

The Art of Giving it Away

"The meaning of life is to find your gift. The purpose of life is to give it away."

— *Attributed to Pablo Picasso*

INTRODUCTION

Greetings. I'm Matthew Toellner, founder of Deep Dish Academy. After years working as a software engineer, I found myself unsatisfied with the direction my career was heading. I realized that the traditional 9-5 business culture wasn't the right fit for me. Despite lacking experience, I wanted to explore consulting and UX design where I could embrace my creative side. I'm driven by an intrinsically motivated growth mindset—one that prioritizes sharing, collaboration, and personal fulfillment over traditional financial incentives. What follows is my perspective on giving away your creative work. While I'll often use the term 'art' to paint a clear picture, this perspective applies to any gift or talent you wish to share.

THE CHALLENGE FOR CREATORS

Blending passion with profit often leads to difficulties that can overshadow the joy of their work. Here are some examples:

Commodification: When your art is reimagined as a product, its deeper meaning can be lost.

Burnout: The constant demand to create for financial reasons can lead to exhaustion, making your work suffer.

Obligated Support: When your art becomes a transaction, friends and family may feel pressured to buy or support your work, even if they don't truly connect with it.

Identity Conflict: You may struggle to separate your personal identity from your work, feeling as though your worth is tied to how much you earn or how successful your creations are in the market.

THE POSITIVES OF GIVING AWAY YOUR ART

1. Building Authentic Relationships

Giving your art away opens the door to real connections with people. Instead of a simple transaction, it becomes something heartfelt and personal. Every time they see the art, they'll be reminded of the kindness behind it.

2. Expanding Your Reach and Influence

When you give your art away, it's more likely to be shared with others. When someone buys a piece of art, they may feel pressure to justify their choice, especially if they worry others might not appreciate it as much as they do. In contrast, a gifted piece carries no such expectations and allows for more open and natural conversations.

3. Freedom from Monetization Pressures

When you sell art, there's often pressure to create work that will generate income, which can limit your creativity. By giving your art away, you remove the financial aspect, allowing you to focus purely on authentic expression. Experimenting with new styles or ideas feels less risky when there's no pressure to make money from each piece.

4. Fostering a Generous Ecosystem

When you give your art away, it creates goodwill and encourages others to do the same. This can help build a community of generosity, where art and support flow freely between people. Over time, you'll develop a reputation as an artist who values human connection more than profit.

5. Universal Benefits for All Forms of Work

The benefits of giving away your creations aren't limited to stereotypical "artists." Whether you're a writer, designer, consultant, or wellness instructor, offering your work freely can unlock the same rewards. Focusing on the intrinsic value of your work is a mindset that can apply to all endeavors!

THE CASE AGAINST OWNERSHIP-CENTRIC CREATIVE SYSTEMS

Consider the absurdity of strict copyright laws—where even using as few as four notes can be considered infringement, and where DJs who create mashups or sample tracks risk legal trouble despite producing entirely new works. Imagine if writing were restricted so that you couldn't draw inspiration from classic works of literature, or if consulting best practices were locked behind intellectual property protections. Think about the open-source software movement, which shows how cooperation sparks innovation. Instead of hoarding and protecting your creative work, consider changing your mindset. Embrace the freedom to share, collaborate, and inspire others, knowing that your work can have a far greater impact when it is part of a collective movement.

THE PARADOX OF GENEROSITY AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT

By giving your work away for free, you still create a sense of value. When people receive something without an expectation of return, they often feel a genuine desire to "give back." Anonymous donations illustrate this beautifully—they invite appreciation and support without the pressures of a commercial transaction. This approach fosters mutual respect and strengthens the creative ecosystem, where support arises from gratitude and goodwill. Remember, people are investing in you—your connection, storytelling, authenticity, and trust—just as much as they are in your art.

Visit www.deepdishacademy.com to explore my creative work and learn how embracing these principles can enhance your own creative journey.