratitude for transformation.
- Hear a celebration from a member of our private community.
- Read about a student's or client's progress on a blog comment.

These moments, happily, occur frequently throughout each day. And, yet, I don't pause to practice gratitude. These sweet seconds of success are not savored but, instead, overshadowed by technology problems or other bumps in the road.

At one point, one of my coaches suggested that I remind myself, visually, of my success by posting client stories of transformation on my wall. Little did she know that I had been keeping a file of love letters from clients for years.

Finally, earlier this year, I made what I call my Wall of Love. It's a display of cards, mostly handmade and often handpainted or stitched, from students and clients. I look at it every single day and I'm grateful for each relationship.

I've included a photo of it along with this podcast post on [ArtBizSuccess.com](https://www.artbizsuccess.com).

That's my story of what makes me feel successful. And how I know that I'm already successful—because of the stories you share with me.

Now what about you? What does success look like to you?

HOW ARTISTS DEFINE SUCCESS

I've always been tuned into the fact that each one of my clients has a different definition of the word SUCCESS as it applies to his or her art career.

I'm also keenly aware that many artists who start working with me don't have a clear idea of what success means to them. That's okay! Because I insist on helping them figure it out before moving forward.

During this process of unpacking what success looks like for clients, I've discovered that artists do a lot of should-ing on themselves. They adopt a definition of success that they think they should have.

It's based on someone else they read about in a magazine. Or whose Instagram feed they envy. Or who they heard speak on this very podcast.

In other words, it's based on comparisons to other artists. I can't fault you for this because I find myself doing it frequently in this age of social media "stars" who seem to rise from the ethers.

But what I will encourage you to do is to watch the shoulds.

Don't assume that you should be following a path only because you saw it work for another artist. You're more creative than that.

You must forge and follow your own path, which requires a huge level of commitment and courage to stay on the journey that is intended for you and nobody else.

We relate the word success to big words such as triumph, accomplishment, victory, results, prosperity, and affluence.

Most artists who take the time to figure it out define success in 1 of 3 ways.

1. Sales - The income you make from the sale of your art, teaching, or products.
2. Shows - Finally getting into that top-tier show that's been a dream for years.
3. Collections - Having your work acquired by a museum or other public collection.

There's nothing wrong with having these goals. All of these are fine, but they ignore the importance of the journey. It's critical you enjoy the journey, as it's what must add joy to your everyday life. As Mary Oliver reminded us, we have but "one wild and precious life."

The journey is a trip you have to live with for years and decades. The goal—when it is achieved—is triumphant, but, still, it's a blip on the radar of your life. You need to find a way to feel the joy of success every day.

You might not have that gallery representation, posh museum show, or flush hedge-fund collector, but, dammit!, you made progress TODAY.

Sure that posh museum show would make you *more* successful, but so would finishing that one commission or sending that single email that you've been procrastinating. In fact, **you won't get the posh museum show until you follow through with the small tasks.**

Until you prove your commitment.

We forget that it doesn't happen all at once. Success in any effort is the result of hundreds of micro-steps.

It's imperative that you acknowledge these stepping stones. That you (and I'm talking to myself here as well), relish your accomplishments on an hourly and daily basis.

Write them in a journal. Post them to social media. Shout them from the rooftops. Whisper them into a pillow. Or just call your bestie to share the good news.

This recognition will give you the motivation to continue.

CHECK IN WITH YOUR HAPPINESS

[Jeff Haden](#), who writes for *Inc.* magazine and is the author of *The Motivation Myth*, says the only definition of success that matters lies in the answer to this question: How happy are you? He writes, "The happier you are, the more successful you are."

Not, "The more successful you are, the happier you are." But "The happier you are, the more successful you are."

This perspective is in line with what I've often told my artist-clients. That if you enjoy a certain task, you'll be better at it. You'll do it more frequently, with more heart, and you'll get better results. You'll be more successful.

People can tell if you are happy or grumpy. It's pretty easy to discern an email message or blog or social media post written by an artist who loves what they're doing—and who loves sharing it—from an artist who is making a half-hearted effort.

I confess that during this revamp of everything in my business, I've been grumpier than usual. My husband noticed and gave me an attitude check. Walking around (or sitting at the computer) grumbling about broken technology or whatever the vexing problem of the day is doesn't serve me. I'm determined to change.

If it's true that the happier you are, the more successful you are, then it is reasonable to assume that you need to check in with your happiness level from time to time. You can do it for yourself or, as happened to me, wait until someone in your life does it for you. I suggest the former.

Were you happy two hours ago? What were you doing at the time to make you happy or not so happy?

What has become clearer to me recently is that we (all of us) need to define success in much smaller increments than we usually think about it.

Haden writes:

... motivation isn't something you have. Motivation is something you get, from yourself, automatically, from feeling good about achieving small successes.

Success is a process. Success is repeatable and predictable. Success has less to do with hoping and praying and strategizing than with diligently doing (after a little strategizing, sure): doing the right things, the right way, over and over and over.

When I read that, the heavens opened up and I could hear the angels singing, *Hallelujah!*

Let me repeat that last part.

Success is a process. Success is repeatable and predictable. Success has less to do with hoping and praying and strategizing than with diligently doing (after a little strategizing, sure): doing the right things, the right way, over and over and over.

I couldn't have said it better myself. I developed the entire [Art Career Success System](#) based on this very principle. That success is repeatable and predictable.

If you follow the steps consistently and over time—if you follow the system—you will be successful, whatever that looks like for you.

The 4 courses that make up the Art Career Success System include lessons and worksheets that help you do the things you must do repeatedly throughout your career and business. Find new venues for showing and selling your art and for teaching. Write your artist statement for a new body of work and update your bio with recent accomplishments. Create content to enhance your online profile. Nurture relationships to improve your opportunities and express gratitude. And, of course, increase your income to reflect your higher profile.

None of these things is ever complete. They are actions you take again and again throughout your art career--approaching them in fresh ways as you evolve.

When you are committed, you show up every day for your art or business. You give it the time, space, and energy it needs to be birthed or to evolve. You realize that every step is a notch in your belt of success. And missteps are learning opportunities that help you grow and progress along this journey of your one wild and precious life.

Those are my thoughts on success for now. I'm sure they'll evolve. I invite you to add your thoughts by joining in the conversation. Leave a comment along with this post at ArtBizSuccess.com/podcasts (episode 32) or use the hashtag #ArtBizSuccess on Instagram.

If you have enjoyed this or any of our other episodes, it would mean so much to me if you would leave a rating and review on Apple podcasts or wherever you get your podcasts. It really does help!

And please do take a minute to see how the repeatable steps in the Art Career Success System can serve as a strong foundation for your art business. Visit artcareersuccesssystem.com.

Thanks so much for the work you do as an artist that makes the world more beautiful and peaceful. And thanks for being on this journey with me.

ABOUT ALYSON

Alyson B. Stanfield is an artist advocate, workshop leader, art-marketing consultant, and host of the Art Biz Podcast.

Since 2002, she has helped thousands of artists boost their careers through her blog, online classes, publications, membership programs, and live events.

Alyson wrote *I'd Rather Be in the Studio: The Artist's No-Excuse Guide to Self-Promotion* for the many talented artists who remain professionally unfulfilled because their work is not seen and not purchased.

Her mission is to empower artists by teaching them skills that contribute to a rewarding and sustainable art career.

Join Alyson: ArtBizSuccess.com

Connect on Facebook: facebook.com/artbizsuccess

Peek on Instagram: instagram.com/alysonstanfield



Art Biz
Success

Despite being overseas for three months of the year, I had an incredibly successful year. My painting sales increased 125% from the previous year! This was largely due to the skills I acquired in Alyson's Art Biz Inner Circle and the Art Career Success System. —Simonne Roy