

Some Simple Rules of Artistic Self-Promotion

Dennis Bathory-Kitsch, December 2015

The Zeroeth Rule

Be a true artist.

The First Rule

Do what you do.¹

Corollaries to the First Rule

Do it well.

Get it done.

Document it.²

Get paid for it.³

Special Corollaries to the First Rule

Keep learning.

Stay healthy (or get healthy).

Be self-critical (but not harsh).

Be certain but humble (save arrogance for when you're famous, when you won't need to be).

Learn about intellectual property.⁴

The Second Rule

Work with people in real life.

Corollaries to the Second Rule

Respond to every request.⁵

Apply for every opportunity.

Do not pay for opportunities.⁶

Expect rejection.⁷

Be on time.

Simple Corollary to the Second Rule

Never burn your bridges.⁸

Special Corollary to the Second Rule

Say yes.⁹

The Special Rule of the Interwebs

Online is not real life (see The Second Rule, above).

Corollaries to the Special Rule

The online community is unreliable.¹⁰

Promoting yourself is not enough; **help others.**¹¹

Constantly posting about you and your stuff is icky.

1 Yes, you *do* have the time. If you think not, then remind yourself of the Zeroeth Rule.

2 Make photos, audio, video, drawings—anything that helped you create your work. Documentation can't be underestimated. Funding, opportunities, news media (see the Third Rule) and, eventually, your biographer will all want access to your creative past.

3 Know your importance as an artist. If you can get paid, then get paid fairly. Otherwise, work in trade, for a percentage, etc. Your work must never be free unless it's something you would already be doing for yourself—and even then, some income is very helpful.

4 Regret is a terrible thing.

5 Remember that they asked *you*. They took the time, so even a polite 'no' is a response. You never know where it will lead.

6 In rare circumstances, there will be an irresistible opportunity (such as the American Academy in Rome Prize) to pay an application fee. If you believe in your work and feel you have a very good chance, then pay the application fee. But by and large, application fees are simply *your* money going into a prize pool to pay the prize money to *other* artists.

7 Rejection will be your constant companion throughout your artistic life. Make friends with rejection.

8 It doesn't matter. Say goodbye, move away, but be above resentment. Generosity and respect cost you nothing.

9 Say no when the situation isn't right—something you can't do, a situation where you don't get respect, circumstances where you know you can't finish on time, something you'd be doing only for the money, etc. Otherwise: say yes!

10 When I fundraised for my opera, I had 1,600 'enthusiastic' people on my email list who told me over and over, "Do the opera! We'll help you pay for it!" When the time came to mount the production, only one among them made a contribution.

11 This isn't a quid pro quo. It's about being a committed member of your artistic community. Set aside jealousy.

Confusing personal and professional is unwise, but **be a real person**.
If you're crazy, create a separate—creative but non-crazy—professional website.

Picky Little Corollaries to the Special Rule

Controversial topics¹² must be deeply important to you, or don't post.

Provide specific links; people won't pick out of a bag of your stuff.

If they do, it will always be the 'wrong' stuff.

Keep it simple for every computer or tablet or phone.

Auto-playing music or video is a bad idea.¹³

The Third Rule

Use the media.

Corollaries to the Third Rule

Use new & old school: newspapers, email, postcards, social sites, radio, television, posters, etc.

Put together a press kit.

Send your stuff for review.

Send *physical* stuff, not links, especially not general homepage, SoundCloud, iTunes, Flickr, etc. links.

Learn to speak well, to be articulate, and to be ready for questions about your work.¹⁴

Use the 'CNN ten-second rule'.¹⁵

Learn to write well—spelling, grammar, consistency, interest, and brevity.¹⁶

Provide a good, short bio in text and web format.

Have a CV/résumé available and create a 'onesheet'.¹⁷

Have an interesting photo of yourself, including a high-resolution one for media.¹⁸

The interviewer is not your friend.¹⁹

Ignore reviews.²⁰

The Fourth Rule

Get outta town.²¹

Corollary to the Fourth Rule

When you come back, then they may love you.

The Fifth Rule

Thank everybody.

Corollaries to the Fifth Rule

Did you get help from the media? Thank them.

Did you get help from friends? Thank them.

Did you get time off from employers? Thank them.

Did you get grants or other support? Thank them.

Did you take time from relationships? Thank them. Big time.

Did people stand in your way? Thank them. They made you stronger.

Thank the people you forgot.²²

12 Controversial topics outside your field, that is. Be as controversial as you want to be as an artist.

13 Visitors who cannot see may visit your website. Do not interrupt their screen readers with your music. Visitors who cannot hear will be unable to grasp why they're stuck on your landing page. Invite your visitor to *choose* to play your music or watch your video.

14 Practice in front of a mirror and in front of friends. Use the least comfortable situations to practice. Then you'll be ready.

15 Imagine you're being interviewed by CNN. You have ten seconds to make a point about yourself that people will remember. What do you say? Boom! Time's up!

16 If you can't do it, hire somebody. When that gets really, really expensive, then learn to write well.

17 Think of your onesheet as a 30-second commercial on paper. People should 'get it' in one glance.

18 Seriously, not a drunk selfie.

19 People in the media have agendas or they wouldn't be talking to you. They will edit what you say and how you present yourself for *their* purposes, not yours. I have been on television in the U.S. and internationally about my opera *Erzsébet: The Blood Countess*, and no matter how hard I tried to tell my story, each appearance was edited to tell the producer's story of death and mayhem rather than my story of badly rewritten history. Be on guard.

20 This may be one of the hardest to do. Local reviews tend to be positive, but once outside your home area, ignore them.

21 Here's the biblical money quote from Mark 6:4: "Jesus said to them, 'A prophet is not without honor except in his own town, among his relatives, and in his own home'."

22 Thank me.