

Pitchfest's are a waste of time and money.

Shit. Did I just say that out loud?

I take it back. Completely. The lawyer holding the gun standing next to me wants me to read the following statement:

"Pitchfest's are actually NOT a waste of time and money, but a place where young screenwriter's can interact with industry professionals...ha ha ha ha ha ha..."

Shit. I almost made it through that without laughing.

Okay...so before I pull a Dennis Miller and go off on a rant here, let me bring the blind into the light.

What is a pitchfest?

Pitchfest's are the speed dating of the screenwriting industry. Let me set the stage.

There's a large conference room with a hundred or so tables, all with a number and a name of a company.

At each table are one or two representatives from said company.

Then the cattle call. A large bell is rung.

In walk a hundred or so writers who all thin that THIS is their chance. They spent time studying the companies and mapping their day out. They have picked several companies that they think will fall in love with their script and if they JUST have the chance to get in their hands, it'll be a golden ticket for them. They pay, most of the time hundreds of dollars, to get their five minutes with "industry Professionals" (I'll explain why this is in quotations later) that will give them that chance.

They sit down at the company of their choice. Introduce themselves and proceed to launch into their pitch.

After five minute a bell is rung and they say thank you and walk away.

Another bell is rung and the next group of screenwriting cattle is brought in.

This continues, depending on the pitchfest, for hours.

So that, my friends, is what a pitchfest is.

So why do I think it's a waste of time and money?

That answer explains why I put "industry professionals" in quotations.

What most people don't know is that the people at the table that you, the writer, are sitting down with are the lowest person on the totem pole. Most people that have any REAL power ignore those things.

Mainly because it's grueling and depressing. No writer I've encountered at a pitchfest really has their shit together. So it's just one bad pitch after another.

The first pitchfest I went to, I was an unpaid intern at a company that could care less if I came home with anything of interest. I knew that going in, but I still saw it as an opportunity to interact with writers and fellow bottom-of-the-rung people such as myself.

Another secret? We're not volunteers. We get paid to sit there. Not a lot, but when you're an unpaid intern you seize every opportunity to make a buck in this town. On top of that, we're nobodies yet get treated like executives all day. Who doesn't want that? Money and respect? Sign my ass up!

On the flip side of that...we're all still gatekeepers. If a script sounds interesting, we'll read it. If the script is good, we WILL pass it along.

The sad fact is, it's 99% shit.

Writers make SO many mistakes at these things that it's brutal. That's where the teacher in me kicks in.

Now that I have a paying gig in the industry and I'm not the bottom rung anymore, I still go in hopes that for every writer I can see, I can help them in SOME way for the next time. When they actually have a chance.

It's these common mistakes that I'm going to explore over the next few articles. I'm going to dig deep and share with you some stories that noob writers make in hopes that you'll read and change your tactic BEFORE you sit down at my table.

So let me rephrase my earlier quote: Pitchfests are a waste of time and money...sorta.

The people at those table already have their foot in the door. They're working at production companies and can get your script read by the higher ups. But you really have to shine. They're there for the free food, free money and God-willing, a free cocktail at the "networking afterparty."

So why am I telling you all of this? Why am I busting the myth behind this Hollywood tradition?

Simple. This is your one and only lesson for the week...

STOP BEING FUCKING NERVOUS!

Sit down. Tell us a story. Drop the "oh my God, what if I screw up?"

We're somebody yet we're not. Hell, you probably have a better paying job than most of us. In some cases you might even have a high degree than most of us.

I'm not saying be cocky and look down on us, but recognize that we're all in the same boat. We want to move up just like you do.

If you start viewing us as a team member and less as a hurdle, maybe you won't be so nervous.

I'll share one anecdote with you before I end this article.

At one of the first pitchfests that I went to, a woman, I'd say in her 20's, sat down and launched into her pitch. She had note cards and fumbled about. She was the textbook definition of nervous.

IT WAS BAD!

Not only was it bad, but she drew attention to it. At one point I think she actually said that she had fucked up and wanted to start over.

I stopped her and told her it was okay. Just relax. Remember one thing: when you sit down, you're the expert. You're the person who thought this up, wrote it and pitched it. I know nothing of your script, you know everything. Hypothetically, you've spent months, maybe even years with this. Just relax and tell me your story.

She eventually got around to it but then the bell rang.

I saw her later in the day and asked her how things were going. She thanked me because she was doing much better at her pitches.

A couple of months later I saw her at another pitchfest. She was going from table to table like she owned that bitch.

I saw her, said hi and told her what I saw. That she seemed a lot more confident and was doing a lot better. She said she was and thanked me again.

That's what it's all about.

Helping each other out.

To quote one of the shitiest biopic's of all time, Notorious (look it up): "If you make it, we all make it."

I also want to add, as much as I rant about the practice, I'll be at the Screenwriting Expo this weekend. Hearing pitches all weekend. If any of you are planning to go and actually like the shit that I spew on a weekly basis. I'll be there. Come up, say hello, shower me with praise, I'll buy you a drink. (read last week's article.)

If you HATE the shit that I spew...um, yeah, totally not going to be there. The guy at the table that's claiming to be me...yeah he's just an unpaid intern I sent in my place cause I didn't want to waste my time! ;)

Next week I go into the common mistakes.

Till then...