

Living the Prolific Life: A How-to Guide

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Pro·lif·ic (\prə-li-fik\): Marked by abundant inventiveness or productivity.
–*Merriam Webster Online*

The prolific life has been characterized by abundant inventiveness and limitless creativity. Prolificacy has also been unnecessarily enshrouded in a veil of mystery and the sources of artistic inventiveness are too often viewed as out-of-reach for the average person. Perhaps it's for this reason that artistic inspiration has frequently been attributed to muses, the channeling of spirits, beelzebub, etc.

In spite of perceptions surrounding prolific creativity, there are several documented commonalities that consistently appear in the lives of prolific people. Indeed, the psychological literature has some definite insights into commonalities of the prolific. My investigation into this literature has yielded these . . .

7 Common Characteristics of Prolific People

Highly prolific people tend to:

1. Be firmly settled in their creative identities. Prolific artists don't question their artistic identities. They own the title of artist, writer, musician, etc. This might seem like a no-brainer, but it's important. Prolific people aren't shy about what they do, or about their love of art. When they have corporate jobs they tend to view themselves as writers with desk jobs rather than a corporate employees who also write.

2. Operate from a bedrock of stability. Despite the stereotypical image of the mercurial and whimsical artist, most highly prolific people have managed to pin down a lot of variables in their life; they aren't constantly rearranging the logistics of life and reconfiguring their life situations. As a result, they can bring their full attention to bear upon the creation process.

3. Get "adopted" early by mentors or sponsors. Prolific artists tend to have received significant artistic mentorships at the beginning of their creative careers.

4. Get an early start: Prolific artists tend to have developed the rapid production habit early in their careers. They tend to have developed the production habit very shortly after beginning their artistic endeavors.

5. Be well adjusted. Prolific people tend to be sensitive, confident, open-minded, curious, intellectually flexible, willing to work very hard, and have a sense of humor.

6. Have a habit of writing. Highly prolific people tend to work even when they're not inspired. They've developed the production habit.

7. Intrinsic interest. Prolific people are intrinsically motivated, almost without exception. They love their work and, in general, would do it (in some form or another) even if it paid much less or not at all.

[Note: Not all of these characteristics are present among all prolific people. These characteristics simply appear at a high frequency among prolific persons].

With these characteristics in mind, here are some tips for developing a prolific life:

1. Ruthlessly guard your mind. Prolific people often purposefully take on mindless jobs because it allows them to devote their thoughts entirely to art. Prolific people own their own minds, and they're often found stocking shelves or parking cars, but all the while scribbling down notes during every free moment. They manage to engineer situations that allow their minds to be constantly creative even when they're not actively producing art. (People who engage in cognitively taxing jobs are often too mentally exhausted at the end of the day to be creative).

2. Unabashedly take on your artistic identity. As Leo said in an earlier post, don't be afraid to call yourself an artist. Can you imagine a prolific artist who's afraid to claim an artistic identity? I can't. Don't be timid about telling yourself and others what you do. If you create art, then you're an artist. The dedication and seriousness required to consistently produce inspired art requires a singularity of purpose that can't be present unless you've come to own your own creativity.

3. Realize the gestation period of creative ideas. Prolific people might be producing at regular intervals, but the gestation period for their "products" is often long. You must be giving birth to a steady stream of new ideas in order for those ideas to bear fruit in a year or two down the road. Realize that prolific

people don't always have a shortened creative cycle; they often just have more creative cycles going on simultaneously.

4. Keep your creative inertia going. Do whatever it takes to make sure that your creative inertia doesn't die. Require small outputs from yourself on a frequent basis and make artistic production a habit. Once you've strengthened this habit the floodgates of creativity are likely to open. One prolific writer I know has a timer that goes off every 40 minutes; with each alarm he writes down an idea.

5. Create stability where it counts. If you're moving all the time and changing your life situation, the single-minded focus required for prolific output can be hard to obtain. Take care of as many external variables as possible in order to allow you to focus on your art.

6. Attend to your mental and physical health. While there are some very visible cases of clinically insane but nevertheless prolific people, these people are the exception rather than the rule. Less stress = greater prolificacy.

7. Get adopted by a mentor. Leverage any and all angles or opportunities available to find a mentor who's done what you want to do. If you want to be a bestselling non-fiction author then don't talk to the convenience store clerk, talk to a bestselling non-fiction author.

Clay Collins blogs at [The Growing Life](#) and is the author of [Quitting Things and Flakiness: The #1 Productivity Anti-Hack](#) and [The James Dean Guide to Being a Body Language Bad*ss](#).

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