

Visiting Tattoo Artists Leave a Permanent Mark on Students' Perspectives

By: Writers Studio

On January 18, 2023, Didi and Shaine Wallace, tattoo artists and owners of Warchief Tattoo in Cadillac, came to the Graphic Arts program at North Ed Career Tech to talk to students about careers in the tattoo industry. They showed the students their portfolios, the tools they use, and even brought in stencils so the students could get a sense of what tattooing is like.

"This career is probably the most rewarding [I've ever had]" Didi said. Not only is tattooing rewarding, tattoo artists can also make a good amount of money. "I know people...in Michigan that make six figures a year," Didi said. "You can make just as much as a surgeon." According to Zip Recruiter, the national average salary of tattoo artists is around \$130,000. Some make closer to \$300,000, which, sure enough, is similar to lower-paying jobs as a surgeon.

According to Didi, an artist's "bedside manner" is one of the most important skills a tattoo artist can have. Learning how to make customers feel safe and welcome is an important part of being in the tattoo business. Communication is another key skill; artists often have to redraw pieces multiple times in order to fit the vision of the customers.

"If you treat your clients like family they're going to come back to you," Didi shared. "You turn more clients into friends than friends into clients."

Communicating with clients is hard to begin with, but on top of that, tattoo artists also have to be able to refuse service when the safety of their clients is at risk, or the proposed tattoo idea makes the artist uncomfortable. For example, Didi says she's uncomfortable doing tattoos that include symbols of hate speech, such as swastikas.

Tattooing can be a rewarding and well-paying career, but it's not easy to become a tattoo artist. While not required in Michigan, apprenticeships are the easiest way to enter into the industry. According to Didi, artists sometimes have to beg, and even

hound artists to take them in as an apprentice. Apprenticeships allow new artists to learn how to tattoo and how to work with customers under the guidance of experienced tattoo artists.

Building a portfolio is another important piece to becoming a tattoo artist as it is a visual resume of that artist's best work. It is used by artists to show their versatility and skill to employers. Didi's portfolio consisted of two photo albums filled with pictures of her work. Her studio requires artists to add ten new photos to their portfolio every year. "You start your portfolio with that apprentice work," Didi said.

Didi and Wallace also expressed their concerns about AI technology, a large threat to the tattoo industry and many other art-related fields. They mentioned a machine being developed that could tattoo simple pieces on clients. The technology isn't perfect, as it isn't good at tattooing at the correct depth under the skin, but it could drastically change the industry in the coming years.

Wallace talked about another issue in the tattoo world: "Stolen art is a huge problem in this industry." He himself has had art taken from him on the internet.

Despite the threats to the tattoo industry, more and more people are deciding to take the plunge into pigment. In fact, according to a poll by PR Newswire, almost 30% of Americans have tattoos, and a higher percentage of young people have tattoos. So, even with stolen art and the rise of Artificial Intelligence, the industry is not being lost anytime soon.

Warchief Tattoo has a website, Facebook page, and TikTok page at warchieftattoo.com, Warchief Tattoo, and [@warchief_tattoo](https://www.tiktok.com/@warchief_tattoo) respectively.