



# POP a PASTY!

7 STEPS  
TO BUILDING  
A SUCCESSFUL  
BURLESQUE  
CAREER

RED HOT ANNIE

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## 7 Steps to Building a Successful Burlesque Career

### Burlesque is Amazing!

You can be anyone or anything on stage. You can create characters that embody *your* definition of sexy, liberating the audience and allowing them to fantasize and take a break from the struggles of life. The raw power of feminine sensuality, the support of your tribe, and the ability to be seen and heard just as you are —there's nothing like it!

Whether you're brand new and don't know where to start, or you're an established performer who feels burned-out, frustrated, or just "blah" about your career, you know what it's like to feel uncertain about what comes next. And if you've ever felt the added sting of an empty pocketbook, you might be hesitant to fully commit to your dreams.

Many people fantasize about becoming an artist, but few are willing to reveal themselves and put what they've created out there. Regardless of whether you've been performing on stage for 40 years or you're brand new, the work you'll do in this e-book will help you **stand out!**

In the pages that follow, I'll walk you through my step-by-step program designed to inspire and ignite your creative genius. These fundamentals of self-love are intended to inspire you to reserve time in your schedule to reconnect to the essential, and the most beautiful and beloved aspects of your beauty.

Remember: Love starts within.

### Who am I?

I'm Red Hot Annie, and I've been on stage since the mid 90's. In school and church plays, I knew I loved the theatre, but it's when I discovered burlesque in 2007 that I fell in love. Over the years, I've performed in thousands of shows domestically, including Alaska, and internationally, including Canada, France, England, Germany, and Scotland.

As the C.E.Oh! of Vaudezilla, I produced a weekly cabaret show that ran for seven years, and I owned and taught at one of the most beloved dance studios in the city of Chicago from 2008-2020. I have appeared on WGN and WTTW, as well as at The Burlesque Hall of Fame, World Burlesque Games, London Burlesque Fest, New York Burlesque Fest, Viva Las Vegas Rockabilly Weekender, and countless other shows and festivals worldwide.

It thrills me to share with you the techniques I've learned through trial and error while performing and teaching burlesque worldwide. All you'll need for this process is a journal and an open mind.

Those familiar with my work know I focus on the process, claiming your divine worthiness, and raising the ceiling on what you believe is possible for you. I believe that having a high evaluation of yourself and your art can help you create sustainable art that ensures future gigs and is certain to turn into money in the bank!

While in the performance industry, I've been fortunate to have a handful of mentors who encouraged my growth, helped shaped my perspective, and given me best practices in how to approach my creative work. Through all of the rehearsals, coffee meetings, test shoots, and time on set and stage, the same message has rung forth:

**You become what you practice.**

**How to Use This Resource:**

Take your time. Pause to write and reflect after each exercise. This can take as long as you want - an afternoon, or even several days. There's no rush. Instead, I encourage you to take your time and savor the process of knowing yourself.

**You become what you practice.**

But that doesn't mean you have to wait until everything is perfect. Accept and celebrate the small victories and before you know it, you'll be twirling tassels with the best of them!

## 1. SET A GOAL: What's the Next Level for You?

Start by determining what you want to get out of this resource. Why did this e-book appeal to you? What would you like to create? I intend for this resource to give you ideas, but your level of creativity and investment will determine how much you get out of this at the end of the day.

### **Write down 3-4 sentences that describe your goal.**

This goal could be for the next day, week, month, or even longer.

- How will you know that you accomplished your goal?
- How will you feel?
- What will have changed?
- How will your behaviors and beliefs have shifted?
- Where will you see upgrades in your life?

Be as specific as you can.

### ***Examples:***

*My goal is to create a burlesque act.*

- *I'll consider this accomplished when I have performed in front of an audience.*
- *I'll feel courageous and empowered.*
- *I'll make connections to other artists and be more willing to take risks.*

Once you have your goal, you'll be able to focus the following exercises on anything you need to unearth to more fully embody who you will become.

## 2. MEMORIES: The Value of Your Artistic Contributions

Set a timer for five minutes. Write down every memory where your artistic contribution felt valued or undervalued, especially in relation to your goal. These can be instances when you've felt deserving and worthy, as well as times when you've felt less so—and they could be things someone else has done, but they might also be things you've done to yourself.

Don't censor yourself—list any examples that come to mind, even if they don't seem relevant at first.

When has your artistic talent/time/contribution been valued or undervalued?

### **Examples:**

*My goal is to create a burlesque act.*

#### **VALUED:**

- *When I redecorated the living room, my mom was really impressed by the colors I picked.*
- *I felt really proud of the playlist I made for a friend's coming out party.*

#### **UNDERVALUED:**

- *The time when I showed a friend my art in 5<sup>th</sup> grade, and they made fun of it.*
- *When I sang karaoke off-key last weekend and felt totally embarrassed afterward.*

Try to really dive deep and find every memory about your artistic contributions that you can. And keep this list handy, so you can add any additional memories that pop up over the next few days.

### 3. APPRECIATE & FORGIVE: What You Focus on Grows

Now that you have your list, take a moment to go through everything on the “valued” side and say, “thank you.” Remember how those experiences made you feel. Sense the memories in your body. Mentally set the intention that you want more of that feeling.

Then go through the “undervalued” side and consider where there is room for forgiveness. You may not feel ready to forgive everything on this side of the list yet, and that’s fine. Just start with what you’re willing to let go of. Articulating your forgiveness out loud can prove particularly powerful.

#### **A simple script for forgiveness:**

*For the ways I have hurt myself through (insert example), I now offer myself wholehearted forgiveness. I forgive myself completely.*

Then, breathe. Feel into your body – notice if it feels more contracted or expansive.

Sometimes things like resentment, anger, and fear get bottled up, like a knot in the belly or a lump in the throat. Whether you’re holding onto painful memories about yourself or another, the only certainty is that you’re the one who suffers when you can’t release the past.

Another valuable tool for cultivating forgiveness is Emotional Freedom Technique (or EFT Tapping). It disrupts negative thoughts and grants you more freedom on your journey to self-love, and you can learn how to do it here:

[\[Link to: EFT TAPPING TUTORIAL\]](http://redhotannie.com/bonus.htm)  
<http://redhotannie.com/bonus.htm>

After you finish these practices, check-in with your body. By offering forgiveness to yourself, you’ll begin to clear space in your heart to allow more success and abundance into your life.

Trust that forgiveness will set you free.

#### 4. DECLUTTER: Out with the Old, In with the New

Imagine your home and your possessions as extensions of your inner world. Go through your home (or just a closet or drawer) and let go of any heavy baggage.

This may include items:

- Related to unpleasant endings, such as gift from an ex or old work badges.
- Related to low evaluation or neglect of self, such as chipped dishes or sheets with holes.
- Related to an outdated version of self, such as ill-fitting clothing or forgotten books.

In short, this can be anything that doesn't fit, anything that adds unnecessary noise to your life, or anything that hurts your heart when you look at it or use it.

How you declutter is up to you, but I appreciate Marie Kondo's advice to say "thank you" as you donate, sell, or discard. <sup>1</sup>

As you declutter, notice any memories that you need to add to your valued and undervalued memories—and see if you can offer more forgiveness to yourself or someone else.

**Bonus Tip:** You can also declutter your obligations! Use the same process. Imagine the power of creating boundaries that honor your needs and desires. Free some time up by delegating tasks, saying "no" more often, or simplifying your social calendar.

Whether you discard a box or several bags, notice how your body feels to release those old memories. This practice will also create more room in your life (and heart!) for success and wealth.

## 5. VISUALIZE YOUR FUTURE SELF: Believing is Seeing

Now that you've freed up some space, let's craft a powerful visualization of your Future Self.

Start by examining what you'd really love to do for a living. If there were no financial or time limits, what would you let yourself create? Just for a moment, let go of what you've been told you can—or should – do. Imagine that someone would hire you for speaking, dancing, writing, or any other artistic passion. What would you do?

I've created this special visualization exercise to help you zero in on your true calling:

[\[Link to:FUTURE SELF VISUALIZATION\]](http://redhotannie.com/bonus.htm)  
<http://redhotannie.com/bonus.htm>

**Remember:** When you start moving toward something outside of your comfort zone, you may naturally feel yourself resisting. Seeing yourself, even in your imagination, accomplishing your goal can be a powerful tool in clarifying exactly what you'd like to experience. And once you have that clarity, it'll be easier to recognize what patterns keep you from being the best version of yourself.

Have you ever considered what stops you from fully embodying the powerful being you know you are?

Do any of these sound familiar?

- "What if I try and I fail?"
- "It's too late."
- "People won't like me if I'm more successful."
- "I can't be nice/good and be rich."
- "I'm too old/fat/etc."
- "I've never done that before."
- "I don't know how."

Where you are today is a culmination of the choices you've made and beliefs you've held in the past. You have a choice in where you'll go tomorrow, but it's unquestionably a result of what beliefs and behaviors you shift today.

Recognize your innate beauty and creativity, and give yourself the gift of truly knowing your worth.

## 6. DEFINE YOUR AUDIENCE: Recognize Your Beautiful Bounty

Many people think about an audience (or fans) as something that only celebrities or very successful people have. We can sometimes be oblivious or even resistant to engaging and relating to our own very real cheerleaders!

Artists in the process of establishing themselves are especially susceptible to a Lack Mentality. Lack Mentality is when you believe that there's only "so much" to go around—and this scarcity mindset often results in unnecessary competition and feelings of inadequacy. As a result, artists undervalue themselves because they don't have enough examples of artists who model success. Frustrated artists can sometimes focus more on who isn't supporting them rather than who is.

All of this is true, even beyond art. How many times have you found yourself focused on what you don't have or aren't getting in any aspect of your life, rather than the support and resources available at your fingertips? This is about focusing on and understanding what you've already got so that you can attract more of it.

Your art is probably not for everyone—but no matter what you create, I can assure you someone is looking to be touched by the very art you want to create. Who are these people? What do they want? And what do they have in common?

Relating to your audience means speaking their language and connecting with them on their level. In other words, how would you speak differently about your art when talking to a fellow artist, as opposed to a cheerleader or fan?

Knowing your audience means knowing how to share with that audience in mind.

Set a timer for five minutes and describe your audience.

- What are their goals?
- Where are they frustrated and seeking relief?
- What do they need that your art can help them with?

### **Examples:**

*My goal is to create a burlesque act.*

- *My audience is rebellious, queer, and has money to buy tickets to my show.*
- *Their goal is to share community with other inclusive beings.*
- *Their pain points include not seeing enough representation of their own bodies in the media and sometimes feeling creatively stifled in their daily lives.*
- *I can help them by being fearlessly myself on stage and by choosing to participate in shows that feature a variety of bodies.*

This process can apply at work, home, and in relationships too – wherever you need support, imagine asking for what you need, with awareness of the collective goals and pain points and then relating to them, authentically, on their level.

If you're having a hard time identifying people who would support you, recognize any beliefs around being someone who has fans or cheerleaders. Do you believe that you (and the art you create) are worthy of celebration and support?

And of course, as you practice this exercise, notice if there any places where you can offer yourself or another's forgiveness?

Once you know who your audience is, it'll be easier to connect to them authentically and share the radiance of yourself and your art.

## 7. PACKAGE YOUR ART: Make it Easy for Clients to Hire You

Now that you have an idea of what you want to create and who your audience is, it's time to package your art. To start the process of packaging your art, start connecting the dots between what you want to create and who your audience is.

### ***Title, Description, & Pricing***

Begin describing your service by giving it a title, description, and pricing. These can all be fine-tuned as you go, but—believe it or not!—the overwhelming majority of artists never even attempt to establish this fundamental starting point.

#### TITLE

A title is the quick and easy way people can remember what you're providing. "Becoming Burlesque Masterclass" or "Vaudezilla Burlesque Cabaret" or "Burlesque in a Box."

***Hot down a couple of creative titles for the service you'll provide.***

#### DESCRIPTION

The description should answer questions that your client may have: How long is it? What do you do/cover? What can the client expect to see/experience/learn? The description should also convey the tone of what you offer, and it should be as light and short (or as serious and detailed) as your art itself.

***Write 3–4 sentences that tell us about your art/package.***

#### PRICING

How an artist prices their work has stymied creative people for ages, due in no small part to our culture's tendency to romanticize the idea of a Starving Artist. But it's essential to break free of that mindset and put a real, honest value on what you create.

***Write down a price (it can be a total guess!).***

Now, have you considered all of your work's financial aspects, such as hair, makeup, costume, and hiring someone to handle the technical aspects of your work? Are you considering all of the time commitments in your work, such as writing, rehearsing, conceptualizing, and email back-and-forths? You'd be surprised how much we take our effort—and especially our time!—for granted.

Remember, art doesn't follow typical supply/demand economics. Just because you're affordable, that doesn't guarantee more bookings or more access. So, consider how you value yourself and how that impacts your first pricing estimates.

The time it takes to acquire a new skill and the general level of experience you have are key factors in how much you charge for your work. Artists should always be aware of new things that add value to their work and up-charge accordingly. As your faith in your work, your value, and your talent grow, your rates will continue to climb.

Sometimes, we think we have to wait until we have the right experience and education to raise our rates. But more often than not, it's about acknowledging, appreciating, and packaging what you already know, and creating a practice that evolves along with you.

Never settle, and never settle into a groove.

Keep your title, description, and prices handy. Save them somewhere on your computer so you can copy/paste it into emails with potential clients, and continue to tweak it as you acquire new information.

And don't forget to integrate your package into your website and social media. That way, when you share your work on social media, people will feel encouraged to contact you with ease.

Understanding how to package your art is a talent that anyone can build, but it takes time. Give yourself room to experiment and plenty of forgiveness when you have to suddenly revise your package, if you miscommunicate about what's included, or if find yourself giving more (or less!) than you intended to. Nobody is perfect.

**You become what you practice.**

Trust that your path is unfolding at the perfect pace.

## **BONUS!**

### **RAISE YOUR RATES: Knowing Your Worth**

Who determines how much you can charge?

Who determines how much you make?

First, look at the overall environment and how you create perceptions about how much to charge for your work. Consider the following as just a few of the places where you may collect data to help determine your rates: mentors, peers, education, and experience.

As you determine your rates, keep in mind the following questions:

- Can you make more than your parents?
- Can you make more than your mentor?
- Does your education limit or expand your opportunity to make more?

How do social class, race, gender, and other factors play a part in what we believe we can charge?

Remember to think of your rate as a constantly evolving thing. Consider the following:

- Who set your initial rate? A boss?
- Did you negotiate? Can you still negotiate? (Hint: it's never too late)

Second, let's look at how personal experience affects how much to charge for your work. Consider the following factors that will influence your rates:

- Personal evaluation (I'm better than... /I'm not as good as... )
- Impostor Syndrome (I'm not there yet.)
- Fear of Unknown (How will my client react to me asking for more money?)

In my experience, very few performers—even powerhouses—negotiate rates, and some of them have left money on the table. Are you leaving money on the table because you're afraid to ask?

### ***A Practice: Asking for More Money***

You need to know upfront that you won't get everything you ask for, and this is an area where you'll need to build up stamina. You'll soon discover that industry standards contribute to the perception of a "ceiling" on what you can get. But these ceilings and other roadblocks just underscore why the work we're doing is so critical. Because this is about specializing: about knowing why you're unique, about why what you're doing matters, and about advocating for yourself.

Most critically, this is about value because the value you place on what you have to offer a client dictates how you will show up for that client. If someone pays you a premium for your

work, you're more likely to do the extra things, such as steaming your costumes, putting on eyelashes, stretching before you go on stage, and being punctual. Further, doing these extra things not only makes them an essential part of your work ethic, but also establishes you as a professional and reminds you of how these things contribute to what you charge for your art.

For the first six years I did burlesque, I took every gig that came my way. Part of me recognized that I needed the practice, but another part of me was working from Lack Mentality – afraid that there was a limit to the number of opportunities I could get if I didn't say "yes" to everything..

During that time, I almost never negotiated my rates. I just took what they offered.

But in retrospect, I can admit that it would have been more powerful for me to do just a few shows each year where I showed up and knocked it out of the ballpark, instead of dozens of shows a year where I was just a little burned out, so I didn't bring everything I know I have to offer.

But don't take my word for it, look at the numbers! Compare doing fewer shows at a higher rate versus doing a lot of shows at a reduced rate:

- 5-10 shows @ \$150/show = \$750-\$1500
- 20-30 shows @ \$25-50/show = \$500-\$1500

When your rates truly reflect a high self-evaluation, you're certain to create the perception that you are a consummate professional and that you bring value to any client who hires you.

But remember, not everyone's going to say "yes." So ask yourself if you've got resistance to hearing someone say "no" to your request, and ask yourself how you'll handle that.

To help you on your journey, I've developed a guide for "how to ask for more money" that you can download here.

[\[Link to: HOW TO ASK FOR MORE MONEY\]](http://redhotannie.com/bonus.htm)  
<http://redhotannie.com/bonus.htm>

Now, go out there and get what you're worth!

## **Step Into Your Light!**

Now that you've gotten a peek into how you can elevate your sense of self and raise your standards, I sincerely hope you can use the actions and exercises detailed in this e-book to make an impact on the art that you create and proliferate in this world.

In the theatre world, we say, "break a leg!" to wish a performer an excellent night on stage. I used to say the same thing to the hundreds of students that went through my dance studio in Chicago, on the night of our student showcase. At my first burlesque festival, as a dozen glittery showgirls sat at a dressing table, pulling up fishnet stockings, and applying false lashes, the stage manager announced that the show was about to begin.

A moment later, a stage kitten slid by and gleefully shouted, "pop a pasty!"

I wish you love and joy on your burlesque journey. May your path be blessed with affirming opportunities and a truly loving and supportive community, and may you always know your worth!

Pop a pasty!

Love,

Red Hot Annie

## References

<sup>1</sup> Kondo, Marie. (2014). *The life-changing magic of tidying up: The Japanese art of decluttering and organizing*. Ten Speed Press.