

Surviving a Creative Career

Hello lovely. So glad you're here. Let's start with a full-on effin' truth about this business: You've chosen one of the most difficult career pursuits on the planet. Fact. It's filled with scammers, it's loaded with rejection, it's lined with broken dreams, and—even if you (like me) don't believe in *those* particular "truths"—it's at the very least exhausting to wonder when the next gig will materialize. It's tough to be on the pursuit. It's also delicious. It's a journey filled with mystery and wonder and excitement and opportunities for working through issues that would stop non-creatives cold in their tracks.

Non-creatives have (shocker) fewer solutions and less creative solutions than we do, when it comes to solving problems. And since every life has its problems, yay us for being able to come at issues from a more open place, creatively. :) Further, it's precisely because every life path has its share of issues that we are fully justified in choosing to do what makes us happy. Our "happy" is the best thing we've got going for us. We—all of us, creatives and nons—take our happy with us, wherever we go. And sometimes, the only thing blocking us from living our dreams fully is that those in our lives don't understand our happy.

Here are some ways to get those in our lives to understand our happy, population by population.

Family

If your family members are hassling you about what success in this industry **should** look like, don't fight that. I know it's tempting. You want to justify, defend, explain... but your best bet is to educate these folks who care so much about you. Teach them how to use IMDb-Pro. Show them NOT the most famous actor they can think of (or that one to whom they always compare you) but instead someone just a tier or two above where you currently are. Show them what the very next tier looks like. Or maybe show them one of those celebs they love... but back at the beginning of their journey. Show them that major stars once did one-liners on short-lived shows. Let them see the number of low-budget indies that came before those first studio projects. Send them articles in which Oscar winners talk about how many times they auditioned before they got cast for the first time. Keep it real.

Also, let them help you populate your show bible! If they start **really** digging on IMDb-Pro, teach them how to create Google Alerts. Tell them whom you're targeting. Get them involved in the process of mapping out your next tier by having them research those folks to which they'd like to compare you. This way, instead of feeling annoyed when one of those well-meaning family members calls to say, "You should do those commercials that the actor who looks just like you does," you can have those family members involved in researching that actor's team, targets, and tier. All of which helps you!

Many actors find it's best to NOT talk about auditions to those lovely family members whose tendencies run "results-oriented". If you do choose to talk about your every preread, please teach your fam that long-haul success is not results-oriented. Remind them that just like their boring business meetings or brilliant Excel spreadsheets are a part of doing business, your auditions are all in a day's work. What defines their

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tier jumps—and yours—is big-picture stuff. Basically, make your family members your allies... or don't share anything with them. That's the best way to protect your soft underbelly. Remember: The reason your relatives can push your buttons so easily is because they were there when those buttons were installed! They have the map. Don't give them access to places that hurt you, when it comes to your career. I'm not talking about putting up dumb walls... just asking that you protect your creative self.

Friends

For any of your non-industry friends, the drill is much the same as it is for your family. Make them your co-conspirators for the next tier. Get them involved. Teach them about the nuances of this career you've chosen. Or, if they're not into it, decide all they need to know is that this career is not results-oriented and that you'll let 'em know when you're doing something very cool... otherwise, the day-to-day is not their concern.

But if your friends are in the industry, it's very important that you remember the difference between friends and colleagues. Friends are people who loved you before you decided to try your hand at acting and who would love you if you gave it all up tomorrow. Friends are happy when you succeed and are there for you when you fail. They are also generally very supportive of your *attempts*. Friends are not so much into results. They are in your life because it's fun to be there. Even if these friends are actors within your own casting category, they are okay with seeing your career take off when theirs stalls out.

MOST of your actor friends are not actually friends. They're colleagues. These are people for whom you're generally excited when they're having career success, but who may very well move on to another tier of professional relationships and leave you behind. Similarly, you may begin to travel in different circles than you used to, simply because your career is advancing faster than some of your colleagues and slower than some of the others. Getting okay with this sort of thing NOW will be a huge help to you, when you wonder where your friend went (or get hit with an angry phone call from a friend wondering where you went). If you're really just colleagues, it's no big deal that you begin to socialize less at certain points in your careers.

About 90% of your actor friends are actually going to be colleagues. That's just gotta be okay. Showbiz is not about friendship. It's about professional advancement and relationships that benefit as many people as possible at once. You're not being **used** by a friend. You're being bypassed by a colleague who has moved a tier beyond. It's not personal. And it won't be when your career spirals up past that colleague's career someday. Get okay with that NOW. It's a reality of this business at its highest tiers.

Partners

Hoo, boy. This is where it gets good. Or bad. Or both. If your partner is the teeniest bit jealous, you'll have to—again with the education thing—educate your partner that this is a necessarily intimate business. Because you can meet your co-star for the first time in the makeup chair and then spend the next

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several hours nearly naked, making out with one another, take after take, you need to be comfortable with yourself and with your castmates and crewmembers. Because you can be asked to do a "body check" at your final producer session during the casting process for a film in which you will appear even semi-nude, we all have to be comfortable seeing you (and you with being seen), talking about shapes and types and qualities of specific body parts that—in any other industry—we'd be fired for even commenting upon. Of vital importance: Your partner needs to be comfy with all of this, too.

Is this line of questioning familiar? "Why do you have to go to that networking event?" "Why does the after-party matter?" "What goes on at the bar after the screening that's more important than the screening itself?" "Why is the film festival all about the parties?" "Why are people getting together to watch an episode of that new show, and why does that event go on for hours longer than the show itself?" "Why is lunch two hours long and why does it cost two hundred dollars?" How do you answer these questions when your significant other works in banking or real estate or computers or education or travel or medicine? Where to begin?

Some folks invite their partners to join them for the events. Great idea, if you have a partner who can watch you flirting and being flirted with without having that turn into the biggest fight of your lives. Others say, "You wouldn't understand," and then have to explain why they were photographed on the red carpet looking very cozy with a good-looking co-star, when the WireImage photos go live.

As with most issues in partnership, when you each have a very secure sense of self, and a very secure sense of your role in one another's lives, you realize that your relationship cannot be diminished by the power of chemistry either of you experiences in your professional relationships. You can enjoy that the strength of your personal relationship gives you more power in your on-camera relationships. How? Because you're not risking anything to "go there." You know where your true love is, and you aren't out there looking for it in a co-star. You're just doing your job. Beautifully.

Just like the best bartenders know to flirt with their customers and to increase their tips by being engaging conversationalists who truly listen, actors know it's heat vs. action we're talking about here. Just like you don't go all the way on screen with your romantic lead because the script *says* you're having sex, you keep the lines clear and clean as you connect in as deeply a way possible, so that it looks real. So that viewers believe you fell in love. So that people buy tickets to watch you convince them you really did "go there." What makes you a good actor, in terms of your ability to *sell that* when you're no more in love with your co-star than you are with your best friend, is that you make it all look and feel real to us. It's the professional chemistry we pay you for. Explain to your partner that it's just your job. And mean it.

Strangers

I once heard someone say: "To compare is to despair." I love that. Comparison will never help you. Yes, have goals. Yes, know where you **want** to go. Yes, constantly live in a state of improving your youngness, so that you're always the best version of yourself possible. But be very careful not to keep your eyes on

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"the other guy." Especially with celebs. You're not them. You can't be them. And when you're tracking celebs to measure your status, you're no better for your mental health than that member of your family who constantly says, "You know what roles you should play? All the roles that so-and-so plays!" What on Earth does that do to serve your creative fire? Nothing. Stop doing it to yourself.

Put yourself through the exact exercises you've learned above (for your friends and family members): Look at the reality of where everyone once was. Look at the long game. Look at those first baby steps and work on what you can control, not what you can't calculate or map out based on the truth via *TMZ*.

Also guard against strangers who have an opinion about how your life should look. I know this may seem far off right now, but think about it: You will have haters. There will be people out there whose goal in life seems to be tearing you down, and with expert precision. I personally get through this particular bit of nonsense by saying this to myself, now and then: "Right this second, someone out there is hating on me. Right now, someone is laying out some really horrible words about me. Right this instant, I am being served up some huge heaping loads of hate that I won't bump into for a long time (if ever). How **wonderful** to know that I'm occupying others' thoughts, right now. What a dream come true that I'm the primary object of anyone's thoughts, ever!"

Now, that's an exaggeration of how I want to walk around feeling in life, of course. And that's why I also say the flip-side version of that: "Right this second, someone out there is loving on me. Right now, someone is laying out some really glorious words about me. Right this instant, I am being served up some huge heaping loads of love that I won't bump into for a long time (if ever). How **wonderful** to know that I'm occupying others' thoughts, right now. What a dream come true that I'm the primary object of anyone's thoughts, ever!"

Ah... it's lovely. Start building that muscle in yourself, now. Because if you have an inch of success, you will face a mile of haters. Don't let 'em change how you do business. Your path is not about them. Ever.

Yourself

All of the above applies to the very wee place inside you that likes to judge your own success, wonder if it's all worth it, measure the weight of feedback from others... all of it. Put together a ritual of daily practices to give yourself loads of self-care and nurturing, because you've earned it, just by diving into a creative career. Your choice to pursue this crazy lifestyle and your ability to endure it even for a minute means that you've built up the right to have some self-love. Give yourself that. Give yourself breaks. Notice how far you've come. Have civilian friends who remind you that showbiz is no big deal. Do community service. Give back. Remember the bigger picture of this LIFE.

Meditate. Forgive yourself when you fail at supporting yourself fully (because, um, you should support yourself on this journey more than anyone else should, since you should also be your biggest fan, right? But you also are human and therefore sometimes don't give yourself the love you need. That's okay. Let

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it go). You will struggle at this. You will feel fatigue with this pursuit. Endurance is a muscle. Build it. Give yourself space to build it! :) Give yourself a lot of love while you're building it. You're here for a bunch of decades, right? Don't expect perfection in season one of a show (your life) you're hoping will stay on the air forever. :)

Remember my ring. Review this month's MP3. Give yourself an escape hatch so that you know you are free to stop this pursuit should that ever feel better to you than the pursuit itself. There is no wrong (or right) answer to how to navigate this career. You've chosen something that's hard, but sometimes knowing you **can** stop the contraption and get off is enough to keep you going. That's me wearing that "get out of LA free" ring. What's yours? What's the symbol that you don't have to push yourself?

I'm not saying you'll ever choose NOT to push yourself. I'm saying that having that assurance that you don't **have to** can sometimes make you push through the hardest times and get you to the next tier faster and faster and faster. Just knowing this pursuit is not *a!!!!!!!* there is can make all the difference.

Please submit your questions for our follow-up Q&A MP3 immediately for the interactive subscription of **SMFA Essentials**! Send your email to: ninjaassistant@cricketfeet.com with the subject line: **Surviving a Creative Career Question**, so we can easily get you in the queue to help out with your questions, before we head into next month's awesome interactive **SMFA Essentials** module.

I really hope you're feeling more excited and inspired by your creative career every day! Next month's interactive module is called **Casting Calendar**. There are certain seasons in this business that affect us all, and then there are tiers to navigate, one at a time (while always keeping an eye on the big picture, of course). In this module, we map out the known factors in an otherwise unpredictable business, so that you can strategize your next move with ninja precision. Stay inspired! And stay badass. :)

We are ridiculously lucky to have a life in which we get to live our dreams, every day. Being blissed out, confident, and capable of achieving your every goal along the way is totally do-able. Unless you're SURE it's impossible, every little dream you hear whispering to you is absolutely, totally attainable. The *Self-Management for Actors* principles **work**. **Bonnie Gillespie is living her dreams by helping others figure out how to live theirs.** She casts SAG-AFTRA indie projects such as the zombie smash hit *BITE ME*, which made the leap from web to TV with **Lionsgate**. Bonnie's weekly column, **The Actors Voice**, runs at Actors Access and her podcast, **The Work**, is available on iTunes. Her books include *Casting Qs: A Collection of Casting Director Interviews*, *Acting Qs: Conversations with Working Actors*, *SMFA: The Ninja Within*, and *Self-Management for Actors: Getting Down to (Show) Business*, which has been named one of **The Top Ten Best Books on Acting Ever Written** and featured at the Tom Cruise actor resource blog. Bonnie coaches and facilitates seminars based on this top-selling book and has traveled internationally—to demystify the casting process and the business side of pursuing an artistic career—as a guest instructor at colleges, universities, actors' unions, and private acting studios. Bonnie has been featured on *Good Morning America*, *BBC Breakfast*, UTV-Ireland, ARD-1 Germany, *Sunrise* Australia, CBC Radio One, BBC Radio 5, E! Online, and in the *LA Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*. Stay plugged in with a visit to BonnieGillespie.com.



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