

HEY?! THAT'S MY CAB

finding a way in photography

Van Ditthavong

for you.

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GROWING UP.

I think one of the weirdest things about growing up (besides eventually finding out that your parents are human after all) - is discovering that clichés are actually truer than you think. It's funny, now when someone blurts out a cliché - I find myself saying, "Hey?! That's right."

CLICHÉ OF THE DAY:

IT TAKES YEARS TO BE AN OVERNIGHT
SUCCESS.

MOVING FORWARD.

It's inevitable to have moments of insecurity, confusion, despair, worthlessness, doubt, and frustration. It's fine - feel it, remember it and then move on.

CLICHÉ OF THE DAY:

IF IT WERE EASY, EVERYONE WOULD BE
DOING IT.

GAME, SET, AND MATCH.

I love watching sports. What I like best is seeing how athletes respond under the most intense pressure situations. It's just fascinating. Whatever the outcome - win or lose - it seems performance and execution on game day depend on laborious preparation, study, and visualization. Athletes and photographers (well... all types of artists I guess) are not so different. To be at our best, to be able to handle adverse situations, to deal with unexpected events, to make our work come alive - we all need to prepare, study, and visualize as much as possible.

CLICHÉ OF THE DAY:

PRACTICE. PRACTICE. PRACTICE.

THE BIG PICTURE.

There's always something that pops up. You need a root canal, new tires, the computer crashed, equipment stolen, hot water heater broke, car battery died, your package was damaged, babysitter didn't show up, traffic, mail was lost, happy hour everyday ... and the list goes on and on. This is life. These are everyday occurrences and they happen to everyone. Don't let them be excuses. Follow your goals, and things that pop up will be easier to handle.

CLICHÉ OF THE DAY:

DON'T SWEAT THE SMALL STUFF.

LONG WAY UP.

Do you ever get that feeling like you're not as good as you think? I do - and quite often as a matter of fact... especially when I stumble upon another photographer's website with killer work. Don't get me wrong, I get inspired but somehow that mountain always seems to get a little higher and higher. There are two ways I guess I can deal with it -

ONE: crawl up in a ball and rock myself to sleep

or

TWO: grab that camera and those lights and put one foot in front of the other.

CLICHÉ OF THE DAY:

IT'S THE JOURNEY NOT THE DESTINATION.

MAKING YOUR OWN TIME.

Here's the battle facing a young photographer - to produce work that defines your vision and to gain a certain level of acceptance for that work. I'm starting to realize more and more that we often get frustrated because we start entering contests, submitting proposals for grants, or exhibiting on gallery walls just way too early. Our expectation for greatness or opportunity often is clouded by other people's perception of time and aesthetics.

I think we sometimes get caught up in "So and so won this award when he was 25," "She won the prestigious X,Y,Z grant for her photo essay, and she's only 23." Good for them! But how about you? It doesn't matter if you're 18, 35, 58, or 88 - we should follow our own rhythms.

We should spend more energy on finding our own weaknesses and strengths (then work on our **STRENGTHS**). Discover a subject that is **TRULY** fascinating so it becomes all consuming and you can't shut up about it. Be your toughest critic and value the sound advice from a good editor. Learn, absorb, and be patient. Don't shoot for the curator or photo editor or art buyer or gallery owner or creative director (unless they are paying you!).

Shoot for yourself.

So how do we know if we are ready to enter contests, apply for grants and exhibit for shows? When we don't care if we've won or lost.

CLICHÉ OF THE DAY:

DON'T JUST SPEND ALL YOUR TIME
DOING, WITHOUT FIRST BEING.

DON'T LET THE EXCITEMENT FADE.

I love the sensation of discovering a new idea or project that I absolutely can't wait to start. Sketches are made, names are written down, and the plan of attack starts to formulate. I love the whole process from preparation to execution to editing to "I think I've looked at these too much." New ideas are great and rejuvenating, but the most important thing is seeing it through - and that takes work. You don't want to be known as the photographer with awesome ideas. You want to be known as the photographer that gets things done.

CLICHÉ OF THE DAY:

FINISH WHAT YOU START.

CASH FLOW.

You hear everyone yapping in your ear - “it’s a tough time to be a photographer,” “we are headed into a recession,” “even the top commercial photographers are shooting weddings,” “magazine rates haven’t increased in 30 years,” “ad budgets are smaller,” “digital photography has made everyone and their brother a photographer,” “it’s expensive to always keep up with technology,” “they said they can get someone to shoot it for a fraction of what you charge,” “art directors are shooting campaigns now,” “I’ve sent out promos and no one’s calling,” and so on and so on and so on.

Find out your REAL cost of doing business. Trim your overhead as much as possible. Embrace the challenge. Focus. Prepare. Execute. Survive.

CLICHÉ OF THE DAY:

WHO CARES WHAT EVERYONE ELSE SAYS?

IT NEVER STOPS.

Remember how determined we were when we wanted learn how to ride a bike, snap our fingers, whistle with command, and blow the biggest Hubba Bubba bubble? Remember how many lawns were cut and cars were washed when we wanted those new sneakers, those cool jeans, and that skateboard? We've been setting goals and working for what we wanted ever since we were little. Why stop now?

CLICHÉ OF THE DAY:

IT ALL STARTS WITH A DREAM.

REALITY.

You have your entire life to make art. You have one month to make rent. So:

- saying no is OK
- price accordingly
- know your market
- learn to respond to criticism
- make due until you reach a subconscious level of competence with your equipment/tools
- improve, innovate and produce
- give back to the community
- keep notes

CLICHÉ OF THE DAY:

KEEP YOUR EYES ON THE PRIZE.

USE THE FORCE.

How good are your gut instincts? Do you always pick the right grocery line? Are the movies you rent usually good or stinkers? Do you always turn left when you should turn right? Are you glad you kept that secret? Do you regret calling off the relationship? Should you have said “Hello”? Did you wait too long? Go too early? Did you find what you were looking for?

CLICHÉ OF THE DAY:

ANY DECISION IS BETTER THAN NO
DECISION.

BE NICE.

You always hear about those photographers who are just a pain to work with and for – they throw food across the room because the catering was wrong, they scream at assistants because they're talking to the model/subject, they even curse the UPS guy who just pulled up in his truck. People excuse this behavior by saying “but oh, their work is so great. He/She is a true artist.” Don't be this photographer - even if your work can back it up.

Creating an atmosphere of negativity and fear is the worst thing you can do. Everyone looks to the photographer for direction but no one wants to see a flustered, insecure, big-headed a-hole. How do you expect to get everyone to work to their full potential, to be more creative, to feel involved with THAT kind of attitude?

CLICHÉ OF THE DAY:

IT'S NOT ALWAYS ABOUT YOU.

ON SUCCESS.

Give. Give more. Give back. Give everything you have.

CLICHÉ OF THE DAY:

THERE'S ALWAYS ROOM AT THE TOP.

SOLVING PUZZLES.

I'm always trying to nail down my process, perfect it, and then break it. To me, this is the cycle of learning and evolving. As part of this cycle, my process is always changing depending on things like technical issues, time issues, equipment issues, subject issues, location issues, color issues, compositions issues, and my own head-space issues. But ultimately, my goal is to create an interesting image... really, an interesting story. I like to go into a situation as prepared as I can. I have a general plan of how I would like the shoot to go and how I would like to interact with the subject - but usually things don't go as planned. And that's the best part. Each situation and shoot is different (even you yourself may be different). The elements and clues you are given as a photographer always change - even if you've worked with your subjects before. That's the beauty and challenge of photography.

CLICHÉ OF THE DAY:

YOU LEARN MORE FROM YOUR FAILURES.

THE START OF IT ALL.

I keep a book of ideas. No matter how bad or small the idea is - I write it down. For a while I tried using a digital voice recorder but it's not as useful as my book. There's something about writing things down, plus I can sketch things out if I have to. In this book - I write down project ideas, shoot ideas, lighting ideas, or anything that comes to mind.

Here's an idea I had written down a few years ago: Make T-shirts with my logo on it and sell it for \$20 bucks.

I did make these T-shirts (sold 4) - and I still have them in a box of sitting in the corner of the studio. Oh, well.

CLICHÉ OF THE DAY:

YOU DON'T KNOW UNTIL YOU TRY.

STEPPING BACK ONCE IN A WHILE.

Marketing, promotions, cold-calling, taxes, press releases, e-mails, promos, rent - this can get overwhelming. Sometimes it's good to just step away for a little bit. Just step back and breathe. Creativity comes and goes - so wait for the next ride. The phone stops ringing - so grab a book or some crayons. Ideas are stagnant - so go on a road trip. Think of it as mental flossing - cleaning up the little bits of frustration and clearing your mind. Nothing is more important than having a clear vision.

CLICHÉ OF THE DAY:

**THE ONLY THINGS YOU CAN CONTROL ARE
YOUR THOUGHTS AND YOUR ACTIONS.**

GETTING INSTINCTIVE.

There are many components involved in making a strong image - like subject, location, framing, lighting, color, use of space, expression, etc. It seems that all elements are equally important for the final product. Sometimes I like to think of these components as ingredients in a recipe. You need a dash of this, a cup of that, a teaspoon of this and viola - you have a beautiful dish. Unfortunately, it's not always this formulaic. Like many of us have found out, following a recipe doesn't always guarantee a magnificent culinary experience. There's a bit more to it.

I think we are constantly training our eyes and minds to become more instinctive. I think we learn through experience and practice what combination of things work for us. One of the areas I have been focusing on more is the use of color in the image. Developing a great understanding of color is extremely important. Like light, color can have a great impact on mood and feeling. Warm colors, cool colors, complementary colors, primary colors - find out what feels right for you. There are no rules (just opportunities) with color. Develop color palettes and store them away.

You can then break them out at your disposal depending on what story you want to tell and how you want to tell it.

Go to museums or galleries and stick your nose right in those paintings - see and observe how the artists mix and use color. Scour old magazines, illustration books, comic books, and clothing catalogs - these are all great sources of inspiration.

CLICHÉ OF THE DAY:

NEVER STOP ASKING QUESTIONS.

DON'T BUY INTO IT.

It's important to know when to keep the blinders on. Well at least try to. As we all forge ahead in building our name in the photography world, nothing can be more frustrating than producing work based on what the industry wants. Granted folks have made a comfortable living producing images that look or feel like others (i.e. - the Jim Fiscus look, the Dave Hill look, the Jill Greenberg look, the Alec Soth look, the Avedon look, and so on) - don't follow the trend. Promote your unique perspective. Know what others are doing but find you own place and stake a claim. Be aware. Realize there are tons of awesome photographers out there - but by working harder and being more persistent you can break away from the pack.

CLICHÉ OF THE DAY:
HANG IN THERE.

A CLEAR UNDERSTANDING.

Having a direction is not the same as having a goal. “I will become a better photographer/artist” is a direction and not a goal. “I will make more money” is a direction not a goal. A goal is a clearly defined, measurable objective. You can either say you’ve met your goal or you didn’t. “I do work for the nation’s most popular magazines like ESPN, Esquire, and Entertainment Weekly” is a goal. “I earn \$50,000 through editorial work and \$50,000 through advertising work” is a goal. “I show at the Peer Gallery in NYC” is a goal. “I have 10 images that are exhibition worthy” is a goal. Why is clarity important?

Because you want to avoid the illusion of progress. You want to know what to strive for so you can focus. At the end of it all, accomplishments are more fun to remember than regret.

CLICHÉ OF THE DAY:
STAY THE COURSE.

a different route.

Routines get in the way of creativity - I am sure of it. It's great to implement when learning and mastering the technical side of things, but doing something the same way over and over gets me down. All of a sudden ideas become dull and boredom seeps in - which means negativity is just around the corner. What's worse is your energy deflates. In order to create new and fresh ideas, you need positive energy and excitement. The beat down starts when you are stuck in your routine and you can't break out of it - or at least think you can't. So start small. If you are right-handed, brush your teeth with your left. If you get to work using Main Street, try the Elm Street route next time. Always a softbox and beauty dish user, well start using grids, snoots, cinefoil, barebulbs, gels, etc...

CLICHÉ OF THE DAY:

CHANGE IT UP.

BE HAPPY.

Don't worry. The world won't pass you by. Focus on improving, learning, being flexible and being kind. There's no need to get riled up about how fast technology is moving, how no one notices your work, or how time flies... You've already beaten the odds. You've won. Trying to make a living as a photographer/artist is a difficult decision - so pat yourself on the back and smile.

You'll get there eventually.

CLICHÉ OF THE DAY:

IF YOU CAN'T CONTROL THE WIND,
ADJUST YOUR SAIL.

ONE FOR YOURSELF.

Being a professional means understanding your clients' needs and doing everything possible to deliver a handsome product on time and on budget. Being an artist is producing work that is creative and original. To be original means showing something new (but "new" scares most people because it's unfamiliar). You have a studio to run so you can't always be doing everything you're interested in. So when the client is paying and when they want something done a particular way, you do it that way and you do it to the best of your ability. However, before the day is done - always shoot one for yourself. It will make you happy.

CLICHÉ OF THE DAY:

MONEY CAN'T BRING YOU HAPPINESS,
BUT HAPPINESS CAN BRING YOU MONEY.

WALKING THE WALK.

A good way to get ahead is to:

under promise and over deliver!

CLICHÉ OF THE DAY:

KNOW YOUR LIMITS.

ON MOMENTUM.

I think a lot about momentum. How to change it. How to ride it. How to build it - and how to weather the storm. In this business, setbacks are aplenty while rewards seem few. It's just easy to dwell on the negatives and even easier to feel sorry for yourself. But in order for progress to happen you're going to have to learn how to deal with both. Focus on all the good things you've accomplished no matter how big or small. Collect them, remember them, store them, and strive for more. Setting little goals and meeting them will help create your own positive momentum. As for setbacks - they always happen. Just don't let it slow you down.

CLICHÉ OF THE DAY:

GREATER THINGS WILL FOLLOW.

YOUR BUSINESS VISION.

It's easy to float around and have your head in the clouds. But growing a creative services business requires more than vision - it requires initiative, organization and a rock solid plan. So once you:

- Develop your brand - (i.e. your unique qualities/shooting style)
- Establish your goals + objectives that are specific, measureable, actionable, realistic and time-specific - (i.e. increase editorial commissions this year by 20%)
- Know your market and competitors - (i.e. environmental portraiture for national magazines)
- Define your strategies - (i.e. grow your commercial business through advertising, personal selling, sales promotion, public relations)
- Develop a budget - (i.e. a first quarter campaign budget for direct mail = \$2000)

- Execute your plan and measure your success and failures (i.e. 2nd quarter Direct Mail promotion with “Laughing Baby” received 30% less calls than the 1st quarter “Smiling Girl” image)

You persevere and do it all over again.

CLICHÉ OF THE DAY:

LUCK IS WHEN PREPARATION AND
OPPORTUNITY MEET.

KEEPING BALANCE.

When the plane is late, when the computer is acting weird, when the phone's not ringing, when the strobes stop working, when the assignments all come at once - I like to close my eyes and imagine that I'm skateboarding and flying off a ramp with one hand on the board and one hand in the air. This calms me down and makes me smile. Maybe it's because I can't skate but wish I could.

CLICHÉ OF THE DAY:

THE SHOW MUST GO ON.

IT'S JUST PHOTOGRAPHY.

In my first year of business, I was having one of those days where things weren't going right - so I decided to give my brother a call. I was frustrated about how the client was unreasonable, frustrated where the shoot was headed, and frustrated about little things out of my control. All he said to me was, "No one is going to die because they don't get their pictures. You should be thankful that you aren't in a profession where things are really life or death. Imagine being a doctor."

CLICHÉ OF THE DAY:

SMILE.

DON'T LISTEN.

Have you ever had people say give it up - it's not going to work? Or - Get a real job - it's time to be responsible now. Or do you know how many don't make it?

I have (and sometimes it's myself saying it), but I eventually would counter - there are people out there doing it, why can't I?

CLICHÉ OF THE DAY:

IF YOU AIM AT NOTHING, YOU'LL HIT IT
EVERY TIME.

FALLING INTO THE HOLE.

I use to think that the goal of making a portrait is capturing someone's "essence." Photography was a way to find the REAL you - a search for truth. However, even though we may eventually find these truths - it is not always fact. It has taken me some time to come to terms with this revelation.

For some reason I didn't want to think a photographer had that much control. I guess in my mind, if I was so influential, I wasn't being sympathetic to the subject. I wanted the entire sitting to be a complete collaboration. I wanted photography to be a more natural, more organic process - which when I think about it now, is a huge contradiction in itself.

So today, as I continue to fall into this massive black hole known as Photography - when I begin to make a portrait I am beginning to tell a story. It is my story. It is my truth. I am still completely aware and sympathetic to the subject - it just won't be their story.

I am fine with that. I am fine that viewers will sometimes learn more about the photographer than the sitter.

CLICHÉ OF THE DAY:

TAKE A LOOK IN THE MIRROR.

USE YOUR PEN.

When it comes to your career and growing it - write things down.

- Your goals
- Your business plan
- Your yearly marketing/promotional campaign schedules
- Your to do lists
- Your ideas
- Your deadlines
- Your debts
- Your fears
- Your accomplishments
- Your vacation plans/wishes
- Your friends and family members' birthdays
- Your next personal project

Why? Because when things are dark and there's no light - you'll at least know you're headed in the right direction.

CLICHÉ OF THE DAY:

KEEP ON WALKING.

HOW THE STORY BEGINS.

There are always a bunch of things flying through my mind when I tackle an assignment (self-imposed or commissioned). Most importantly, I want to establish a place/scene. This is the foundation for my story I'm creating. The drama or mood that I'm looking for is determined by the lighting. So immediately I try to determine these things: 1. the quality of light (the varying degrees between harsh and soft light) 2. the color of light (different light sources creates different colors) 3. the contrast (this is the amount of lightness and darkness in the image).

Once these factors are determined - I then can decide what type of light modifiers I need (silver beauty dish, 7-inch reflector, collapsed umbrella, soft-box with 40 degree grid, gels, etc..). But sometimes you don't need a single thing, and the available light is just perfect. The way you answer all your lighting questions helps you determine your style.

CLICHÉ OF THE DAY:

LOOK BEFORE YOU LEAP.

A TIME TO REFLECT.

Reflection is good, it let's you examine where you've been and where you want to be - but sometimes I need to snap out of that state because I know myself. I'll be too cerebral and too stagnant... and that's never good for progress.

CLICHÉ OF THE DAY:

DON'T FEEL SORRY FOR YOURSELF.

ON MARKETING.

The more you produce, the more work you have, the more reasons to say, “Hello!”

CLICHÉ OF THE DAY:

COMMUNICATION IS EVERYTHING.

HAVE A REASON.

Poems are hard to write because every word counts. Every syllable and line creates a rhythm. In this case excess is generally not good. Creating images is no different. Every element (color, space, lines, subject, lighting) included should be there for a reason - even if it took two seconds to make or two months to develop.

CLICHÉ OF THE DAY:

GET TO THE POINT.

HOW TO MAKE IT.

Find out what drives you. Find what makes you want to get out of bed everyday. Fuel that desire to be the best you can with relentless belief in yourself. Embrace competition and enjoy others' success. Avoid jealousy or envy and hold on dearly to your passion. Never let that go. Shoot more - with lights or without lights. Work on composition, color, space, direction, lighting and make notes of your mistakes. Continue learning how to see - how to really SEE. Visualize as much as possible. Look ahead and keep going. Breathe.

CLICHÉ OF THE DAY:
ENJOY THE RIDE.

