

**EPISODE 99**

[INTRODUCTION]

**[00:00:04.1] ANNOUNCER:** Welcome to the Creative Empire Podcast. Each week, Reina Pomeroy, the life and biz success coach, and Christina Scalera, the attorney for creatives, are taking you up close and personal with successful influencers in the creative community and tackling your biggest business hurdles. Their mission is to help you, creative entrepreneurs, think beyond your daily biz so you can make the brave decisions that build your Creative Empire.

[INTERVIEW]

**[0:00:35.0] RP:** Welcome back for another episode of the Creative Empire Podcast. it's Reina here and Christina is here with me, we have Molly Suber Thorpe today and she's a very special guest for me. Molly is a graphic designer, calligrapher, she's an educator and an author, you might have seen her book, *The Modern Calligraphy* and you can find it on all the places where you can find books obviously, but she's super impressive.

She's been featured in The Guardian, Wall Street Journal, Martha Stewart Weddings, a lot of other places. I met Molly a while ago through a college connection and she actually designed my wedding stationary so many moons ago and I'm so excited to have this creative circle come full circle and to be joined by her. She actually lives in Greece right now. So, Molly, welcome to the show, we're so excited to have you.

**[0:01:27.1] MST:** Thank you Reina, it's my pleasure to be here.

**[0:01:29.9] RP:** Awesome. So give us like a fly by view of what's happening for you now in your business and like what you're doing over in Greece?

**[0:01:38.2] MST:** Okay, so I live in Athens Greece because my husband is Greek and we moved here a couple of years ago. But prior to that, I lived in Los Angeles for about a decade. If I have to define myself, I guess you could say my elevator pitch is that I am a calligrapher and graphic designer.

I started out as a graphic designer in school and calligraphy came as a natural extension of my love of typography and the handmade crafts. Over time, that sort of morphed into, or I guess you could say expanded into me teaching calligraphy and also writing about calligraphy and as you mentioned, I did write and publish one book in 2013 and I'm actually coming out with a second book this spring, early summer. So that's very exciting, also about calligraphy.

That's basically where I am now, I do a lot of calligraphy work for clients that gets merged with graphic design. So things like logo designing and type treatments for magazines and things of that nature. I also write about it. I do a lot of writing, making resources for people and I actually just also launched a website called [calligrafile.com](http://calligrafile.com), which is a resource for calligraphers. I have my hands full with that sort of range of things.

**[0:02:55.4] RP:** So cool, so many different projects. Can you tell us more about the book?

**[0:02:59.6] MST:** The new book?

**[0:03:00.8] RP:** Yeah, the new book.

**[0:03:02.1] MST:** Yes. Okay, the new book's title is *The Calligrapher's Business Handbook* and it's a book addressing the questions that I get most often from people who are starting to pursue calligraphy, not only as a career but even just as a side job. As soon as people are starting to monetize calligraphy, a huge array of questions arises.

I get asked them constantly by email or students that I have in my intermediate level calligraphy classes. I get asked questions ranging from, "What do you charge to address an envelope?" To, "How do I tell this customer that I can't do this job the way that they want me to do?" Or, "Oh my gosh, this company just presented me with a contract for my hand lettering and what are my rights? I didn't even know I own the copyright to my work if they hired me to do it."

I'm not frustrated at these beginner calligraphers for not knowing the answers to this because calligraphy is not an industry that has been around from a commercial standpoint for that long. Graphic design is and because I'm a graphic designer, I came at my calligraphy career from that

background. I had worked at a graphic design firm, I had learned about writing contracts and charging by the hour versus charging flat rates, versus charging for certain numbers of proofs and edit rounds and things like that. That are just not engrained in any other sort of calligraphy teaching or curriculum.

I just saw this immense need for the calligraphy community worldwide to come together and learn some basics about what it takes to be a commercial artist and take some tools that graphic designers use constantly to come up with fair pricing, that respects their talents and doesn't make them resent all the work that they do, and simultaneously, build a community for calligraphers to talk openly and honestly with each other about pricing. There's no reason we should be keeping it a secret or keep it under our belt.

There's certainly things that make businesses unique, that people should not necessarily share with the world but it's going to benefit every single person in our calligraphy community if we talk more honestly and more openly about what we deserve and why we deserve it and we sort of boost each other up and help each other understand that when we all charge really respectable rates, all of us win and our whole art form is going to be elevated to the next level.

**[0:05:30.9] CS:** Definitely.

**[0:05:32.0] MST:** So, that's what the book's about.

**[0:05:33.7] RP:** I love it.

**[0:05:34.8] CS:** That's intense, I love it though.

**[0:05:37.3] RP:** So needed.

**[0:05:38.6] CS:** When somebody is just starting out and they're really scared to charge those higher rates, they might read the book and they say, "That's great but that's not — I'm different, this is not going to work for me because of where I live. I live in rural Kansas and nobody's going to pay those prices. Or I live in," — all the excuses that they could have. Or, "I'm just so new, I need to just do some free work," or that kind of, if you were having a coffee conversation

with that person and they were, you could sense that they were scared, that kind of thing. What are some things that you might say to them?

**[0:06:08.7] MST:** Very good question, and I was very careful to address this as well in the book because I'm not only aware of but very respectful of the fact that not everyone has the confidence to charge higher prices and not everyone has the ability, the freedom to charge high prices because it does limit your clientele and your client base and not everyone has the privilege to be able to turn down any work at all.

So, you're right. I'm very aware of that. So what I say to people in those situation is this. Number one, decide what you would like to be paid. First of all, emotional pricing is a huge problem with commercial artists because you need to have confidence in your work to confidently state prices that really pay you a decent living wage. So, decide privately before you meet with a client, before you're put on the spot, before your gut is going to kick in and make you say to yourself, "Oh my gosh, can I really charge that rate?" Decide for yourself what it's worth.

Then decide for yourself the lowest you would go, "If I did this job, what would be the lowest I could charge so that I wouldn't be seething with resentment as I did it?" Maybe your answer is going to be that you could do it for free, that you could genuinely see yourself doing it for free and you wouldn't be filled with resentment. If that's the case, free or for a very low rate that doesn't work out too much of an hourly payment at all, ask yourself what the other benefits are that you would get from it, if not monetary payment.

Would you end up with a portfolio piece for example? Make sure, with the client you're working with that they're going to be comfortable with you advertising that work in your portfolio. State this clearly upfront, ask them questions like, "Can I, when we're done, get a reference from you or get some sort of testimonial from you that I can put on my website?" Try to find some other ways to get some kind of compensation from the job that may not be monetary that many clients are more than happy to give you if the job goes well.

So that's where I start with but I do urge people to honestly say to themselves, "If your reason for not charging a high rate is because you think you might not be worth it or you think maybe people won't pay it, try, see what happens, try." Because, I meet many people who don't try to

quote higher prices and through no fault of their own, they look at what other people are charging and they think, “Oh, maybe I should stay in that range or I don’t have as much experience so I shouldn’t charge that much.”

I think people are pretty pleasantly surprised sometimes what can happen when you confidently state your prices and explain why they are what they are and what goes into a job. Calligraphy, especially, is a very misunderstood art form and many clients through no fault of their own, most well-meaning clients will ask for a quote from a calligrapher thinking that it’s really just a simple matter of handwriting. Writing out some envelopes, how long can it really take and gently educating clients about what goes into our work is a really crucial part of what we do and that often makes the difference between a low paid job and a well-paid job.

**[0:09:11.4] RP:** So good, Molly. That’s really impressive, just the way that you said that. I think that’s spot on in terms of educating your clients to show them the misunderstanding and to show them that what we’re doing is actually art and it’s not just a swoosh of the hand and it should be priced that way.

I know, one of the things that people struggle with in terms of this thing is just having those numbers to go off of. You said like, what would you like to be charging for it and then have that number. I think often, we struggle to separate the emotional from the actual, here’s what I need to make in my business amount. Do you have any tips on how you’ve calculated that or how you suggested for somebody maybe who has a full time salary and is doing something like this on the side or is a freelancer?

**[0:10:02.6] MST:** You mean, to come up with their very specific rates?

**[0:10:05.2] RP:** Sure. Or yeah, if you have a formula or some kind of way that you have suggested it for them?

**[0:10:10.7] MST:** Absolutely. For calligraphers, I feel like the types of work that we do really fall into two categories; commercial work and noncommercial work. The very simple definition between the differentiations between the two is that personal work is work you do for a client that only is used by the client. It doesn’t get used for any commercial purposes, it never makes

money on behalf of the client, it's never used in advertisements. When your client is done with it, it stops there forever.

Commercial work is things like logo designs and book covers and greeting card designs. Things that your client, whether it's an individual or a company, is going to use to profit off of for a time to come. Now, commercial pricing is 10 times harder than personal pricing because you take into account a lot more factors. Whether it's royalties, or licensing rights, buy out's and I can get into that if you want, but I think that the majority of calligraphers out there starting out are really wondering about personal, noncommercial work pricing.

That's things like envelope addressing, place cards, all that sort of wedding stationary stuff, even a chalk board sign for a local café. The number one thing I urge people to do is time themselves. Don't start by looking at other people's rates, don't start by thinking, "Okay, this other calligrapher I see charges \$3.25 per envelope, I probably should try to finagle things in my own job to make it profitable for me to charge \$3.25 in the envelope.

No, don't start there. Do a job for yourself, whether it's for a friend or just a total mock up job but spend a day calligraphing envelopes like you would if you had a real client order. Do it naturally, take breaks as you normally would, time yourself, do the math, figure out how long it takes you to do each envelope, if you decide you want a specific hourly rate like you know, \$30, \$50, \$60, whatever that hourly rate is for you and your lifestyle and your living expenses, do the math there and then, I say, double it or try to double it.

What I mean by that is that there's an immense amount of overhead time that goes into every artistic project. So you need to know how long it takes you to do your art, and that's the most important number. Then you need to add on 50 to 100% more on top of that because you're going to be emailing with clients, you're going to be shipping orders to clients, you're going to be making proofs, you're going to be making redo's, you're going to be doing time in your own career, advertising.

So the time spent doing the non-artwork stuff is, as many of us know, at least half of your time sometimes, depending on your job. For this personal projects, when I've helped calligraphers specifically work through their pricing and start with this process, time themselves, set their own

hourly rate, figure out the price per envelope and then double it, it actually usually comes out to somewhere in the realm of the standard envelope pricing among American calligraphers. Which, right now, is between \$3 and \$4.50 an envelope for professional calligraphers. Just to give you some numbers there.

The first survey that was actually done professional survey of calligraphers in America came out last year and it was done by a calligrapher named Carla Hagen and her husband and they did this immense survey of 320 calligraphers in the United States and asked them their specific prices for all sorts of things as well as prices for additional fees and other types of charges and their findings were amazing. We found that obviously the price ranges are immense, but among professional calligraphers who've reached a level of success where they have consistent work and they don't have any other job, the prices were pretty consistent at that end of the spectrum.

I think that's a great sign, it means that people have really figured out a groove, people are charging what they feel that they're worth but at the same time, it should be very inspiring to people just starting out. Because if they do this math and they figure out their time and they figure out their hourly rates and then they charge according to that, they're going to be maybe at the lower end of what many professional calligraphers already charge, that's where they should be. You don't want to be known as the cheap calligrapher. So possibly that was rambling a bit too much.

**[0:14:35.9] RP:** No.

**[0:14:36.1] CS:** No, not at all.

**[0:14:37.0] MST:** That's where I tell people to start.

**[0:14:38.3] RP:** So fascinating. I think we need like a survey for every industry, honestly.

**[0:14:44.5] MST:** I think so too. Graphic designers have been doing this for decades and I hadn't realized how valuable it was to me as a graphic designer until I was in this industry that has nothing of the sort. You know, when you're a graphic designer and you just graduated

school and you charge \$75 an hour in America, some clients will blink and say, “Wow, that’s a lot,” but most won’t.

In fact, if you market yourself on some sort of website that aggregates lots of different graphic designers, \$75 an hour is pretty low. I’m not here advocating for specific hourly rates that people should charge, but what I am saying is that there is an industry standard and a sense of respect in the graphic design community that has been created by the fact that pricing is, in a sense, standardized.

It is drilled into graphic designers in school not to give away their work for free. It is drilled into graphic designers that licensing rights costs extra money, logo designs are not the same as designing a poster. Because the work is purely commercial; it is artistic but it is commercial at its core. Calligraphy is an art form that is also very commercial at its core. As much as it is artistic and the art of it is beautiful and that’s where the practice goes, monetizing it makes it commercial, automatically.

We are automatically types of graphic designers even if we only work by hand and never bring our work into the computer. There’s a lot for calligraphers to learn from the way that graphic designers have gone about setting up their market and creating a really strong industry and community.

[BREAK]

**[0:16:21.7] CS:** How would it feel if someone laid out a business plan, a road map or some kind of strategy that would get you started and get you closer to the goals that you dream of accomplishing in your business? Well, Reina and I actually have done this. All you have to do to get this totally free resource is head to [creativeempire.co](http://creativeempire.co) and click on “free workbook”. We will deliver to you 50 of our most potent powerful strategies and proven tactics to getting our businesses visible, booked and profitable.

If you would like to have this in your business for totally free, you can grab that at [creativeempire.co](http://creativeempire.co). We’ll see you there.

[INTERVIEW CONTINUED]

**[0:17:05.0] CS:** That's so interesting. I mean, all of this is really good for everybody that's listening. But what do you do about — What I've noticed is that a lot of people entering the market, there's a couple of things, so let's tackle these one-by-one because they're not like super related but for example, one of the things that a lot of people struggle with is, you know, I love that you said don't compare yourself to everybody else out there, set your own prices first, because that's crucial.

But one of the things that I've seen a lot of people experiencing and even fortunate to be doing this for a long time now. A lot of people are entering, a lot of people are learning from you and from other resources, they're getting into this, they're doing calligraphy, it's becoming something that takes over and possibly is looking like a full time career.

The problem though that I see a lot of young calligraphers, and young in the sense of business not age necessarily, dealing with is that they feel like they're too late to the game at this point. Two years ago it was still really hard to find any resources and so they were all pretty much self-taught. There were very few resources out there and now there's so many resources out there that it's kind of like photography when digital cameras were invented.

How does somebody balance, feeling like they're too late to the game, like they have to learn everything yesterday because they're already competing with all of this market saturation that they maybe perceive and it's not really there. You know, what kinds of things could they be doing that are helping them instead of living in this place of fear or desperation or?

**[0:18:39.5] MST:** Right, very good point. This is something I too encounter a lot with students and people asking for my career advice and number one, first and foremost thing I will say is, hone your talent. Every time that you scroll through Instagram and you scroll through your blog feed and you start to feel down that you are not as good as other calligraphers and, "Why am I not so successful?" And, "Gosh, my pictures don't look that good."

Close your browser, quit your app, put down your phone and go to your desk and practice calligraphy. Calligraphy at its core, you are going to be hired partly because you — you're going

to be hired initially partly because you should have good social media, an amazing photographs and an easy to use website. But you're going to be rehired and you're going to become well-known because you're really good at calligraphy.

I know I keep coming back to this graphic design comparison but it's true. Graphic design, and like you said actually, digital photography, right? These are industries that are artistic and commercial and are flooded. The resources out there are flooded, the number of graphic designers and photographers and in a way now, calligraphers is flooding the market and the way you stand out is to be really good and there's this — of course there's this immense stress in our society right now that I should have learned yesterday and why can't I hone my skill faster?

It's an unfortunate reality that you can't. You cannot become an amazing calligrapher overnight but you can become an amazing calligrapher slowly and steadily. Slow and steady will win this race for you. Because I see lots of calligraphers making the mistake, well intentioned calligraphers, people with great talent, making the mistake of investing more time or as much time at least in marketing as in sitting down every day and practicing.

Like an instrument, like photography, like all sorts of skills and, you know, I like the quote, "Remember why you started." I love that quote and that very simple quote. You picked up a calligraphy pen for the first time, not because you thought, "Maybe I can make a career of calligraphy." You picked it up for the first time because you're attracted to calligraphy and you like it and you probably kept practicing it because it's really hard, you probably kept practicing it because you really liked it.

For the most part, the people who are feeling this kind of stress and feeling overwhelmed by the market are people who have sort of lost their passion for why they started and understandably are feeling a push, an urge to get their business out there and get more clients and more followers and all of that. But it is not a fast process for anyone, for no one and it's hard to accept but sometimes you have to step back, refocus on your art form, throw yourself into it, make it all yours, don't worry about imitating the popular trends you see in other people, make your own art, make it super good, critique yourself and then make it even better than that, get amazing photos of it, post it on the internet and your success will come.

**[0:21:49.0] RP:** I love that. I resonate with that slow but steady method so much in terms of like the success doesn't come over night that you have to hone your craft and you really have to love on that crafts so much that you get better and better and it doesn't matter what profession you're really in, right?

Whether it's calligraphy or — I'm just thinking about, I just took up ice skating and this is not anything related to my business but it's something that I want to get good at and I have to get on the ice in order to get good and so you have to show up to do the work I think is the point. You can't charge those bigger, higher prices if your work doesn't make...

**[0:22:29.3] CS:** If it's not consistent.

**[0:22:30.7] RP:** Right, exactly. I appreciate you saying that.

One of the things that I know I wanted to touch on because we haven't had anyone on our podcast yet that I think identifies as a freelancer, can we talk a little bit about that world? We've kind of been tip toeing around that. Can you tell us what the, I don't know if there's an official definition or what, between how you see free lancers versus small business owner identity difference or held their different in business structure?

**[0:23:01.3] MST:** Sure. The most obvious difference of course is that my whole company is just me. I'm often asked, you know, "Why don't you expand and why don't you bring on another person into your company?" The very easy answer to that is, I don't want to. I love that I am 100% my own boss and I'm not the boss of anyone else. I don't have a boss and I'm not a boss, except for being a boss of myself.

But, I thrive in this particular setup and I crafted my career specifically knowing my personality and knowing that this is how I do best. Yeah, all of the client intake that I do, all of the advertising, finding all of my clients, that's on me, doing all of my work 100% on me, I don't outsource almost anything that I do unless it relates with web programming, and I only have as much work as I can personally, physically do.

In that sense, There is a cap to how much my business can grow, there's a very serious cap. I do find myself turning down jobs or thinking to myself when I'm working with a big client, "I'm not liking this direction that I'm going with this job, with this client and this is going to eat up half of my year and what portfolio pieces am I going to get from that?"

That's stressful sometimes, but at the end of the day, I still have the ultimate control over what I do and I'm very fortunate that I built this side job — it started as a side job for me when I worked at a graphic design firm — that I built this side job slowly and steadily and took in a bunch of clients and sort of managed to do a lot of work that I wasn't exactly the focus that I was most interested in.

Slowly crafted a client base that pretty closely resembles my dream. I'm very lucky in that regard. So a small business owner I think spends time thinking about either expanding or just sort of the size of their business and what their scope is. I have spent almost no time thinking about that because I know already, it is my own limits and that's it.

**[0:25:03.7] RP:** So fascinating. How do you find your jobs? I'm sorry, Christina. Do you have a questions?

**[0:25:06.7] CS:** Yeah, no, go for it. I was going to ask like yeah, how do you plan for the future when it sounds like it's kind of variable which is good and bad.

**[0:25:16.1] MST:** It is good and bad and how I plan for the future is — that is a question lots of freelancers ask and it's really terrifying and this is another side topic that I'm not going to get too much into. In the United States, it can be especially terrifying and you realize that more and more when you live abroad, as I do, in the sense that job security, having official employment, I mean that in the legal sense. Employment has some padding to it that being a freelancer will never have in the United States and some other countries.

That's a risk and that's a risk that I took for 10 years as a freelancer in the United States that everything from finding my own health insurance to knowing that I am not building a pension, I don't have the same kind of opportunities that some people employed in a company have. So that's terrifying and there's no way around it and it's something freelancers should talk about a

lot more. Because I'm not saying we all need support groups for it because it's really upsetting but for some people, it really is, it really gets terrifying.

But if we admit that there is more that goes on behind what I call "the lens", if we zoom out from our Instagram lives and look at the actually nitty gritty daily life of being a freelancer and being your own boss 100% and strip away anything good about it and just look at the worst parts for a second, which a lot of us don't like to do or admit. What is the worst part of my job? Health insurance. That's an easy answer, right? I think a lot of people have maybe not the same answer but they have a pretty quick answer for that.

It's much harder for me to say what's the best part of my job because there are so many awesome things about it. The worst part of my job is job security and insurance, period. It's so easy for me. I meet freelancers who say similar things to this all the time and yet, when we say these things to each other, so often there is this bizarre surprise that comes over us. Like, "Oh, really? For you too?"

Of course for them too. I mean, if it were easy for us to have this kind of security or this kinds of cushions, we're smart enough to have done it if we can setup a business, we can setup this other kind of level of job security if it were possible but it's not. We shouldn't be surprised that other people feel it, we should talk about it a bit more because it's not something we're doing wrong in being freelancers and I think personally, my wishing, hopeful side is that if more freelancers did talk about it, maybe more things would come about to help freelancers with the struggle.

There are already some great resources, I will say that. The Freelancers Union is one that I'll give a shout out to that's pretty amazing and helpful for freelancers but the surprise that I hear is what's most striking to me always, when I say to anyone, "Well of course you feel nervous about the job security and the future. Of course, full stop."

**[0:28:18.5] RP:** I think for any person who is self-employed too, that is also very scary. So I want to echo that. I think a lot of people hesitate to take the leap from full time employment where somebody else is paying for health insurance to doing it on your own, that's one of the biggest, I think, hindrances of people taking that leap so thanks for calling that out. Let's flip over

a little bit because you live abroad and I think you live a different life than a lot of us do in the United States.

I'm just curious what has freelancing and having this business allowed you to do? You said that there's lots of things that you love about your business, I'm just curious what kind of opportunities have come since being a freelancer? You've published a book, you've done a lot of different cool projects, give us what's possible.

**[0:29:08.5] MST:** Sure. When I started out as a freelancer I knew that I wanted to make sure that my client base allowed me to be mobile, that I could take my computer pretty much anywhere and my desk and my calligraphy pens and do my job. So first and foremost, I started to advertise my calligraphy outside of where I lived. Of course I started my advertising in LA where I was living at the time but I really pushed hard to make sure that I was accessible to people from all over the country.

So I became known as someone you could ship your envelopes to and I would do them and send them back to you and I made that part of my job. I wasn't just looking for local things. When I choose to write my book, of course that was very liberating because I was very fortunate to have a fantastic literary agent and work with a fantastic publisher who allowed me to have a lot of freedom come from writing my book, freedom in many ways.

It opened great new doors for me and it allowed me to take sort of a break from some of my client work, to just focus on writing my book and then when it came out, I just felt like I had this renewed focus that I really like teaching and I like writing about calligraphy and helping other people learn calligraphy. So I also added teaching to my roster and then I started to travel to teach and now that I live in Greece, I travel back to the United States at least twice a year, and every time I am there I teach at least four classes, sometimes six or eight on my visit.

Here on Athens, I do no teaching in public. I don't have public classes but some private lessons and I've travelled elsewhere in Europe to teach as well. But for the most part, my days consists of me sitting at my desk doing hands on calligraphy and graphic design on my computer and working with clients in all corners of the world for hand-lettered, mostly hand-lettered projects that can be delivered digitally.

That's how I've directed my business and I love it. This is exactly where I wanted to take it doing things like logo designing and book cover designing and things like that so that I could utilize my hands, utilize the computer side of graphic design, and do it all on the internet. So I'm very lucky. I am sitting here smiling to myself because when I say it out loud, I feel so fortunate because it's true. This is how I wanted it to be and there are downsides, as we said, to every job but I have created this trajectory in the business and I'm liking where it is now and it gives me a lot of mobility.

**[0:31:41.5] CS:** And it hasn't gone unnoticed. As you know, I am just looking at the bottom of your about page and the features that you've had, the articles that you've written, the Martha Stewart Weddings as your client, Fendi as your client. I mean, all of these amazing features and successes, what does it feel like? Because for a lot of our audience they haven't had that yet. They feel like those are the things that they need to get.

So I am curious to know, what does it actually feel like to be working with Martha Stewart Weddings as a client? What does it actually feel like to be called out on Brit + Co and all of these, Design\*Sponge, these huge features that you've had, what does that actually feel like?

**[0:32:24.2] MST:** Well it's immensely flattering and humbling. I will say this, and I've said this about a couple of other aspects of what I've discussed, but to people who have not had the big break with the big client, I've been approached yes and worked for Martha Stewart Weddings and Fendi and Jay Jill and many awesome companies and yes, it feels great and it feels awesome that they've come to me and it is a sign of success and I am not trying to diminish that but I get sad. Frankly, I get this sense of sadness when I hear some of my students or people who email me just talk about how with their meagre client base they're not as good.

Let me start by saying that the calligraphers I most admire on the planet earth some of them don't even have a website. So some of the calligraphers that I admire most in the world don't have this kind of job, these kinds of clients and they don't strive for it and that's okay. If you strive for it, that's fantastic and you should strive for it and the market is getting more flooded and I admit it is harder to get your name out there and to get yourself noticed but it can be

debilitating to feel a sense of inadequacy or inferiority because you're looking at what other people have accomplished and you feel that you haven't been able to achieve the same.

It was almost a revelation to me when I decided that I'm basically going to stop looking at Instagram. This is a big thing for me one day. I said, "I'm going to put down Instagram. I'm not going to look at Instagram anymore at least for a month. I'm going to see if it makes me a happier person," and it did and it's because the people on Instagram that I looked at were people who I really love, absolutely love but I couldn't work all day and sit at my computer and simultaneously be reminded of other people's careers.

Many people can and that's good but if you find yourself feeling like you're striving for something that you can't quite achieve. And it's affecting in any way, your workflow or your ability to work towards achieving that goal, cut out whatever it is hindering you, these comparisons.

**[0:34:37.0] RP:** Can I just jump in on that? I feel like we look at these people to start the market research cycle like "Oh I'm just researching right now" and then we continue to follow them and things pop up like the emotional niggers, the worriers and the niggers and the anxiety and all of the haters that come out for us and then when those things come out, it's no longer market research.

**[0:35:00.6] MST:** Right.

**[0:35:01.2] RP:** It's us continuing to perpetuate this thing that, "I am not enough, I have to continue to see these people because they're doing better than me," and like you're saying, cut them out because it's not personal. You need to take care of yourself.

**[0:35:15.3] MST:** Right, you need to take care of yourself and maybe start by just saying, "Okay I'm only going to browse Instagram and blogs on Saturdays and I am only going to do that for one month" but it can actually help your mental health so much. It is so hard to put your creative energy into your own work and put yourself into that work and give your work a personal touch that is something you create and that you like at the end of the day. When your mind is filled with imagery of other people.

Whether its beautiful stuff that you admire and you look at for inspiration or it's other stuff that you're scrolling through on the internet, there is a point where we get overloaded and I found it to be incredibly helpful to tell myself that it's okay not to be up to date anymore with every single thing in my industry. I'll check in on it once a week and that's enough for me right now because my creativity gets hindered.

I lose time every single day when I have to switch brains to do my creative work and then browse around the creative work that other people are doing. So that's one thing I would say and the other thing I would say is that it's incredibly flattering to me that I've done work with some really amazing clients but the most satisfying jobs that I've done are also not the ones that stand out on my about page.

Those ones that stand out on my about page do help me get other jobs, and that's just the reality and that's great. But some of the most satisfying fulfilling ones for me have been jobs that are clients that no one has ever heard of and so that's what I strive for when I take on new work now. Is just "is this something that I'll find fulfilling? Is this a kind of job that I would like to do?" Yes? Okay, then I'm really excited about it.

**[0:37:04.7] RP:** So good. So if somebody were at the very, very beginning if you were to go back to day one Molly building her creative empire, what advice would you give her?

**[0:37:16.1] MST:** That's a very good question. When I was starting out, I had a very narrow vision for my side job. I thought I was going to be this graphic designer at a design firm forever and that because calligraphy didn't fit in with my day job, I would have to have it somehow on the side. So I situated my life in that way. I started at a time when there were not a lot of modern calligraphers and there wasn't this deluge in social media that there is today.

So in that way, I was lucky that I honed my own vision for my career and my calligraphy but if I had to do it over again knowing what I know now, I actually may have taken a little bit longer before I started to monetize my art because I went through a period in the beginning where I had that sense of inadequacy that we were talking about just crushing self-confidence issues about every invoice that I sent out and I made big mistakes that I have learned from in terms of

what I charged and what kind of work I accidentally gave away not knowing that I had my copyright and things like that that I learned as I became a better graphic designer.

So I think I probably would tell my older self to just enjoy learning calligraphy for a little bit longer. Just make sure that I am so fully happy with doing it that if the jobs don't come, I'll still be happy. That the point of this what brings me happiness is not that I'm making money from it but that I am just doing it and that came over time, but for me came concurrently with learning. So while I wouldn't say that I regret that, if you're asking what I would do over again it might be that.

**[0:39:07.5] RP:** So good. Is there anything else that you want to tell somebody who might be on this journey right now just a little word of encouragement before we wrap it up?

**[0:39:16.6] MST:** Sure, absolutely. I would say, you can absolutely make a career doing calligraphy in this day and age. Not only is the market overrun with calligraphers but calligraphy is being utilized more. It's not like there are more calligraphers and the same number of jobs for calligraphers, it's quite the opposite. The jobs for calligraphers are expanding left and right.

So the advice I give people on this journey now is broaden your horizons. Think about all the ways that calligraphy can be used. Think about all of the cool not just products but types of campaigns and styles and brush lettering and pointed pen lettering and modern calligraphy and traditional calligraphy and all of that and find what you like the best. Not what's most popular today, what you like the best. Hone that, make it top notch and not only will the clients come but someone will love it and want it and there is a need for that art somewhere.

**[0:40:17.5] RP:** I love it.

**[0:40:18.4] CS:** Thank you so much, Molly. Where can everybody find you, where can they connect with you on social media, what's the best way to just enjoy your books and your platforms?

**[0:40:28.2] MST:** My company is called Plurabelle Studio and my website and social media are all the same, plurabellestudio.com, on Instagram and Facebook you can find me @plurabellestudio and through my website there's a pretty noticeable link up in the top that's

called “my book” and on there you can find out how to get my book in English, Spanish, Chinese, on every continent of the globe, however you want it and in my shop, you can sign up for my upcoming workshops too.

**[0:41:00.1] CS:** Awesome, thank you so much. Everybody out there, I hope Molly has inspired you a little bit today and that you would go out there and build your creative empire.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

**[00:41:10.0] ANNOUNCER:** Are you ready to build your own empire? For more information, show notes, downloads, and tips on how to do it, head to [www.creativeempire.co](http://www.creativeempire.co), where you can find out more about this week’s episode and the two lovely ladies behind it all, encouraging you to build your own creative empire.

If you enjoyed this week’s show, it would mean so much to Reina and Christina if you could take two minutes to go to iTunes and leave a review. It’s a little thing that makes a big difference for the show.

[END]