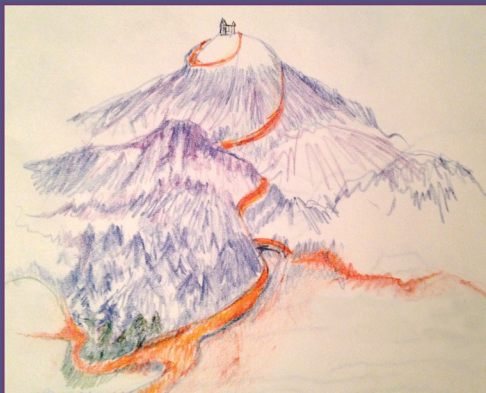


FOREWORD BY MICHAEL A. FRANKLIN



# THE ART OF BUSINESS

A Guide for Creative Arts Therapists  
Starting on a Path to Self-Employment

EMERY HURST MIKEL

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*My adventures in high school began when I was 14 years old. While attending the Madeira School I learned a lot about myself and the world around me, including many lessons, some more concrete than others. There is one piece of advice in particular that I took to heart. Our School motto and our mascot continue to help me through the many challenges that arise in life.*

Emery

*“Festina lente”*—Make haste slowly.



Congratulations!

You have taken the first step towards a fulfilling and flexible way of working. Remember, this can go as quickly or slowly as you wish. Don't be afraid to step back to collect your thoughts now and then, or push forward when you're feeling energized and ready to go. Rely on friends, community, and anyone you go to for support. At any stage in this process, you can email me and ask questions, or if you'd like more hands-on interactions and supervision, we can set something up to get you to where you want to be.

In this section we'll explore how to find jobs and get started. There are several areas we'll go over that are about protecting yourself. Don't let these overwhelm you. The idea is that if you are aware of the possible issues that might arise and can set the appropriate boundaries upfront, there will be less hassle, fewer issues, and guidelines in place for you when something does happen in the future. Enjoy the chapter!

## **Marketing yourself: Part I**

### *Building bridges*

This is a time to build relationships. It's a balance between flexibility and not backing down from the things that are important to you or

your beliefs about the work you are doing. There's no way to know ahead of time what kind of environment you are entering into, and each place will have its own feel, relationships, rules, and internal structure. The people you are in contact with at the facility often just need to feel heard and understood when it comes to their clients and concerns. So aim to be as understanding as possible while still expressing your needs and wants.

Consider the following. Is it all right with you if someone does not want to start for a few months or would like to try a few sessions at a lower price? How can those few months be viewed as an investment for the near future? When compromising, be very clear with what the expectations are.

Example: "For the first three sessions I'll charge the trial rate of [\$] and then for the fourth session [date] I'll begin charging the agreed rate of [\$]."

Try to put these decisions and compromises in writing when possible, so that they are clear and easy to refer to. If you agreed to certain arrangements over the phone or in a conversation, it's smart to follow up with an email to confirm what was discussed. Email is great because you will have a written record of all of the exchanges you have with the facility contact. This will help to address any confusion that may arise in the future. Even better, in the email, is to end the above example with a question: "Does that sound right to you?" This will provoke a response and you will be able to show the other person that response if lines get crossed down the road.

If, for some reason, a working relationship can't be established immediately, is it possible to keep the lines of communication open for future work? Observing that things are hectic or do not seem to be lining up and then saying you will call in a month or two to try again can leave an opening without adding pressure to your schedule. When the start date is postponed, it is helpful to follow up a week or two later with a thank you note for the time they did spend with you and to remind them politely that you look forward to speaking with them again soon.

## *Trust with a backup plan*

It's not necessarily that people want to take advantage of you; it's that we are all human and we make mistakes. The clearer and more upfront without judgment we can be, the fewer the mistakes and miscommunications and the quicker resolutions can happen. We get to know the people we are working with and we expect that they will occasionally double-book us, forget about a session, lose our invoice, or show us any number of unexpected strange behaviors. We will occasionally do this too, so we need to cultivate a relationship of trust and understanding. When a mistake is made, focus on showing compassion and coming up with a mutually beneficial solution. Also read the "What can you do?" advice in the section on termination in Chapter 5.

The backup plan consists of:

- clarity and details around expectations
- writing things down and following up on conversations with an email
- contracts and signed documents
- constant and consistent communication about any changes
- taking responsibility.

*Soon after moving to Long Island, I showed up one day at a Jewish community center I had been working with to find the parking lot only half full and everyone going into the building wearing black or dark colors. I had a feeling something was different about today, so I gathered my supplies and headed in the front door. As I entered, I felt very much out of place and asked if the adult day center was open today. The gentleman greeting people looked surprised and informed me it was a holy day, so nothing would be open until Monday. I thanked him and returned to my car, feeling bad that I had just crashed a holy day. There had been a time or two previously that I was unaware of a day off for religious reasons, but my supervisor, Debbie, had always been great about alerting me before the actual day occurred.*

*I called and left a message for Debbie explaining I hadn't realized there was no program and that I would like to look over the calendar and write down all the upcoming days off to avoid confusion in the future. I also said not to worry; there was no charge as it was my mistake. I*

*put a large part of the blame on myself because of my ignorance of the religious culture within which I was working. I immediately went out and bought a book so I could educate myself on holidays and traditions and gain a general understanding of Judaism. My elementary knowledge of the Jewish faith and culture had been enough for all the groups I had worked with previous to Long Island, but clearly that knowledge was no longer sufficient.*

*The following Monday I received a message from Debbie apologizing for not saying anything before the holiday and offering to pay for the group regardless. She said she had the money in the budget and that she knew I did research for projects around the holidays even though it was a different religion to my own. She reiterated how much she enjoyed the sessions and that she would be happy to discuss any questions I might have about the beliefs of my clients, should any arise.*

*While I still turned down the payment, I began asking more questions and took her up on the offer to help me learn more about my clients.*

## *Persistence*

Persistence is the most important thing, especially with the initial push to find jobs. When sending out a letter or even an email, there is no way to know who receives it, if they forget about it, if it gets lost or sent to the wrong person, or if it ends up in the trash unopened.

Therefore:

- Send repeat letters and call multiple times.
- Keep notes on when you write or call and any new information such as:
  - Names and titles (activity director, life enrichment director, etc.).
  - Are you calling the front desk, direct line, or personal cell?
  - Your impressions based on the people you speak with.
  - Any scheduling possibilities or likely fee ranges.
  - What is your gut reaction to the person you speak with?
  - Were you helped, brushed off, met with confusion, spoken to honestly?



You can learn a lot from the person at the front desk or the assistant who answers the phone. Keep track of your impressions while you continue to try to reach the right person. It's okay to stop if you are turned off by what you are receiving from the other end of the line, or to take breaks and try again later. Use your best judgment and trust your gut reactions!

*About a year after I started building up my business, I received a call from a woman who was very excited about having me come do a free session and start up a program with her residents. After we talked a little, I realized this was one of the sites from my original list of possible jobs. That meant I had sent approximately five letters to the same place. As I was thinking about how amazing it was that my letter had taken five tries to get to the right person, the woman said, "Thank you so much for continuing to send letters when you didn't hear from me. I have been collecting your business cards for months now and have a pile on my desk to remind me to call. Every time I got a letter, I thought, 'Okay I'll do it tomorrow.' I can't wait to finally meet you!" She then asked if I would like some of my business cards back. I told her that if she knew of other people who might benefit from art therapy, she could pass the extra cards along.*

### *Time to make a marketing packet!*

The first impression a person has of you can mean the difference between getting a call or not. It is important to be informative, piquing their curiosity without being overwhelming. The goal at this point is to receive a call from someone interested in more information.

You should include:

- at least a resume (one page maximum) and a cover letter
- a business card, if you have one—something smaller they can hang on to or put on their desk as a reminder to call you.

Other possibilities:

- a flyer or pamphlet with images about what you do
- a sample project outline with images
- one or two articles on art therapy, art with your targeted population, or other related material

- a copy of a presentation outline you have given about the work you do.

The bottom line is include information to intrigue, not overwhelm, your potential employer. Limit yourself to five pages as an absolute maximum, including your resume and cover letter. If *you* are overwhelmed by the amount of information in your packet, so are your prospective employers.

More in-depth tips:

- Resume (see sample in Appendix A):
  - one page maximum
  - clean, not crowded
  - includes an applicable objective
  - includes pertinent information and relevant training.
- Cover letter:
  - upbeat, positive, exciting, informative!

What can you bring to the people you are offering art therapy? What's your approach and why is this what you love to do? Focus on the strengths and positive outcomes. Try to avoid using negative language, even when making a valid point. Look at the examples below and examine how each relays a similar message. The first focuses more on the negative in tone and language, while the second gets the message across in a more positive, upbeat manner.

Example 1: "People suffering from dementia experience loss, confusion, and anxiety. Often they turn inwards as their abilities deteriorate and lack the outlets needed for a better quality of life. Art therapy can help with these negative symptoms and declining quality of life."

Or

Example 2: "For people living with dementia, art therapy can lessen anxiety, give back a sense of control, create feelings of accomplishment, and offer new outlets for expression and communication. For many, symptoms are alleviated and quality of life rises considerably after just one or two sessions."

## THE ART OF BUSINESS

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In the first or second sentence of your cover letter, offer a free session. If you are lucky, the person reading the letter will get through a few sentences before deciding if what you are offering interests them. Even when they have made a decision, they are more likely to just go ahead and call instead of reading the rest of the letter. Offering the free session is risk-free for them and will draw in anyone who is even a little bit interested. There is more on how to prepare for and run the free session in the next chapter!

When you mention money, I suggest you say that you work on a sliding scale, but don't provide actual numbers, especially when first starting out. You never know when someone will offer you more than you expect. Keeping this topic open in your cover letter will offer you more flexibility later on.