

Sheila Chandra

Why Mentoring is Essential for Artists

'We all grow up with the idea of the 'true' artist
as the 'lone wolf'. Someone who's driven to
create even in the face of everyone else's scorn.
But that isn't the whole story...'

At the start of their careers, mentoring is essential for artists

Virtually all the artists I've ever asked had at least one knowledgeable person who recognized their artistry at the start of their careers - often even in the face of their own disbelief. Not many young people have the chutzpah to call themselves an artist without encouragement. Many deny it, or minimise their belief in their talent because what they do feels 'easy'. They forget that it isn't easy for others, and that 'easy' is the way it's supposed to feel. Or they may deny because they find their chosen craft difficult or agonizing while they're still learning. Or because there's no one who looks like them in their field - especially where the artists getting most of the attention are white, male, mature and able-bodied.

In a way, mentoring is essential for artists because they need to be 'recognized'

Artists and creative people do not seem to be able to 'name' themselves - at least, not initially. This inability is to do with their huge humility and awareness of just how much they have to learn in order to measure up with other artists. Often, it takes the encouragement of another writer, painter, gallerist, producer, manager, dancer or whatever, to make them believe that they have what it takes to work as a creative professional. This recognition process and gentle encouragement is essential, as without it, the nascent artist may simply give up and become something else.





**'Be kind, suppress your competitive instincts
and foster the talent around you'**

– SHEILA CHANDRA

Were you mentored as an artist at the beginning of your creative career?

Chances are, someone helped you – either with just a comment or a great deal of support. Think back to who that was, and how crucial that support was to your growing sense of self as a creative person. Think about whether you'd have taken so many risks or thrown yourself so completely into a creative career without that conviction in your own artistic powers that those people helped you develop? Or whether you'd have taken the right steps at all without their insights and advice?

Mentoring is essential for artists making changes to their careers too

It's not just new artists and creative people who need support. Artists making any kind of change of direction, either of discipline or change of level also need perspective. The kind of perspective that only a life coach or another experienced creative person can give. In fact, whatever level you're at, you never grow out of needing perspective and support and advice.

If you're just starting out – find mentors

It's well worth the effort to search for mentors, even if you meet with some rejection along the way. Try to use their time wisely. Think about what you want to achieve, put focused time aside for mentoring, and most crucially of all, run hard with the advice you're given before you see them next. Even if you can't find more senior people in your industry, or in a related industry, to help you, take the time to learn all the tips and tricks you can from your peers. Build a strong network with them as you never know when you'll need it. And be willing to help them out too of course...

If you're established, it's time to pay it back. Mentor the nascent artists you know

Dear reader, it's time to pay back the kindness that was shown to you. If you have a thriving creative career, think where you might be now without that kindness, recognition and support? Make the effort to help artists at all levels. This is particularly important while we live in a time that's hostile to many art-forms – where funding is being cut, and too often, only those from privileged backgrounds can afford to launch themselves or weather difficult times. If that continues it will seriously skew the kinds of stories and perspectives artists are able to share. It will affect our entire arts culture, perhaps for a generation or more – which is something that should deeply concern us all.

What can we do about it? Be kind, suppress your competitive instincts and foster the talent around you, especially in those that are struggling in difficult circumstance to make art. Give people good advice, signpost them to resources, introduce them to contacts and be encouraging. Let's create a culture of nurturing rather than the competitive one that those who exploit or publicise our work have encouraged. In particular, aid people of real talent to see what they have to give. Especially if they're having a hard time recognizing it. You'll be helping another artist to be 'born'.

—
SHEILA CHANDRA IS THE AUTHOR OF 'ORGANIZING FOR CREATIVE PEOPLE & MENTORED STREET ARTIST STIK FROM HOMELESSNESS TO BEING ONE OF THE MOST RECOGNISED STREET ARTISTS IN THE WORLD. SHEILACHANDRABOOKS.COM
—