

Welcome back folks! If you don't remember, last week I invited my friend Dianna to share her story of her first pitchfest and the overall experience. She focused mainly on the experience of pitching and the people she saw.

This week, we continue with her story as she dives into the executives she has dealt and her impressions of them.

Take it away...

It's almost pitchfest season, that lovely time of year when the birds are singing, the trees are sprouting buds, and writers are honing their pitching skills. Or pouring gasoline on their script and lighting it on fire, whichever the case may be.

I typically wish for the latter.

I've attended pitchfests both online and in person. They're wonderful, in a truly intense way that can make you laugh, make you cry, even turn you bitter and angry. But hey, that's the biz. If you don't like it, you know what to do.

No. No they don't. Why don't they?

One thing about pitching that I should say right up front is that people you pitch to are just like you and me. Except for that tiny little caveat that they potentially hold the key to your future in the palms of their hands. No biggie, right? I am not here to trash the people you pitch to.

Damn. Guess that'll be my job.

They're great.

Hmmmm, are they?

Mostly.

They mostly come out at night...mostly. (sorry, couldn't help it.)

Just like people who pitch. You know, writers? Those people. Yeah, I'm guessing that most execs are either writers or have done at least a little groveling to get where they are. Or not.

Like I keep saying...EVERYONE is a writer. EVERYONE has an idea and EVERYONE that has said idea, thinks it would make a great movie.

As for the groveling...I've been very fortunate in my career to NOT have to grovel, but come on...do I seem like the type of person that would get on my knees...

You know what? Don't answer that.

That being said, I have made a few observations in my limited time in Tinseltown. I think all the pre-pitching advice "they" (in other words, gatekeepers, people who run pitchfests, and sometimes other writers) give you on pitching is wonderful:

THIS is what I've been waiting for. Yes, what ARE people telling you guys to do?!

be normal (seems like a given, but is it?);

Correct. PLEASE be normal or at least make an attempt at normalcy.

dress like you're going to a (casual) job interview;

Yes. Good.

give them a good handshake and make eye contact (with you so far);

Some people are weird about the handshake...a polite "how do you do" works just as well without the contact. But okay. Read the moment at the table.

be brief;

God yes, PLEASE be brief.

have an amazing passion for your story;

This one is actually pretty funny. You would think, with as much as people "want this" that they'd come to the table with some fire in their loins, right?

I have lost TRACK at the number of people that have come to the table and launched into their story with ZERO thrill or excitement.

Well guess what?

If you don't give a shit, I'M not going to give a shit. So why are you wasting everyone's time?

and always act professional.

It is a business after all. And remember, you're selling yourself as much as you're attempting to sell your script.

Great. Got it.

But what faces you from the other side of that table? There are some execs you love and some that just plain love themselves.

Yup.

And that's totally fine.

Good. Wasn't planning on changing. :)

One thing some of them do, seemingly for their own amusement (and I'm not saying the guys who do this are most often handsome twenty-somethings with a chip on their shoulder, because that would be just plain rude), is try to poke holes in your story, or trip you up.

Well, in all fairness, (although I know the type of guy you're talking about) sometimes there are a lot of holes to stick your finger in.

We pitched our script to one guy and he started questioning the technology. I guess just for kicks. Yeah, so I'm sitting here next to my writing partner who has a PhD in electrical engineering, who wrote this little "book" called a dissertation with equations like this in it:

$$\begin{aligned}\nabla^2 E_R - \frac{\alpha_L}{2\pi} \sqrt{\mu_0 \epsilon} \partial_t E_R - \mu_0 \epsilon \partial_t^2 E_R \\ = -\frac{1}{\epsilon} \nabla (\nabla \cdot P_{NL}) + \mu_0 \partial_t^2 P_{NL},\end{aligned}$$

and he knows what that shit means. So here we are: me, the one who researched it and read fifty articles on the technology and the guy who already knows it because it's his job; I mean, he worked on a segmented mirror replacement system for the Hubble Telescope, and this exec tells me he's "kind of a techie."

THIS is fucking funny. I so know that "dude" and have been stuck at a table with a multitude of "that guy's."

Look, I'm not going to surprise ANY of you with this little nugget of truth:

This business is built on EGO. Serious fucking EGO. Every one on every day wants to be the smartest guy in the room.

And a lot of these guys are just fucktards sent to find a script. They go because someone who actually has power doesn't want to go but feels obligated to the pitchfest runner's to have their company listed.

Why?

I have no idea.

Do you know why I go? At first I thought it was interesting. My first pitchfest I was literally in town like a month when some producer got cornered into being at the fest. He didn't want to go so he asked me to do it.

I had no idea what to say or do, but I learned quick. The next one I went to because I thought I could meet some people and network.

and yeah, that's happened and some of my closest friends in the industry I met at a pitchfest.

Now?

I keep going for you guys.

I go for this column. I go because it will generate new information to come back and report to you.

More "what not to do's."

So yeah, THAT guy is a fucking moron and wanted to be the smart guy at the table.

Of course you are, Mr. iPad. And thanks for your time.

Exactly. Fuck that guy.

Then there were the two who started putting on their jackets as we walked up to the table. Clearly, they wanted no part of speaking to us and, frankly, weren't shy about showing it.

For the record, what time of the day was it? Because yeah, totally DON'T want to talk to you anymore after a certain point.

Since we paid a couple hundred bucks to do so, they sighed and sat back down. They heard our pitch and the only thing they could come up with was a suggestion we "bring artwork."

WOW!

That's not even fucking phoning it in. That's just being stupid. And being lazy about being stupid too.

Sigh. Sad.

Ever respectful, we thanked the dudes and checked the time. Next pitch is coming up, guess that whole "lunch" idea is toast. Ah, the folly of hope!

Some execs are truly helpful and act interested. You appreciate these people because, believe it or not, all execs aren't totally "normal" either. But don't tell anyone, because I'm not sure they're aware of it.

Good point. If ANY one has a great story about a weird exec, please send it in. I rip on you fucktards enough. How about returning the favor and sharing some stories about weird execs?

Give me what ya got!

Just roll with it, like we did. When a woman from a major studio spent all our pitch time telling me about how amazing this experimental film fest (that I've never attended) is, I nodded and smiled.

Like this one.

Why? I don't understand why this women felt the need, at that very moment, to talk about that with you. That's just fucking stupid.

On the other hand, you probably didn't want to work with her anyway.

Then the bell dings and you're herded out. So much for that pitch, but she was really nice. I'd talk to her in line at Starbucks.

Apparently she'd talk to ANYONE in line ANY WHERE.

In a crazy way, in the irrational world of screenwriting from the outside in (your chances of getting struck by lightning are probably much higher, but still we go on), these people, these execs who give up their weekends and slog along to take these meetings, should be looked at as allies. Really. Make them laugh, give them a (sincere) compliment. Be yourself and do what you do - because in the end, you will be a success or not on your own terms, not theirs.

To which I will add this: No one holds the keys to your future but you.

And I know that sounds like some fucking fortune cookie, group therapy bullshit, but it's true.

Your career does not stop and start with the fucktard on the other side of the table from you.

Don't give them that power.

Big thank you to Dianna for her insight. Greatly appreciated.

Piece of business before I leave you... if any one is going to be at the Great American Pitchfest the first weekend in June, PLEASE email me. I want to talk to you about something I'm working on. Thanks!

Other than that...

Till next week...