

I spoke to several writers during this contest and one thing kept coming up over and over: Taking criticism.

Writers are NOT confident people. "Is this good? What do you think?" We constantly need reassurance that we're doing what we're supposed to be doing.

I'm good friends with a very successful writer in Hollywood. She's written major motion pictures and a successful novel.

I talked to her before the release of her book and was surprised to find out how nervous she was. She was AFRAID and unsure that anyone was going to like it.

That's when I realized something: It doesn't matter how much success we have, we're still insecure artists. We need that reassurance.

But something happens when you have that need... you're open to listening to EVERYONE and I'm here to tell you something very important:

Everyone, as a collective, are fucking stupid as shit.

One person says they hate the car chase in act one but they love the nuke in act three.

Another person says: "LOVE the car chase, but the nuke? That's kinda dumb."

So who do you listen to?

Here's the answer: No one and everyone.

Let me try to explain. Let's say you give your script to four people. All four of them equally love and hate different parts of your script. They contradict one another and confuse you, BUT, if there's ONE thing that you hear from all four of them, then THAT is a problem you need to address.

Everything else is just subjective bullshit. You can't make a movie that EVERYONE will love. It's impossible. We all have personal tastes that influence our opinions and you can't let that shit get in your head.

I learned very early that you have to put your script through different levels of readings. After you finish a script, this is what you should do:

Step 1: Give it to a few friends. Not close friends, just people you talk to from time to time. This is your blowjob phase. You're nervous and you need to have your ego blown. That's what these people will do. They'll give you some moderately honest feedback and maybe bring up some issues you never thought of. But you have to realize that, to them, they're just going to blow you because it's cool that you're "writing movies" and that's really much more exciting than their shitty lives. It'll make you feel good, but that's IT. Don't pay too much attention to these people. Just enjoy the aural love on your ego.

Step 2: You may or may not do a rewrite based on the “notes” you get from step 1, if you do, great...if not, that’s fine too. Now that you have a little bit of confidence behind you, give your script to a few close friends. These are the people that are going to get a little deeper into your script and hopefully be a little more honest with you. BEWARE: They are still going to blow you! Do not take their notes to heart, but do listen a little more.

Now, after you’ve done those two steps, you’re probably going to do a rewrite. During the rewrite you have to remember one thing: YOUR FRIENDS ARE FUCKTARDS! Don’t let them ruin your script. What do they know? They don’t write scripts and first time readers have trouble with script format anyway. They’ll ask you what the hell “INT.” means. You don’t have time to listen to these plebeians and you don’t want to let them mindfuck you and tear your script apart.

On to...

Step 3: This is where you step up your game. Time to give it to people in the same boat as you. Give it to fellow screenwriters. NOT PEOPLE YOU RESPECT TOO MUCH. Just people that know what’s what. These guys will probably only lick the tip. If that. But you won’t care cause you’ve already had a ‘nuff love and you’re pretty confident. Again, you want to listen to these people. You’re still going to get the contradictions. You’re still going to play the “love that, hate that” game, but you’ll have a better idea of who’s full of shit and who’s not. This will prepare you for the next step which is...

Step 4: Give it to people you respect. This includes teachers, professors, people with a higher education level than you, literary types...really anyone that’s going to not care about how you feel and want to stomp on your shit. You won’t give two fucks though cause your wall has been sufficiently built. You don’t need the confidence any more...now you need feedback and these people will give it to you. Still keep in mind that their advice will be contradictory, but by now your ear should be trained enough to weed out the good and the bad comments.

Lastly, you’re ready for the final step:

Step 5: Industry people. Your script should be ready to be sent out. Hypothetically, you’ve done a rewrite after every step before this, so it should be in great shape. More importantly, you should have steel plated armor around your ego. Now, at this point you’ll also know exactly what to listen to. You’ll be able to tell when someone inspires you to write again and you’ll also be able to tell when someone gives you a fucking crazy idea like “I want a giant spider in the third act!”

You should go through this process a few times. It’ll help build the confidence and once you’re there, you’ll become:

AN ARROGANT ASSHOLE!

Like me. Which is good. This business is tough. You have to have confidence. You have to be able to battle in creative meetings and you have to be able to stand up for yourself. Pick your battles and win them. I’m not joking here. You will get stupid notes from people in much higher positions than you and they will believe, without a doubt, that they are right. You have to be able to protect your script.

I know this sounds pessimistic. It's not. It's reality. I see it every day. Grown men arguing over the dumbest details of a script. Oscar winners. Guys who directed movies that brought in 500 million dollars at the box office worldwide. They will always be more right than you and if you're a pussy, they will walk all over you.

Be the Kanye West of screenwriting. You're NEVER wrong. I'm not saying you shouldn't listen to people, but just weed out the bullshit.

On my last script, someone in the industry gave me seven notes on it. Six of them were genius and inspired me to make my script better. The seventh was fucking stupid, so stupid that I don't even remember what it was. When he said it I just nodded and smiled and thought, "yeah, not doing that."

It can be very easy to let notes overwhelm you and cause you to get all flustered and panicky. Nothing good comes out of this. Once you have your criticism ear trained, this should stop happening.

I'm going to give you a book. If you want to be a screenwriter and have some success in this business, you HAVE to read it. It changed my life and made me into the rough and tough screenwriter that I am today. It helped me find success in this industry and it'll help you too.

You have to read: "The Devil's Guide to Hollywood: The Screenwriter as God!" by Joe Eszterhas. Eszterhas is famously known for writing *Basic Instinct* and landed the highest paycheck for a screenwriter for *Showgirls*. This book will give you a God complex.

And why shouldn't you have a God complex?

You create the world, right?

You create the people, right?

You give them jobs. You dress them. You even give them personalities. Hell, they can't speak without you.

Does that not make you God?

Last time I checked, no one came in and told God that she should have a spider in the third act, so why would you let them do that to YOUR world?

As always, send any questions or comments to weekendread@gmail.com and I will get back to you in some way, shape or form.

Till next week...