

Dennis Nowakowski

LEARNING TO TATTOO BECOME A TATTOOIST

The easy way

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About the author

Dennis Nowakowski, born 1976 in Oberhausen NRW, unmarried without children, is a trained carpenter, media operator and tattooist. For many years he kept his head above water with jobs that would be useful for his career. At a young age he discovered his passion for painting and drawing. Comics sparked in him the passion to develop his own stories and to transform them into pictures and speech bubbles. The profession of carpenter gave him insights into technical drawings and perspectives which he was able to implement in his comics.

Later he worked as a show advertising designer, where light and presentation were important. Here, too, he adopted the knowledge he had learned for his private passion. Then came the retraining as a web designer, which was a huge leap forward. Modern media inspired him to new ideas and the implementation of his comic projects. Image processing programs, graphics tablet and the internet made it much easier to publish his own works.

Enthusiastic about his drawing achievements, a good friend took him by the hand in 1999 and initiated him into the basic knowledge of tattooing. From scratch, Dennis learned how to solder needles, apply colors and shades, use the machines correctly, change motifs and much more. The required starting capital and the amount of time needed was not to be underestimated. Previously trained on pork rind or synthetic skin, he eventually got his first customers, which required patience and perseverance. Free of charge and in his spare time his work developed into acceptable results, which attracted more and more people. Stressed by his regular work and the rush of new clients, Dennis took a creative break for half a year.

After the exclusion criterion of various people who simply wanted to be bribed for nothing, he continued with loyal customers who at least paid him for the

material and appreciated his work. So he learned how to deal with customers and their demands on tattoos. His work developed further. At the end of 2014 came the point where he wanted to change his career. So he asked his friend Harald, who had tattooed for over 30 years, if they would like to open a tattoo studio together. Enthusiastic about the idea, they got down to work. At the beginning of 2015 they opened their studio, i.e. Tattoo, in Oberhausen. After some stumbling blocks, which an independence brings with itself, the first year passed them by. More and more people became aware of Dennis' work. Sometimes even customers changed from Harald to him, who was quite happy with it, because his schedule was bursting at the seams.

A solid partnership developed, which still exists today. The former beginner and the veteran exchange their knowledge in a professional way and stand by each other faithfully in the service of the art of tattooing.

Introduction

Is it even possible to write a book about tattooing without visual aids? I was confronted with this question and, despite critical voices, I answered it with an unequivocal "Yes." If somebody wants to learn this profession, he should be able to visualize things. With novels or audio books it finally works, too. The only difference is to be able to visualize for yourself. If you are not able to do this, you cannot advise a client who has a very specific idea of his tattoo motif. If you look around in the internet or bookstores, you will find a lot of books, DVDs and Blu-Rays that deal with the topic of tattooing. Unfortunately at not very affordable prices, which discourages most buyers. Therefore I have set myself the goal to write a book that really everyone can afford.

Why this book?

Quite simply, I want to motivate young talents to get rid of their fears and unwaveringly follow a path that will possibly take them further. It is sad to see talented people degenerate because nobody takes them by the hand and promotes their talents.

"Better let it go, it's just a fad," or "You won't be able to live on it."

are only some of the sentences that take the courage away from ambitious people to take off professionally with their passion. Tattooing is a form of art that is becoming more and more popular, especially in Germany, and yet conservative people are belittled because they cling to the traditions of hard work, such as craftsmanship. Talented painters, co-drawers, musicians, writers or actors will have the dream to ever get a foothold with their passion.

"You'd better learn something smart, You've got to take over the company," or "These are dreams."

are the most common statements about the answer to your career choice. I don't want to denigrate solid professions, but I find it strange that there are no recognized training opportunities for exceptional jobs, such as tattooing. Is it just me, or does it perhaps say something about the backwardness of our country? But exactly here it shows who has the potential to become a tattoo artist and who doesn't. The first step always has to be taken by yourself. This also means to get away from the gossip of others who don't even know better. Those who do their job well, have no hobbies or dreams. These people take it upon themselves to decide about you and what you want to achieve. Scary are family members who laugh at you rather than support you. Distance yourself from these people and

concentrate on your goal. In this case you want to become a tattoo artist - and a really good one at that.

This requires a good portion of self-confidence, as with everything you do seriously. Arrogance is often confused with this characteristic. High-flyers are eventually brought back down to earth, even more, they clap their hands with full force and that's it. This must be avoided. Self-confident, nice and courteous is the motto of a lasting relationship between tattoo artist and customer. Even more important is the talent. Every would-be tattoo artist can order machines, colours, equipment somewhere and go for it. Anyone can open a tattoo studio. I repeat myself - it is not yet a recognized profession, which is why talentless people who then call themselves tattooists, shoot up like mushrooms and start to disfigure unsuspecting and obviously blind people. Which explains the phenomenon of tattoo shows on TV. Cover up shows everywhere you look. Every viewer just grabs his head when he sees and thinks something like this

"What idiots. Why do they lie down there voluntarily?"

But the cover up professionals will fix it, right? I will go into this later in more detail. Also on further problems and solutions, which expect you on the way to become a sought-after tattoo artist. The topics around machines, colors and techniques, I will deal with as detailed as possible. We deal with the right shop, independence, dealing with customers, the right advertising and much more. One more thing first. Not every tattoo artist who has been in the business for a long time will pat me on the shoulder and confirm everything I say here. I would be very disappointed if everyone would do it the way I do, stitch exactly the same style or express my opinion. We are all too different for that. Speaking of different. I deliberately refrain from making a distinction between tattooists and tattooists. Tattoo artist is a gender-neutral term for me, which is why I will only formulate it in this way. Just to prevent this Shitstorm from happening again. Everything here

written down is based on my experiences, which I could collect over the last years. This book is only meant as a guideline to encourage talents and to support them to go their own way.

This book is divided into two parts. Learning to tattoo and becoming a tattooist. A consciously chosen decision by me. After all, one must first learn every executive activity in order to be able to boast about it later. You are not a tattoo artist just because you own tattoo machines and colors. Also not because there are people who sit down voluntarily and let you work on them. If you do not bring the willingness and ambition to learn as much as possible about tattooing, you might as well leave it alone. After all, I want to reach as many people as possible, so that I can at least teach them the basic knowledge. Many terms and procedures will be repeated, because I rely on a subconscious conditioning. The more often you hear, see or read something, the better it is memorized. Similar to a film that you can speak along completely because you have seen it dozens of times. Since I'm such a film freak, I use many quotes to introduce different chapters. I also use various metho-den, which I have copied from well-known motivation trainers. In many parts of this book I will ask you to pause, to go into yourself and to ask yourself the right questions. This book should not only help you to become a good tattoo artist, but also to develop your personality. This is my declared goal, for you.

"Enjoy reading and hopefully learn."

I want to become a tattoo artist - How do I start?

"If you want to do something you've never done before, you have to do something you've never done before."

Congratulations, you've made a decision and you're going to go through with it. Two words will walk you steadily through this book.

"Hang in there."

Everyone stings differently

Everyone approaches a tattoo differently, otherwise it would be boring, too. Nobody should copy my approach one hundred percent. It wouldn't make sense. It's just a guide to help you understand the material. Both technically and humanly. You're the operative hand, not me. To do something different from me is completely correct, if it is easier for you and the work becomes even better. Now it is time to explore to what extent your abilities are sufficient to stick a needle into the skin of other people. All prospective tattoo artists see only the technical execution of a work such as machines, colors, matrix paper "tracing paper for motifs", outlines "contours", stitch depth, etc. They are keen on finally stabbing. Full of zest for action, they get going and overlook details that distinguish a professional from a newcomer. Very often young people come to our studio because they want to learn to tattoo. Unfortunately, time hardly allows to deal with them. Some tips and tricks are in there, but it frustrates me more and more to send these partly very gifted and grateful talents away. To hear that they were thrown out of other tattoo studios, literally chased away, I cannot understand with the best will in the world. In our industry, as in many others, there is a real power struggle for the status position in society. Everybody wants to be the best, does not tolerate any competition on the market and devalues other studios that actually do a very good job. One little look beyond the horizon

and they would know about a future employee who can make good money. Instead, you are frowned upon and thrown out. Unfortunately this is not a rarity. But this behaviour speaks volumes about the management qualities of these studios. You can safely turn your back on these people and laugh about it. They are exactly the same big-headed people, who later on are run away by the good tattoo artists to get something going themselves. Fortunately, there are also the helpful ones who take a moment, listen and give good advice. Who look at your work, eliminate weaknesses and routinely ask questions. Those who do not question you, but encourage you and strengthen your actions. The quality of the work says nothing about the person behind the machine. Nor does a huge shop with thousands of motifs on the walls and a giant reception area. If that is your stated goal, you must work on it. If you have reached this goal and belong to the elite of the scene, then never forget that you also started at the bottom. Always be polite and give prospective tattoo artists a chance. There are enough customers out there for all of us, believe me. Whether they come to you or not depends not only on your work. I wouldn't get tattooed by some unfriendly bum either, no matter how good he is.

Find a place to go

Hang in there, find someone who is reasonably familiar with the subject matter and take you by the hand a little. You can also find many tips and tricks on the Internet. At least a correct execution from A to Z concerning the hardware. However, there is nothing like having a mentor on site to familiarize you with the finer points, which are not permanently available and applicable to all situations. I hope to be able to help you with this book and to help you get rid of all the questions that prevent you from getting started. Please do not expect a patent remedy for all your questions. Every situation, every tattoo and every client must be treated individually. Your task is to find an acceptable solution for your client. Falls du das schnelle Geld im Auge hast, solltest du wirklich solide Werke abliefern, die viel Zeit kosten.

Quality has its price

One of the most common phrases in this industry. Unfortunately by people who can just draw outlines and fill in black. And even that not very well. As a newcomer, you are happy about every customer, who mostly come from your circle of friends and are available as guinea pigs. To ask for a lot of money from the beginning and to pray down said saying is absurd. Be grateful for every person who voluntarily lets himself be stabbed by you. In the beginning you will be fascinated by writings, names, dates, tribals, ornaments and the like. They consist only of outlines and some fill color, preferably black. Highly recommended for a more routine way of working. So you get more feeling for your machine, needles, colour, shapes, skin and problem areas. But that's not enough for the way to the elite. Personal talent, self-assessment and ambition play a major role here. Overestimating yourself, which explains all the cover up shows on TV, can end fatally. A reputation is quickly damaged. A picture is worth a thousand words. Nevertheless, at some point you have to let go of what you have learned so far and move on. Here you should also slowly realize where you want to go. So which style you want to stab. Basically, you should be able to do everything later if you are in a good mood. Diversity in tattoo problems can unfortunately only be found to a limited extent, as the artists eventually settle down. Two rough directions are Old School Art and Realistic Style Art. You should also exchange your private rooms or basement for a studio at some point if you want to earn money professionally with your passion. Exactly this kind of courage is missing.

Do not hesitate

Such a short text and already so much information, I know. I'm glad that my good friend Harald took me by the hand, recognized and encouraged my drawing talent. For many years I was bobbing around as a cellar stabber, who only dumped small motifs at dumping prices on weekends. My real career only began at the age of 38, even though I had little hope and many people dismissed it as nonsense. Many discouraging years, with several jobs on my resume, did not

make me happy. Asking what was wrong with me kept me busy. Having no goal makes you freeze and stagnate like you're in a state of shock. It was only when we opened our studio that I realized my true potential. Managing the shop, getting nice tattoos, talking to people, exchanging experiences with my business partners, developing my own techniques and much more. Now I ask myself why all this happened so late. Where would I be if I had done this fifteen or twenty years ago. Much further than today, of course. I want to spare you this dilemma and ask you to take this step as quickly as possible. Don't waste too much precious time and energy. Don't get discouraged and make the decision you think is right.

When you have done all this and worked your way through this book, you will be ready. After reading it, use it as a reference book if you get stuck. There will certainly be a situation that you have neglected or underestimated. I'm keeping my fingers crossed for you and all I can say is,

"Hang in there."

Talent helps - but it is not everything

A little story

A star tattoo artist comes to a five star restaurant. As he sifts through the menu, the chef recognizes him, who is a great admirer of his work. He speaks to him.

"I am a great fan of your work. You must have a great tattoo machine and great colors."

The tattoo artist smiles and nods friendly. After a five-course meal, he calls the cook to his table and says,

"A truly magnificent meal. I am thrilled. You must have a great stove and really good pots."

It's a fairly well-known story, which I rewrote a little bit. Making a good job depend entirely on tools and materials is nonsense. A craftsman is only as good as his tools. Without talent or enough practice, the best tattoo machine in the world won't do you any good. If you don't have the talent in the first place, it only helps to practice until the doctor comes.

"I can't even draw stick figures - how can I become a tattoo artist?"

If I got one euro for every person who uttered that sentence, I could take months off work. Why is everyone convinced that you have to be a brilliant draughtsman or painter to deliver beautiful tattoos? I know many tattoo artists who have never drawn before and are now respected tattoo artists. You just have to realize that it is a learned profession, as in any profession. Nobody masters something perfectly that he does it for the first time. Nobody comes into the world as a brain

surgeon, racing driver or banker. These are all skills that we have to learn. The only question is how good you want to be. For each area there are specialists and professionals who stand out from the standard workers because they can do more or are more precise. As a rule, it takes three years to learn a profession. Most people think that's it. To master something really well, no matter what, an average type of worker needs seven years. This is no joke, it's scientifically proven. There's no need to throw in the towel now. If you could do anything, you wouldn't need this book.

A standard education helps

A solid apprenticeship occupation can therefore not hurt. At the very least, it would be an emergency plan in case the desired career as an engraver doesn't work out right away. This way you can, at least at the beginning, provide for a regular income and spend your free time drawing, needles and colours. Invest as much time as possible in your hobby, as I call it at first. Getting a good feel for shapes, line work and shading is a solid step forward. Colours and colour combinations are often an art in themselves, but they develop over time. Look intensively at many pictures and motifs. Pay attention to light edges, shadows and shadows. Brightness, contrast and colour intensity are also dynamic factors.

Skin is not paper

You cannot compare painting on white paper with stabbing the skin. Skin does not lie smooth in front of you and keeps permanently still. It belongs to a sentient person, to whom you can cause extreme pain if you approach the matter too brutally. Physical pain is followed by psychic pain if you mess up the motive. These statements should not deter you from your intention, they should make you think. How would you react if someone torments you for several hours and the desired result looks like anything but your chosen motive? You would be really angry. That's exactly what the customer is if he doesn't get gentle treatment and

solid workmanship. The term "butcher" is widespread in the scene and describes tattooists who are ruthless and unprofessional. This is also how the finished motifs look like, which take ages to heal, are scarred and cannot even be saved by a cover up. These people have very quickly lost their reputation and always mysteriously disappear abroad to "allegedly" get off to a good start. Such or similar stories about disappeared tattoo artists you will hear more often, when more and more customers come to you. You do not want to be such a tattoo artist. Your name must stand for reliability, solid, fast and relatively painless work.

Only in a few cases a prospective tattoo artist brings all the basic requirements to be really good. Do not worry about it. That's why you learn everything that has to do with the topic. At the beginning of this chapter, I talked about people who never painted and yet were able to gain a successful foothold in the industry. I also know of brilliant draughtsmen who are unable to get a painting properly on the skin. They cannot cope with the circumstances. A tattoo machine is not a pencil, skin is not paper, paper does not move and does not scream when it becomes too painful.

Just as frowned upon as the "butchers" are arrogant tattoo artists. I admit it often, I don't get along with most of the people in my business because they are too arrogant for me. With mediocre work, which is honored far too highly, many people cheat their way through and consider themselves the greatest makers of our time. They present themselves self-confidently, can do everything, know everything and are beyond any doubt. Unfortunately, this is also to blame on the customers, who themselves have no idea of the matter and praise the would-be artists for their work to the skies. Thick, continuous outlines and a little paint are apparently enough to make a large part of our society happy. The laws of nature, such as light and shadow, are overrated anyway. It's also astonishing that these customers voluntarily pay several hundred Euros for very little tattoo.

"What are they putting in your tea, folks?"

You see, talent alone is not enough. It's all a matter of practice. If you really want it, you will sacrifice every minute of your free time, learning, reading and practicing. Usually the passion for actual painting also awakens in you and you try out many other things. Maybe you will end up at an easel, with canvas, oil or acrylic. Or you discover your passion for good comics and want to write a story yourself and implement it in many pictures. Everything is possible. The advantage of tattooing, you earn some money. To make it as a painter or comic artist is damn hard, laborious and hardly recognized. You should not be distracted too much from your intentions by other influences. Besides your exercises you should familiarize yourself with your engraving tools and master them blindly. Know your tattoo machines, your power supply "transformer", your foot switch, your needles, your colors, your stencil paper "tracing paper" and everything else. The safe handling with your tools is the first step to professionalism. It is not only talent that counts, but your will to succeed.