

Pitching and Negotiating for Screen Composers: Strategies for raising your value, creating winning partnerships, and getting what you need.

Presented by: Adrian Ellis for the SCGC, March 29th, 2016 at the Harris Institute.

Every relationship is a potential collision of ideas and interests - not all of which may align. Each conversation with a potential client or current partner can be seen as a pitch or a negotiation. To many creatives, this aspect of our business is frightening and overwhelming. But it doesn't have to be - with the right tools and some practice, you can gain better control of these situations, and you might even start to have some fun!

In this session you'll discover some often surprising and counterintuitive insights into the decision making process, and you'll learn tactics on how to create influence, gain leverage, and position yourself for ongoing success. Beyond just getting the best compensation, the approaches and tactics outlined will help you forge better relationships with your clients, while giving you strategies for getting what you need out of a deal or negotiation, with a focus on creative solutions and win-win outcomes. Whether it's presenting yourself while networking or in a meeting, winning the trust of a potential client and landing the gig, getting buy-in for your needs on specific deal points, or presenting your ideas during the spotting session, you'll find yourself much better prepared and feeling more confident going into any situation.

PART 1: Negotiation (1hr)

Caveat

Questions:

- Who feels comfortable with negotiation?
- Who is a haggler or has haggled?

Preconceptions

- Negative - It's like House of Cards - adversarial, manipulative, secret plots and undermining people
- It's filled with hardened sharks who want to take you for all you have
- It's scary and hard, no fun, you have little or no power, and a lot to lose
- It's not something that can be learned, and has little application outside of trying to haggle for a better price or get a raise.

Fears, self-perceptions and assumptions (What's blocking you? What is your resistance?)

- Composers are soft people, we are artists at heart, who like peace and for everyone to like us
- We don't like rocking the boat, and put ourselves last in order to please
- We assume the other side has a better position and is more valuable than we are.
- We downplay our value - we are just happy to be getting any work at all.
- We have limited thinking, have a scarcity mindset, and believe there are few options

Positional Negotiation (Bargaining)

- Role play - I have 5k for my indie feature movie. Can you do it? Bat the ball back and forth and see where you end up. What have you learned?
- Why is P.N. bad?
 - Adversarial, and that's bad for us whose industry is based in good relationships. (Note about hiring a "shark")
 - Produces bad decisions
 - Is inefficient, limits options, hems you in

Principled Negotiation (Merit based negotiation)

- Focuses on GREAT communication, and for **win-win outcomes**.

What's the difference?

- Separate the People from the Problem
- Focus on Interests, Not Position
- Invent Options for Mutual Gain
- Insist in Using Objective Criteria

Additional Notes:

- It's bad policy to guess what others want, or to give into an imagined ultimatum. Are you giving them what you want they really want, or what you THINK they want?
- Make first offer? Maybe – creates an effect called "anchoring". Maybe not? They may offer higher; discuss interests.
- Take first offer? Maybe - but ask for some concessions - makes both parties feel better and act better.
- Don't negotiate against yourself! Don't offer more information than is necessary, or downplay something, offer concessions because "you feel bad".
- Don't denigrate their offers, or worse, them or their project! Paints you in a corner, is rude, and low value.
- Don't lowball, and know your context (indie film vs. major)
- Never sacrifice quality!!! Invent other options!
- You are an expert (or you should be!) They may not know what they want. Your job is to provide a solution, in some cases, on they have not thought of - something better than they could have imagined.
- Screen Composer Specific Pitch notes:
 - Make it about them
 - Make it about the story (not the music)
 - Solve the actual problem (may not be what they ask for, what it seems, or even musical).
 - Involve them in the solution (directly, or in their idea)

Tactics, Tricks and how to combat them

- Time pressure, Diminishing your value, Extreme demands/Small concessions, No Authority, Take it or leave it, Silence/Withdrawal, Feather Ruffling, Bluffs/Lies, Threats/Warnings, Psych. Warfare.
- Prep is everything! Know what's fair, Know your BATNA/Reservation/Walkaway Terms. This helps create confidence and fortitude.
 - Know what's fair, be able to calculate your rate in your head, work out diff. Scenarios with different terms.
 - Feel good about your BATNA, and use it to create leverage. Don't use it as a bluff!

- Remember, if you are already in the room, they picked you. You have an advantage. It would be painful for them to go back and resume the search, or use #2 option.
- Relax, breathe, don't react (blink, email, call). Don't give into pressure!
- Call them on it, invite them to negotiate based on principles.

PART 2: Presenting, Pitching, and Raising your Value (1hr)

- What is it?
 - It's about having control of how you are perceived in social and business interactions, being able to influence how people see your value, and understanding how decisions are made.
- Preconceptions
 - Negative and outdated - It's like sleazy sales. You're forcing something on people which they don't want
 - Interactions are unnatural and forced
 - You are pretending to be a big shot, and that is sleazy and false
 - The rules are the rules, and not to be broken
 - Power is immutable, and there is nothing you can do about your current situation.
- Fears, self-perception, assumptions (What's blocking you? What is your resistance?)
 - Low self-esteem
 - Neediness and validation seeking behaviours
 - I need them more than they need me
 - This isn't "me".
 - Breaking the rules is "bad".

Real situations:

- Film Festivals, getting into a closed door
- Networking
- Initial meetings/phone calls
- Spotting session

1. What is Value?
 - a. An agreement (ie. money)
 - b. Fluid, changeable, a perspective (Marcus Aurelius, old iPads are doorstops)
 - c. Determined emotionally, quickly, intuitively
 - d. You can change how you are perceived, by projecting something, and by changing the social dynamic. (Clooney story)
2. How We Decide (The Neuroscience)
 - a. The three parts of the brain (reflect development, how they are still used):
 - i. Reptilian Brain (Ancient - basic emotions, survival)
 - ii. Mid-brain (Social situations, meaning)
 - iii. Neocortex (High reasoning, problem solving, analytics)
 - b. We process information through these levels. The Reptilian Brain wants to do the following:
 - i. If it's not new and exciting, ignore it. (It's not food, a mate)
 - ii. If it's dangerous, or complicated, run.
 - iii. If it's new, summarize radically.
 - c. New/exciting is based on ancient hunting instinct. We like colourful, moving things, and we desire what moves away from us. See: everything about modern life.

- d. Most of the time, we don't use facts and figures to make decisions. We use emotion, "gut feeling", and instinct. Neuroscience has shown this, using brain activity to know what buttons will hit before we even "know". We use reasoning after the fact to justify our decisions. This especially applies to our field, which is based in social dynamics. It's a "people business".
 - e. We chase what moves away from us, we want what we can't have, we place value on things which are difficult to obtain.
- 3. Frames

Frames are perspectives of value and power, and are projected. When frames collide, one will subvert the other. You can challenge these by activating interest and tension.

 - a. Power frame or Status
 - i. Small denials/defiance (challenge them, but be funny/fun - then redistribute some of the power) Example: limit options (high end store vs. wal-mart).
 - ii. Situational Status (be the expert in your domain)
 - b. Prizing (Changing the conversation)
 - i. you become sought/hunted, withdrawing - the reptile wants things that move away from it).
 - ii. Use the Time Frame (against No Authority, and to **set the tone**)
 - iii. Control the agenda/location
 - iv. Make them qualify themselves to you.
 - v. Tell them you're choosy who you work with, why are we a good fit, why is this project a good fit.
 - c. Intrigue - be interesting, have a point/story (HZ - Superman). Create an emotional narrative, with suspense, leave them hanging.
 - i. Put yourself at the center of the story, you are in danger, will you make it out? Demonstrates tenacity, confidence, etc. (Scarehouse / Fucktory story)
 - ii. Cut it short - tell the end after a pitch
- 4. Beta Traps and Seizing Situation Status
 - a. Beta traps in our field: Cattle calls, front desks and big buildings, contests of any kind.
 - b. Bad locations, off your turf with others more powerful or in-league
 - i. Politely ignore or refuse power rituals/beta traps
 - ii. Be unaffected by others' status
 - iii. Small denials/defiance - *Don't be afraid of restriction options. The idea that choice is good may be false. Again, it's about a solution that works. Go into a high end store, the choices are more limited. The opposite? Walmart.*
 - iv. Move discussion into your domain
 - v. Prize, make them qualify to you
- 5. Pitching and Creating Attention
 - a. Attention = Novelty + Tension = Dopamine + Norepinephrine.
 - b. To create novelty, offer a reward (kick in dopamine) - light mystery, new idea, demo, bright shiny stuff.
 - c. To create tension, take something away (norepinephrine) - create push-pull pattern. Create stakes - they may lose you. Time constrain, Withdraw.
- 6. Frame Stacking and Hot Cognition
 - a. Hot Cognition is primal, unavoidable, instant, and enduring.
- 7. Eradicating Neediness
 - a. Eliminate Desires. Things come to you. (diCaprio story)

- b. Be excellent in the presence of others. Be interesting, show what you're good at - and that's more than just music. All talents, connections, insight, resources.
- c. Withdraw at the crucial moment. (Leave them wanting more).

Conclusion:

These ideas, strategies, and methods are jumping off points. In order to get proficient, you will need to practice.

- Begin in low-stakes situations. Try stuff out. Learn to recognize beta traps. Begin to step around them. Identify social frames/status. Initiate collisions with safe targets or partners using small acts of denial/defiance.
- HAVE FUN WITH IT! Smile, laugh, and don't take it too seriously. But, see how far you can get!
- Practice w/ friends and colleagues.
- Never stop learning.

Further Reading:

Getting To Yes

Pitch Anything

Influence

The Obstacle is the Way

How We Decide

Blink