5 Qualities
Of a Successful Illustrator

By Thomas James
5 QUALITIES
OF A SUCCESSFUL ILLUSTRATOR

WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED
BY THOMAS JAMES

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Thomas James is an Illustrator, Podcaster, and author of the critically-acclaimed book, ’15 Steps to Freelance Illustration’. Since 2003, he has devoted intense study into the art of Illustration, as well as best practices for running a freelance business. In 2009 he created Escape from Illustration Island, a website, podcast, and art community devoted to sharing resources and inspiration with Illustrators and other creative professionals.

Thomas also serves on the Board of Directors for the ICON Illustration Conference and as an advisor to the Graphic Artist Guild’s New York Illustration Portfolio Show.

In addition, Thomas has written guest posts for Fuel Your Illustration, Design TAXI, and the Creative Freelancer Blog, and has appeared on Illustration podcasts and blogs such as Big Illustration Party Time, Chris Oatley’s Artcast, Art & Story, Zero 2 Illo, Workbook, and Ninja Mountain.

In his spare time, of which there is never enough, Thomas enjoys life with his beautiful wife Melissa and his awe-inspiring twin daughers Emma and Olivia in Portland, Oregon.
5 Qualities of a Successful Illustrator is my answer to every artist who has ever reached out to me and posed some form of the following question:

“How do I become a successful Illustrator?”

First, let me state that it’s virtually impossible to answer this question in a way that is directly applicable to every Illustrator. There are so many factors involved in each artist’s life and career that it is pointless to try and write a how-to book on achieving whatever form of success any one person might desire.

To be sure, there are definitely basic steps that every aspiring Illustrator can take to build a stable foundation for their business and increase their chances of a long and prosperous career. This, in fact, was the basis of my previous book, ’15 Steps to Freelance Illustration’, and if you haven’t read that book or are looking for actionable steps towards starting your business, you would be well served to begin there.

The question I’m referring to above, and that I aspire to answer within these pages, is a slightly more abstract one that suggests a desire to achieve a higher level of success. Many artists are simply not satisfied enough to make an average living creating average art,
but would rather strive for a career with things like greater control, more artistic freedom, more inspiring projects, and many other aspects that seem to be enjoyed by the top tier of Illustrators in our industry.

As I have pondered an accurate response to this question during the past year and a half, there has always been one common thought that comes to mind, which is that success is more a result of a person’s general approach to their life and their art, rather than any specific series of actions.

At the end of the day, it’s not about what you do, it’s about who you are.

It’s about what qualities you bring to the table, how you face and respond to the challenges and obstacles that present themselves down the roads of life, business, and the creative dream.

So, I’ve written this book for two reasons:

1. To explore the qualities that make the difference between an average Illustrator and a highly successful one.

2. To examine ways that an Illustrator can apply these qualities to their own situations so that they may have a better chance of achieving whatever great success means to them.
To do this, I’ve taken a look at some of the most successful Illustrators, many of whom I’ve had the fortune of meeting and speaking with via the Escape from Illustration Island Podcast, and observed the most common qualities that seem to have enabled them to reach a level of excellence that many Illustrators aspire to.

So, this book is part case-study, part ‘how-to’, part philosophy, part psychology, part inspiration, and part motivational self-help. In these pages, we will examine 5 essential characteristics of a successful Illustrator and explore the reasons that they have such a positive impact on an Illustrator’s career.

This book also aims to help you understand ways that you can cultivate these 5 qualities within yourself in order to reach your creative dreams. As you read this book, certain qualities might stand out to you as things that you may be lacking or things that you feel could be developed even more within yourself. In addition, you may discover that you are further along on your path that you previously thought.

I hope that this book inspires you, motivates you, enlightens you in some way, and helps you to understand what it takes to ‘make it’ as an Illustrator and reach the level of success that you have always dreamed of.

Thomas James
INTRODUCTION

When you look at many of the top artists in the field of Illustration, like Marshall Arisman, Drew Struzan, Anita Kunz, Ralph Steadman, Barron Storey, Murray Tinkelman, and others, you will find 5 key qualities that played a role in propelling them to success and making them household names in the industry. Without some combination of these qualities, chances are they might never have achieved the level of success that they did, might never have created the work that fed their souls, and that so many of their peers admire and look to for inspiration.

These 5 qualities are:

- **Skill**
- **Passion**
- **Originality**
- **Courage**
- **Drive**

Obviously, there are a lot more than 5 attributes that successful Illustrators possess, and it’s essential to have a strong foundation in place and know or learn the basics of running your own freelance business, collaborating with Art Directors, promoting your work, and so on.
However, the 5 qualities that we’ll be discussing in this book are the ones that are absolutely essential in making the ordinary extraordinary and helping you to take your professional artistic career to a higher level.

It’s about more than making a living.

It’s about being the kind of artist that you’ve always wanted to be, ever since you first looked upon an Illustration and declared “That’s what I want to do for a living”.

It’s about having the level of creative freedom that you’ve always wanted to have on the projects that you’ve always dreamed of working on.

In the end, it’s all about who you are. It’s all about doing the work of cultivating 5 essential qualities and making them your own, deciding what they mean to you and how you want to apply them to your own life and your own business.

As we explore the 5 qualities that follow, keep in mind that when all is said and done, it’s all about you.
WHAT IS SUCCESS?

Before we examine the essential qualities that help an artist achieve success, it’s important that we take a step back for a brief moment and establish a common ground on which to talk about the term ‘success’.

Every artist has their own unique concept of this word. Depending on who you are, it can mean anything from making a lot of money, to landing dream projects, to creating with complete artistic freedom, to simply never having to punch a time clock ever again.

For the purposes of this book, success means creating outstanding work that moves you, and establishing yourself as a mainstay in the Illustration industry. It means reaching your full potential and being one of the Illustrators that an Art Director dreams of working with some day.

Whatever your personal definition of the word, achieving success requires forward motion. Lack of success, therefore, means standing still.

This book is about moving forward.
This book is about being bold enough to follow the dreams that seem the most challenging, but that you feel the most passionate about, and realizing that they may be closer than they appear.

If you are reading this book, then chances are you hope to glean what insight you can from the Illustrators who have done the same with their own careers, and with their lives. No matter what your concept of success, the 5 qualities that are outlined in this book are the key traits that can help you to move forward towards your own higher concept of success.

So let’s get started!
THE 5 QUALITIES
“When I was looking at portfolios... maybe 25-30% of them just weren’t very good. The skill wasn’t there but the desire was. Another 25-30% of them were good but they just didn’t have the conceptual chops.”

- Steven Heller
The subject of artistic skill is unavoidable when discussing the qualities that successful Illustrators possess. In this case, skill refers to a professional level of expertise or mastery in the areas of technique, concept, composition, execution, communication, and all other aspects that play a role in quality picture making.

It goes without saying that in order for any type of artist to ‘make it’, they must be great at what they do. No Illustrator will ever be repeatedly hired for a project, featured in an Illustration annual, or acknowledged for their achievements without this quality.

Art Directors, Art Reps, and competition judges spend a great deal of time looking at the portfolios of Illustrators, both good and bad. It’s simply an intrinsic part of their job. Because of this, they see a lot more mediocre work than they do outstanding work, and they can spot lack of skill from a mile away.

In fact, one might argue that they actively seek out signs of amateur work as they browse Illustration portfolios, because it can help them to know when to move on to the next artist, saving
themselves valuable time and energy in the process. Therefore, skill is an essential quality to develop in order to increase your chances of making it past an Art Director’s filter. Without a basic level of competency with your craft, you’ll never be able to keep them around long enough to listen to what you have to say, no matter how meaningfully you say it.

On a more personal level, a lack of skill will restrict your ability to complete one of the most important tasks that an Illustrator faces every day, which is to communicate ideas in a clear and evocative manner.

Great skill is an enabler when it comes to Illustration, in that it allows the artist greater freedom and flexibility with their craft. Any time an artist must solve a problem or communicate an idea, which is pretty much all the time, their ability to do so is directly related to their level of skill. Those who possess a wealth of this quality are more able to see a problem from multiple angles and are more confident in their ability to develop and execute concepts in a meaningful way. Illustrators are hired for their ability to do just that, and those who are more adept will land more projects, make more money, and have more freedom with their careers while those who neglect to develop their skills will find themselves restricted in their artistic freedom, growth, and success.
CULTIVATING SKILL

You have probably seen many Illustrators who seem to have been born with an amazing amount of skill, effortlessly producing masterpieces and winning accolades from their peers since they first put pencil to paper. In this case, skill is normally referred to by a different name: talent. Although some people are turned off by the word talent because it seems to discount the years of work involved in honing a skill, it is undeniable that some people seem more naturally built for certain activities.

When it comes to being an inherently talented artist, some people have it, and some people don’t. This is just one of the many realities of life, which can be both frustrating and inspiring at the same time, and it makes one wonder just how that talented genius got so lucky.

The flipside of this is that even the artistic prodigy tends to have his or her own set of flaws and shortcomings. If you can’t readily tell what they are, it’s only because they’re doing an incredible job of either highlighting their strengths or concealing their weaknesses.

However, with a little investigation it’s easy to see that everyone is naturally good at something. Every person is inherently talented in at least one area, and often several. The key is doing the work of figuring out just what your own natural aptitudes are and
developing them to their maximum potential, while cultivating those areas where you might be deficient.

For those who haven’t been born with a seemingly inherent knack for illustration, there’s no need to be discouraged. In fact, it could even be argued that you might be at an advantage for having to start from scratch, because the journey towards artistic excellence will help you to cultivate many of the other characteristics necessary to building a successful creative business, not to mention personal growth.

Also, it’s important to note that even those who are blessed with inherent talent must work to acquire additional skill in the areas where they fall short. So, whether or not you’re one of the “lucky ones”, part of your job as an illustrator is to refine and build upon your unique set of skills and seek to add others to your arsenal.

No matter what level you have reached with your artistic skill, there will always be more to learn and perfect in the life of an illustrator. Conceptual thinking, storytelling, composition, communication, execution, and all other skills related to illustration are tools that need to be strengthened and refined through constant study and cultivation in order for an artist to continue to grow and improve.
This may be achieved in a number of ways, such as:

- attending or continuing your studies in art school
- self-education through research, practice, and observation
- attending lectures and workshops
- studying the work of your fellow artists
- self-initiating creative projects
- soliciting critiques and feedback on your work
- pushing your art beyond the limits of your comfort zone

Cultivating skill is a life-long journey, and the Illustrator who makes continual artistic growth a priority enjoys the benefits of more inspired work, greater freedom, increased interest from Art Directors, a wider variety of projects and approaches, and the satisfaction that comes with mastering their craft.
"I was hungry, and I kept painting. I was homeless and walked the streets and I still kept painting ‘cause I was passionate about it."

- Drew Struzan
When it comes right down to it, there is no art without passion. Illustrators, painters, sculptors, playwrights, and other creative professionals are fueled to a large degree by the love and enthusiasm that they feel for their art and the creative process in general.

If you’ve ever felt intensely inspired by a new illustration or spent hours working on your latest masterpiece without any knowledge of the passage of time, you’ve experienced first-hand the passion of an artist.

Passion is the source of all your inspiration and the motivation to act upon it.

Passion is the force that gives you your unique voice and makes you want to share it with the world.

Passion is what makes you crazy enough to try and make a living creating art in a world that tends to discourage such things.

A large part of achieving success as a professional illustrator is nurturing, feeding, and listening to your inner passion.
All successful artists are exceedingly passionate about what they do. They feel as though they have no choice other than to pursue their craft, and simply can’t imagine living their life any other way. They declare themselves to be artists because there is something within them that won’t let them deny it. For many, it is often described as an obsession or a compulsion that overpowers them. In a recent conversation with Murray Tinkelman, an Illustrator of over 50 years, he described this concept perfectly:

“There is nothing else in the world I can do but be an artist. It’s either make pictures or die. It’s not only what I do, it’s what I am.”

In addition, the candid and inspiring words of Drew Struzan that opened this chapter further show that when an Illustrator discovers art to be their true calling in life, and when they tap into the passion that comes from this realization, they can sometimes muster an amazing amount of resilience in the face of hunger, homelessness, and many other challenges that would drive the less resilient to a more conventional career.

An Illustrator’s passion is a quality that is not witnessed by the outside world except through the artwork, words, expression, and actions of the artist, because it is the most personal of all qualities, held close to the heart by those who possess it, but when it is revealed it can influence and motivate others to do the same.
CULTIVATING PASSION

Like all of the other essential qualities discussed in this book, passion must not be left to its own devices, lest it lie dormant or fade away beyond recognition. This may result in an uninspired life and a shallow career for most artists. When an Illustrator is deaf to their own passion, they are destined to a life of struggling to please others while never reaching their full potential. They will fail to create new or groundbreaking work, and their voice will likely be nothing more than an imitation of the voices of others. On a personal level, this seems to negate the reasons that most people set out to become artists in the first place, which is to make a living expressing their creative souls.

On the other hand, Illustrators who tap into and pursue the fire of their passion have the potential to achieve great success and happiness because nothing can stand in their way, and because no other person can interpret the world the way that they see it, or create the work that they create. Passion is unique to each individual, and the cultivation of one’s passion is a key ingredient in an artist’s original voice.

A large part of achieving success as a professional Illustrator is nurturing, feeding, and listening to your inner passion, channeling that passion into the images you bring to life, and seeking the work that feeds your soul.
Just like every artist has some form of inherent talent, so too does every artist feel enthusiasm towards at least one thing. Part of your journey as an artist is identifying where your passion lies, where it comes from, what it means to you, and what to do about it. An artist becomes great when they apply their skill to their work in a way that reveals and communicates their spirit to the world. This is a quality that is often difficult to articulate, but is easy to witness when it emerges from an artist’s work.

In addition, all successful artists have a passion for the artistic process itself, feeling compelled to create something of beauty from their experiences, memories, joys, and sorrows. It is often the creative process that is more rewarding to the artist than the ‘finished’ object that results from it. This is why in most cases the euphoria from a completed masterpiece is soon followed by the desire to create something else.

If you are not feeling this sense of joy for your work, it might be time to take a step back and reconsider your approach. Are you working in a certain way only because you think it is marketable, trendy, or popular? If so, you might want to take a cue from some of the top Illustrators in the industry by doing only what inspires you, and setting everything else aside. This singular act can mean summoning a great amount of courage, as we’ll see later in this book, but it can also open up doors that were previously closed to you and allow you to express and develop your truly original voice.
“When everything is said and done, if the pictures you make have no meaning to you, for whatever reason, it would seem to me a kind of hollow career, and certainly a hollow lifetime.”

- Marshall Arisman
Originality is one of the deciding factors that makes the difference between an ‘average’ Illustrator and one who inspires others and makes an impact on the industry with their own unique voice and creative vision.

Illustrators who are original, innovative, and truly creative stand out from the crowd and command attention from Art Directors, Editors, Art Reps, and their fellow artists. They have a greater ability to stay on the radar of those who might hire them, and they have a better chance of being noticed and featured in magazines, annuals, competitions, podcasts, and blogs, which will greatly relieve the burden of their own promotional efforts.

Imagine if you will that all Illustrators start out together in a gloopy gloppy mass that is made up of aspiring, or even veteran artists who would be considered ‘average’ or less so in terms of talent, concept, style, or any number of characteristics. At this stage, most Illustrators generally don’t take chances, don’t push themselves beyond their comfort zones, don’t strive to find their own voice, and therefore don’t stand out, progress or grow as artists.
There comes a point in every Illustrator’s career when they must decide whether to stay within that mass or strike out on their own, break free from the sludge that impedes their forward motion, and search for the more audacious dreams that they envision for themselves. If an artist chooses the path of innovation, they are planting a seed that can be cultivated into a long-lasting culture of originality that can guide them along their own unique path to their version of success.

**CULTIVATING ORIGINALITY**

It takes passion, courage, skill and drive for an Illustrator to express a unique identity with their work.

Choosing originality means developing a distinct style, technique, process, content, voice, and approach. It means not following every other Illustrator’s path, but rather tapping into oneself and having something special to offer to the world.

When artists first experiment with this idea, they often struggle to find what they call ‘their own style’. This can be a dangerous trap, because while this is an important step in any Illustrator’s career, it’s also the kind of thing that can be overanalyzed to the point of becoming counterproductive. Ironically, the act of trying too hard to be original can result in focusing too much on what everyone else
is doing in order to do something different, which means that you are not focusing enough on yourself.

What’s important to remember is that every single person is original and special in their own way, but not every artist realizes the importance of listening to that part of themselves that is unique, having the confidence to allow it to rise to the surface, and developing the skill to communicate it in a meaningful way.

If there is a subject, emotion, or opinion that you feel strongly about or have a deep understanding of, infusing it into your Illustration will have a strong and lasting impact on your work. Whether or not everyone else appreciates it, this is something that is very specific to you. This is an effective method that all the most successful Illustrators have discovered as well.

Influential Illustrator Marshall Arisman spent his first 3 years as a professional artist trying to be anything but original. Instead, he attempted to figure out what Art Directors wanted and tried to please them by molding himself to fit their needs. Before long, he realized that this approach was simply not working. He was barely breaking even and falling short of reaching his true potential. As an experiment he made a list of 4 things that he had a deep knowledge of and decided to focus his energy on creating art based solely on those 4 things. As a result, his work improved in the sense that it channeled and reflected his true self and fueled his artistic spirit. In
addition, Art Directors all of a sudden began to hire him for the type of work that he truly wanted to create, and the beginning of his successful career was born.

When you look at the work of some of the most successful Illustrators, you will see that not everyone can relate to everything that they do. However, they excel at what they do because they have the courage to make it their own, and the people who connect with their work understand and appreciate it on a very deep level.

Chances are, in your early days of dreaming about making a living as an artist, you wanted to be someone who made an impact on the world with your unique voice. You wanted to be an artist with something to say. That is only possible through the confidence to act upon what you know, what you are passionate about, and what inspires you.

As we will see in the following chapter, this is one of the many aspects of your Illustration career that takes a great deal of courage.

Along with courage, this requires a complete mental shift in the way that you approach your work, your portfolio, your brand, your business, and your life. You have to stand up and say “This is what I want to do. This is what I want to be hired for. This is who I am. I’m
going to let go of everything else because I want to do something special that means something to me.”

That is what originality is all about.

It involves discovering something about yourself that only you know, that only you feel, that only you can do or say.

It’s about being you.
“I spent three years trying to please somebody, I couldn’t figure out who they were, and now that I’ve gone back to me, this thing seems to be working. That’s basically the foundation of it all.

- Marshall Arisman
Every aspect and every stage of an illustrator’s career requires some level of courage. This is because there are so many fears that must be faced, and so many private elements of the artist’s soul that must be revealed to the outside world.

Criticism, denial, and rejection are all harsh realities of our business, which is why it takes a constant level of courage and audacity to be putting yourself out there again and again in the face of that. Without courage and resilience your spirit may eventually be damaged.

Without courage, fear has the power to stifle you, paralyze you, and hinder your progression and growth.

Right from the start, it takes courage to declare yourself to be an artist, rather than an ‘aspiring’ one, and decide that you have something unique to offer the world and to try and make a living as a creative professional. Even though being an Illustrator may be something that you’ve always dreamed of doing, it takes an incredible amount of bravery and audacity to act upon those dreams.
In fact, I’ll go even further and say that this first step just might be the most courageous thing you’ll ever do in your career as an artist, because it confronts one of the most powerful fears we face as human beings: the fear of the unknown. When one embarks on this new career there are so many unanswered questions, obstacles, and challenges that keep many people from ever taking this first step at all, most of which are imagined to be much more intimidating than they actually turn out to be.

In addition, it requires an incredible amount of bravery to show your artwork to the world, to place it in front of the public eye where it is vulnerable to potential criticism, interpretation, theft, and even mockery. An Illustrator needs to be confident enough in their work, or at least in themselves, to share their most intimate creations in their portfolios, on the internet, or the walls of coffee shops and galleries.

Contacting Art Directors takes courage, especially when we work in a culture where Illustrators tend to see themselves as inferior to them, rather than as an equal collaborator. It requires confidence in what you do and what you have to offer.

Every time you submit a sketch or a final draft to a client, you are exercising some level of bravery because you exposing your work to the potential of criticism and rejection.
Another big step in your career that takes a great deal of courage is deciding to pursue your own unique creative vision and create the type of work that you feel passionate about, especially in an environment that encourages you to fall in step with the masses to keep potential clients happy. One of the easiest traps to fall into is the temptation to try to please everyone besides yourself, to try and be a jack-of-all-trades, to try and include work in your portfolio that speaks to as many people as possible and increases your chances of winning every type of client. While this may seem like a sound business strategy, it can also be argued that it is a crippling act of fear.

Taking chances with your work means that you won’t be able to appeal to every type of client, every Art Director, every publication, every Design firm, and so on, but you will appeal to those who appreciate what you’re doing, the way you’re doing it, and they’re going to hire you for you.

All successful Illustrators have surpassed these milestones in their own careers, and owe much of this to their ability to muster their courage and keep moving forward towards their passions and dreams.
CULTIVATING COURAGE

Being courageous means deciding to react to a situation by facing it head on and moving forward, rather than succumbing to fear and standing still.

This doesn’t mean that you should never feel fear. In fact, if you are never afraid than it might mean that you aren’t advancing beyond your own boundaries of comfort and contentment. Instead, fear can actually be seen as a natural side effect of real growth and expansion, in the same way that a child feels growing pains as their body develops towards maturity.

As I mentioned earlier, every step in your career as a professional Illustrator will require some amount of bravery, which means that it will be necessary to develop a natural inclination towards courage and cultivate it as an intrinsic part of your life as an artist. This will make every obstacle along the way easier to face and allow to you move and react in a more fluid way to the challenges before you.

Once you’ve declared yourself to be a professional artist and put your work and your reputation out into the world, you’ve planted the first seed of courage. You can take comfort in the knowledge that you have already taken the boldest step of all, and that you have the origins of bravery necessary to face any fear.
Sometimes the act of courage is a result of desperation. This happens when you hit a wall in your career and realize that acting out of fear is no longer working. Desperation won’t necessarily make you courageous, but the realization that fear is leading you nowhere often reminds us that courage is the only way forward.
“Talent is one thing, but the deciding factor is how much determination we have.”

- Leif Peng
When it comes to being a successful Illustrator, or running any type of business where it all comes down to you as the sole proprietor, drive means determination, motivation, resilience, and endurance.

I choose to use the word ‘drive’ because it implies forward motion.

It means advancing through your life and career towards your dreams when other people, things, or obstacles are telling you to stop.

Leif Peng is an experienced Illustrator and educator with a long history of success in the industry. In a recent conversation with Leif, he shared an observation that he has made about the art students he encounters every day. In his experience, there is always a small percentage of aspiring artists who exhibit the drive to explore every avenue that is available to them, to learn every skill, and to pursue every opportunity to develop their future artistic careers. These more determined artists will most likely find a way to ‘make it’ even if they are less skilled than the majority for the time being. In contrast, the larger percentage of artists don’t

The simple truth is that if you don’t continue to move forward, you’ll never get where you’re going.
appreciate the value of determination, and therefore will probably never find success as a professional Illustrator, no matter what level of intrinsic talent they display.

**CULTIVATING DRIVE**

When your parents don’t believe in you, when your friends think your work is terrible, when Art Directors turn you down, when your peers are better than you and are getting the jobs that you want, when you enter Illustration competitions over and over but never make the cut, drive is about continuing to move forward.

It’s about never taking ‘no’ for an answer.

If you look into the past of any successful artist’s career, you will probably find a time when they didn’t have what it took to ‘make it’. What set them apart from their peers is that they kept going. They decided not to understand the meaning of the word ‘no’, or at least decided not to listen.

It comes down to the fact that nobody is going to do it for you. Even when people do believe in you, or do think you’re good at what you do, they still can’t do the work for you. They can’t put in the long hours and sleepless nights. They can’t come up with new ideas and fresh inspiration.
It’s up to you.

No matter what, you’ve got to cultivate the drive and determination to make things happen for yourself. None of the other qualities discussed in this book mean anything without drive, because without it you’ll never get anything done. Ever.

I can tell you from experience that this is easier said than done. You’ll find plenty of reasons every day to not keep going. You’ll find plenty of reasons to stop, do something else, to change course. You’ll be presented with a constant stream of forks in the road where you’ll have to decide whether to move forward, make changes, or go in a completely new direction.

Sometimes drive is simply a matter of stubbornly clinging to the concept of success that you have envisioned for yourself, and realizing that only you have the power to put one foot in front of the other.

The simple truth is that if you don’t continue to move forward, you’ll never get where you’re going.
A CULTURE
OF CULTIVATION

“You learn from your mistakes as much as you do from your successes, and it changes your personality; it makes you tough ‘cause you stand up and you become tenacious and you become powerful because you’re not gonna give up.”

- Drew Struzan
ow that we’ve examined the 5 qualities that are required to take your Illustration career to a higher level of success and reach your full potential, it’s important to consider how you can cultivate them within yourself to the greatest effect.

Everyone possesses each of these qualities to varying degrees. Some artists excel in certain areas, and others are lacking. If you want to elevate your work as an Illustrator and strive for the career of your dreams, it’s necessary to look inward to determine where you stand in each of these categories.

For example, here are some valuable questions that are worth asking yourself:

• What artistic skills can I improve upon to take my work to the next level?
• What uninspiring activities are taking my energy and time away from things that I am more passionate about?
• Am I acting out of courage or out of fear?
• What actions have I been wanting to take but haven’t because they lie outside my comfort zone?
• What small steps can I take to make courage an intrinsic part of my daily life?
• Am I creating work that is unique to me? Am I injecting enough of myself into my work?
• How motivated am I to improve my career? How much time do I spent thinking about and encouraging forward momentum in my business?
• How do I react to negative criticism or rejection?

Asking yourself questions like the ones above on a regular basis can help you to determine which of the 5 qualities you need to improve upon most. Try not to be discouraged by any unfavorable answers to these questions. Rather, try to see them as the first steps toward moving your Illustration career closer to your personal and professional goals. If you do fall short in some of these areas, keep in mind that everyone else, even your favorite Illustrators, are deficient in at least one of these areas from time to time.

What’s important is the idea that if you put effort towards enhancing any of the 5 qualities within yourself, your work will improve, your life will become more rewarding, and your career will progress in a more positive direction.