

five

THINGS I WISH I KNEW

BEFORE I STARTED MY
CREATIVE BUSINESS

"IF YOU CAN'T USE YOUR FEET, USE YOUR HANDS..."

THE BEGINNINGS OF JLB CREATIVE

G'day Patrons!

I have a lengthy post today, so grab yourself a [time appropriate beverage haha] and get settled in.

I'm going to dive into the TOP FIVE things I wish I knew better before I started my business. A lot of what I'm sharing today might help you if you're looking to jump into a multi-faceted online Creative business, but if not, hopefully it provides you with some insight into how this all works BEHIND THE SCENES.

Please Note: I am not a university graduate. I did Business Studies in Year 11, before we even had Instagram! My advice is based on personal experience, trials and tribulations, successes and failures, that I have analyzed and continue to process even now. In all honesty, with the rate of growth in communications and online entrepreneurial opportunities, can anyone truly 'study' business anymore without just being in it?

For anyone unfamiliar with my journey, I was a professional dancer for seven years straight out of high school.

I performed in production shows at Tokyo Disneyland, with Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines and Disney Cruise Line. It was a true blessing and I never took a moment of it for granted. 2 weeks before my Disney Cruise Line contract finished I was in a car accident that ended my dance career as I knew it (crushed foot). I had a good 18 months of physical therapy to get back to dancing (a miracle I am still thankful for), but God had different plans for me.

At an appointment to discuss surgery for my foot, my surgeon said it was going to be a long road to recovery so "if you can't use your feet, use your hands..."

It was poignant, to say the least. That was the birth of jlbCREATIVE. I don't know if anyone is around from those days - but please enjoy some images of the first products I thought would be a good idea for the world HAHA!



my first job out of high school 'One Man's Dream II - the magic lives on' at Tokyo Disney Resort. No, Mickey is not heavy.



a bunch of random show photos from over the years. Cue nostalgic music



my last dance contract, and one of my favorites, the Disney Fantasy



Obviously this is what everyone needs right? haha



I mean, I really tried it with the layout and photography!



the Christmas card sets weren't very popular either, but I kept trying



I thought Valentines Day would be better... it was not HAHA



my nephew Elijah (Liji) was my burlap banner and flower wall model haha!

Yes, I thought I would make some quick cash offering what everyone wanted; handmade print items and personalized burlap banners! HAHA! I also thought I would make a killing in the wedding industry with my handmade paper flower backdrops (problem: they took more time than the money was worth! Hahaha).



my paper flower phase got out of control



like, really out of hand...



I had multiple flower walls for no reason, just to have them!



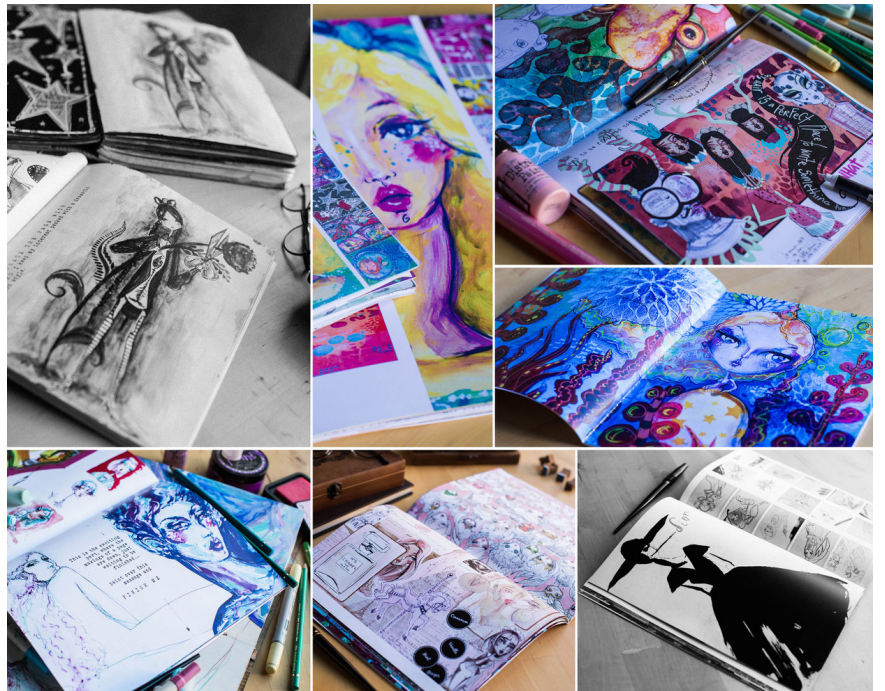
my Dopey Liji and another flower wall.



my social media post for when I found out I made the Design Team



my first book and the mini mockup I made to see what it would look like



I invested the little money I had and it sold... so I re-invested it again and sold some more

Without any immediate successes, I continued to work on my skills and my ideas, believing that it would all come together as it was supposed to. Cue my \$50 working capital investment into "THE BOOK" and the "Davenparty" Design Team... it was then that I started seeing a direction.

We're here now, and we still have a long way to go I'm sure, but I've picked up a touch of wisdom in my musings along the way. Today I just want to share some of those thoughts with you.

Here are the TOP 5 things I wish I knew (or truly understood) before starting...

1. SET YOUR MISSION CLEARLY

I had an idea of what I needed to do, but I didn't have a profound reason for doing it. Sure, making some spending money whilst I was in physical therapy was a good reason, but it's not reason enough for people to want to engage with you.

I learnt a very valuable lesson from Simon Sinek's "Start with WHY" Ted Talk

People don't buy what you do; they buy why you do it.

It was key in realizing that I needed a better "why" than "play cash for art supplies". It wasn't easy to find my why because it had already been established for so long. I did art because I loved to do it. Loving art is enough to share it, but I knew I had a business opportunity to tackle so I wanted something a bit more solid, perhaps even inclusive of my customers.

After watching so many YouTube videos I noticed a pattern in the successful Creators I was learning from: they didn't just want me to watch, they wanted me to DO IT too! Get involved, learn, experiment and play... see if you don't enjoy yourself. Suddenly I didn't want an audience to just look, I wanted them to engage like I was.

In a way, I think I adopted my WHY from those before me who clearly showed theirs. I took a deeper look into my abilities and opportunities then just set a mission for myself.

I want to nurture Creativity in others. I want to share my joy for Creative expression, encouraging others to share theirs as well. I want to build a community of uniquely empowered Creatives, equipped with an arsenal of skills that can spread their Creative joy and expression to everyone they have access to. A "Pay it Forward" model built on encouragement, education and empowerment.

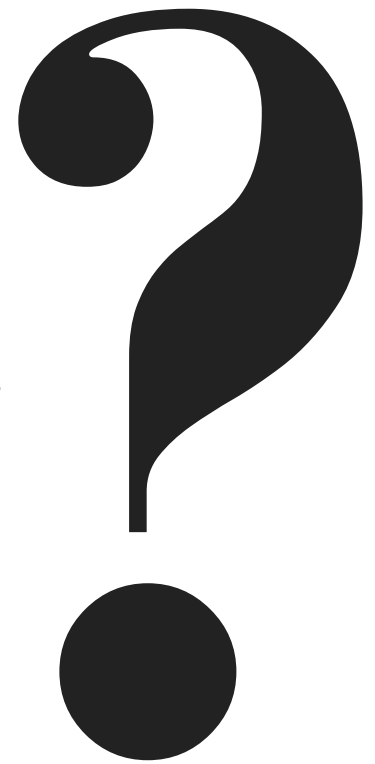
In setting a mission I had a very clear foundation to look back at every time I felt off-track, discouraged, off brand, conflicted etc. More than anything, it's a reminder for yourself to stay accountable. There will always be those who seek to destroy the empires we try to build, but with a noble mission (serving as a reminder of why you fight to continue), you are empowered to move forward.

Don't stress if you need a while to form a mission statement, in fact, it's allowed to evolve with you. Just know that your mission will become evident to people in the decisions you make, not the words you speak. If you do it for money, it will show. If you do it for clout, it will become apparent.

In fact, if you have a spare moment today, think of some Creators you follow and their offerings. See if you can formulate their mission statement from your own understanding of their work, their decisions and their offerings. Please don't share this with them! Haha, we don't need to police anyone! But it's an interesting exercise nonetheless. I have found some people's mission statements change over time and it has been the reason I start investing in some people, and stop with others.

Think of why they are sharing with you. Do they

want me to look
want me to learn
want me to buy
want me to feel better
want me to grow
want me to admire
want to help me
want me to help them



We're all a different mix of a bunch of reasons. I think it's healthy to choose reasons that are not so centered around 'self', to protect yourself from giving into ego and money (seems to be the biggest temptation for us humans). Don't get me wrong, we need to pay bills, but if your foundation and focus involves you earning money, you will chase the dollar. I learnt in Church once that your heart will follow where your eyes are focused. It seems simple, but it's true! If you're looking for money, you will take action towards acquiring it. If you're looking for recognition, you will focus on pleasing your ego. If you're looking to help and encourage, you will sacrifice and give.

Personally, I have a mission statement that doesn't mention profitability. That is because I know myself, and I know that I make decisions very differently when money is involved. I didn't want that to be a reason I stopped sharing, teaching or encouraging. It is why I continue to offer free content daily on Instagram, weekly on YouTube and check in with Facebook and Instagram live when I can, even throughout the Playtest Patreon experience. The work is a struggle sometimes, but I am bound to my mission and I know I will be provided for, my job is to just show up and work... the blessing of achieving my mission is worth more than any certain amount of money.

Message to Myself: A mission statement for any business is important; set one for yourself, set it clear and stick to it! Check in with it every time you're confused about decision making and choose options that help you achieve your mission, not take you away from it.

2. BE OK WITH FAILING A LITTLE BIT

I knew this, but I was also lucky enough not to have cared about it in my art before. It was always for me so there wasn't anything to care about. Here's where Social Media comes in to cause its issues! Haha.

Failure is inevitable for everyone. It's OK, as long as you learn from it. It took me a few failed attempts to learn some things, and other failures I have yet to experience and learn from, but at least I am open to it now.

I started out thinking I could ONLY have successes and that people could only see my social media posts as a reflection of my achievement. The problem with painting a veil of perfection is the impossible standard you set yourself to live up to. There were SO many projects, videos, voiceovers, sketches and Instagram posts I scrapped because they showed too many of my failed attempts and ideas. Looking back, it made my job so much harder!

People love looking at your triumphs, but they also like to learn from your mistakes. You can feel very vulnerable when you fail, and even more so sharing it publicly. But, and everything after "but" counts: It shows you are real and you care to learn! There's a greater sense of satisfaction watching a seed grow into a sapling, watering it and helping it grow into a magnificent blossom than there is just admiring an already perfect flower.

Failure is going to happen, so you might as well let it help you.

Message to Myself: Show your mistakes and let people know what you're failing at. Share your journey to success with them, it's far more rewarding than pretending you were born skilled and perfect... nobody is born that way.

3. ESTABLISH YOUR BOUNDARIES AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION STRATEGIES

This one is an interesting one.

The obvious one in business is: know how to correct the mistakes that happen. Obvious stuff – damaged orders, customer dissatisfaction etc. But what took me by surprise was the “real live humans” element to having an online business. I don’t know how but I forgot to realize there were real lives attached to the people I met on YouTube/ Instagram/ Facebook.

Engaging with people builds relationship. Social media is people engaging with people, as is business. It’s fair to assume that I should have known I would be interacting with people setting up an online business, but I wasn’t. I haven’t been a super “connected” person online. I got my first real mobile phone in 2017... I spent so long working in the middle of the ocean with no cell service I didn’t need one. In Japan we all lived 3 doors away from each other, I could just walk to my friend’s place to see what they were up to. Don’t get me wrong, I wasn’t “disconnected”, but I learnt social media properly in the last couple of years and I felt a little late to the game.

I didn’t realize what REALLY went on for people online. As much positivity as there is out there, there are also very angry individuals with “computer courage” ready to enjoy their sprees of anonymous damages. You need to set your boundaries to protect yourself from the fallout of those interactions.

How will you do damage control?

What will your language sound like?

What do you want your actions to achieve?

What will you not accept?

I have experienced a BUNCH of issues that challenge these questions in me every time. I know my mission, so I make decisions that would serve that purpose, but it’s not easy. You want to know the real truth? One on one, person to person, if you pulled a stunt on me I am:

- 1. Very confrontational.**
- 2. Aggressive (even worse, sometimes Passive Aggressive)**
- 3. Verbal... and loud**
- 4. Armed and ready with a court-worthy prosecution**
- 5. Ready to write you off**

So... knowing this about myself, I needed a new version of me to grow into; someone calm, understanding and solution-focused.

I had to learn this quickly because it doesn't take long to come across someone on Social Media that pushes your buttons. Beside it being bad for business, whatever you put out on the internet stays there forever, I knew I needed to be proactive and lay the groundwork for good, positive growth.

I'm not going to lie, I still struggle, but I call upon that good ol' Disney training and my Christian beliefs to try and catch myself before I do something morally reprehensible. It's a battle sometimes and I don't always get it right, but I take rest in the knowledge that I'm doing my best... I have had opportunity to practice this change and I am proud to say I handled most situations with calm, understanding and a solution that would bring growth or peaceful closure.

Message to Myself: You're going to meet people who don't share your vision or might be threatened by it. Do not accept their forceful efforts to destroy what you're building, but be firm, clear and affirming in your response. Give them the benefit of the doubt and an opportunity to explain their words/actions. State your position peacefully, empathize, and try to find a common goal to work towards. If all this fails, move forward separately. DON'T EVER humiliate or verbally attack, it is a reflection on your bad character if you do, but also, that's a REAL person you are talking to. They have real pain, real fears and real concerns, you have a responsibility to bring light to them, not more darkness.



4. COMMITMENT IS KEY

I knew this one, but did I really?

Hahaha, NO, of course not! Starting your own business is so hard! Just when you think you're finding your feet someone comes and pulls the rug out... again and again! It's a constant process of thinking, researching, trying, learning and repeating.

My goodness, the research. If anyone showed me the amount of time I would spend researching fascinating topics like United States Sales Tax Laws, or AdSense revenue and other diversified money streams available to online content Creators, I would have said "No, thank you" right then and there!

It's a lot! Everything is a lot. In fact the easiest part of the job is the creating part, and even then, it's not always easy.

You should reach out for help and support when you need it, but I can't preach what I am only just starting to practice. What I can talk about is commitment.

I am committed. At present, I am over committed (which is not a great thing. Wow, stop reading now if you don't want to be confused any further haha!)

If I could just state the obvious: you're going to have to be committed if you want to see results. All the growth I've had has been risky and I had to commit to it. I think passion is a great fuel for this, but it is not enough on its own. Passion needs action, and the actions are a LOT OF WORK. Often times the ACTIONS you need to complete to grow seem like "too much", but it's just a reality. We can't sit and wait for opportunity, we have to seek it out and commit to the work it will take to seize it. How many times can I say commit? Haha

Below is a small list of moments I wanted to give up

- Setting up my Etsy store
- Moving the business to the States
- Formatting my first book
- Filming my first Davenport video – the unboxing on YouTube
- Tax season
- A couple months into my YouTube channel
- Making my "Handmade Journal Tapes" for Etsy
- Making my "Orange grab bags" for Etsy
- Making anything handmade for Etsy
- When I went to Japan
- My Design Team drama and every time it re-surfaces
- Manufacturing my first stamp sets and washi tapes
- After every dance audition I went to
- Inktober 2017
- Halloween
- Formatting my second book
- State Sales taxes
- The slow start to 2018, when I got sick
- Tax season, again
- Setting up Amazon Affiliate links
- MerMay 2018
- Prepping jlbCREATIVE Workshops
- Playtest Patreon starting
- Right now...

I wish I were being dramatic, but this is real. I am always exhausted and always looking for an easier way out, but there isn't one for me. I am self-made and self-produced, it is a TON of work... it takes commitment.

Good News is: I'm committed :)

I'm on a new journey now to find balance and a healthier work schedule. When I do, I will commit to that as fervently as I have committed to the crazy journey I've had thus far.

Note: Some people are handed lots of opportunities, and that doesn't mean your commitment isn't worth those opportunities. Their blessings are for them, your blessings are for you. Even when people are handed opportunity on a silver platter, there is a level of commitment they have to bring to it for it to succeed. I have seen people gifted incredible opportunities only to become complacent and experience a third of the rewarding satisfaction they could have had if they committed to it. I have also seen people build their own opportunities from scratch and bathe in the glory of their efforts, truly rewarded for their commitment.

Message to Myself: RUN! Haha, no. Remember your family motto "do it once, do it well". If you don't put the work in you won't see the results. You don't know what "work" looks like yet, but you will soon, and you will smash it! Just stay committed and remember WHY you're doing it - you love watching people explore their Creativity and God has gifted you an opportunity to encourage that, don't take that for granted and own that responsibility.



this was when I started to see a bit of...

direction

5. KEEP YOURSELF OPEN TO CHANGE

This is just standard.

It's a common idea shared amongst many successful business owners, and it also makes total logical sense. You have to grow with the times, shift and adapt practices to suit the climate and take full advantage of advancements in technology and opportunity.

I was lucky in that I never felt bound to specific goals and plans, so every step forward felt like I was just feeling the waters of what was already showing promise. I have been hesitant to jump into some avenues though, namely Patreon. I guess you being here and reading this proves I am open to change, so maybe I don't need to write more than this? Hahaha

Message to Myself: Nothing is constant, so you can't be married to your visions for the business and its direction. Explore your choices, take risks and learn quickly. Adapt and ride with the current, not against it. You don't have to conform, just be open to the trends and ideas, they could lead you to newer ideas that will offer you growth. You will learn over time not to fight the uncertainty and rather enjoy seeing the horizon of limitless potential.

So, there you have it, five incredibly obvious things I've had to learn the hard way so that you won't have to! Obviously, we all still have a journey to go on and you might read this now and learn it later, that's Ok too.

Like I said, I knew a few of these things before I started but I decided to indulge my optimism, thinking that reading others' wisdom meant I already had it. However, I did not absorb all that wisdom and I still had to experience the lessons for myself to truly get it. You might have to as well, and that's OK, just know we're all doing it, then maybe it will seem less paralyzing in the moment.

It has been a journey. A difficult, exhausting, confusing, challenging, emotional journey to get here... and you know what?

IT WAS ALL WORTH IT.