

Getting a Gig – Some suggestions from Kenny Johnson

Your goal: Access. – Getting a foot in the door.

Resume:

Make it look professional – like you’ve been doing it forever. Slick. Buttoned down.

List all of your own student films as writer, producer, director, or all.

List all the films of others you worked on, and how you contributed.

(If you don’t have many credits or films, include a few sentences describing the details of how you worked, how thorough you were, how you work with people. Flesh it out.)

List any academic honors or accolades your work received.

List your school credits, internships, etc.

List professionals you studied with (even if it was just a one-off guest lecture.)

List any special things about you: multi-lingual, Olympic champion, freed the slaves, etc.

List marriage and children (all of the above shows commitment, stability, seriousness, responsibility, dedication.)

List job experience and references.

Consider defining your goals: is producing or directing prime? What’s secondary (pick one) writing or editing or cinematography etc.. Don’t say “anything I can get.” People prefer specifics. If they don’t have your first ideal gig, you can always step back and regroup.

Proof read the resume carefully. - Check your spelling!

Use All Your Resources:

Student Films: - Present only the very best – or the one most appropriate to the viewer.

Know your market: does your project reflect their company’s style?

Also have a short compendium reel where each clip shows some different aspect of your talent, your eye, your ability.

Networking:

Classmates: - Stay in close touch with each other. Help each other. Generosity repays itself.

Teachers: - Ditto (but remember all their other students will be hitting on them, too.)

Guest lecturers: - Ditto – if they allow it.

Friends and relatives: - Even if they’re not in the business they may know someone who knows someone. (A family lawyer may know an entertainment lawyer who knows a producer, etc. There’s only about three degrees of separation between you and the person you need to get to.

Continue Producing Work:

Many more filmmaking tools are cheaply available – but many more untalented people are glutting the market. Be certain your work is high-quality and a standout. Produce & direct theater if possible.

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Intern or DGA Trainee:

Studios, networks, production companies often use unpaid interns. Call everyone.

The DGA Trainee program is great, but they take only about 10 out of 100. Aren't you a 10?

Knock on every door:

Try every place: studios, networks, production companies, commercial houses. Even the smallest gig is a foot in the door. It's easier to move up, to get another job when you've already got one.

Meetings:

When you get one, learn all you can about who the person is; look for a connection to build off of: NYFA alumnus, a shared interest, home town, etc. What's on their resume?

Entering the office, scope it out for clues to ice-breakers: what books are on the shelves, family photos, unusual objects, "Wow, is that the original Maltese Falcon?"

Ask about the person or mention something of theirs that you liked. Be upbeat, open, vital, honest. Make solid eye contact.

Rehearse what you want to say. A lot. Then make it sound spontaneous.

If it's a meeting where you're pitching a project, rehearsal is critical. Carry a cheat-sheet for security, but play into their eyes. Make it intriguing, with a strong beginning, middle and end. Keep it as short, clear and concise as possible. Only pitch a project you thoroughly believe in. Be sure to pee before the meeting.

Always try to take something away. If the person doesn't have a gig for you, try to get a recommendations to others. Ask if they will make a call for you. Follow up, sending any additional material (newspaper clipping, etc.) to nudge them onward.

If they want to hear "your take" on one of their ideas: research the project thoroughly. Try to find out what others have said or guess what the "standard take" might be and mention it, then tell them how you see more possibilities and spin out your fresh, wonderful ideas with clarity of vision.

Remember: regardless of their appearance, attitude, arrogance, they want you to magically solve all their problems. They want you to be the one they hire.

The Write way:

Writing can open the door. Often leads to producing in TV, then hire yourself to direct. A writing partner can help.

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The Deal:

1. Research others' deals
2. Give agent ammunition
3. What's important to you; what can you lose
4. Fees, perks, air fares, approvals/consultation
5. Use Guild protections; WGA reading times
6. Back end flexibility, get some up front?
7. Sequel/series royalties
8. Locked for series; pay or play
9. Sequels etc. at floor of this deal
10. Can you say no? Steve Cannell's building
11. Series: Guaranteed scripts, directing, time?
12. Series: Budget adequate for strong staff?
13. Get good counsel, trust your own

Their Notes:

1. Don't argue each, hear all if possible; always pick your battles
2. Three kinds of notes: Good, Bad, Different
3. Don't fold if their ideas won't work; it will haunt you
4. Take time to consider even their worst, put off if possible
5. The Golden Brick
6. Removing several bricks & rebuilding the wall
7. Hold vision; what's the definition of a camel?
8. Can you say no!? Will you walk? Weigh the consequence
9. Awful note may not be: V meets the aliens
10. Stan Lee, too many buys

Offered a gig you don't want?

Can you get on board then refashion it into something you can live with – maybe even come to love? Can you bloom where you're planted? Segue into something better?

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Got the gig?!

Display enthusiasm, show your passion. Be the first to arrive the last to leave. Meet and learn everyone's name. Talk to them in depth re their experience, background, family, friends, aspirations.

Take fullest advantages of the gig. Observe. See what works, what doesn't. Ask lots of questions. Offer suggestions carefully.

Bring homemade cookies. They may chuckle at your naiveté, but they will remember you.

Bottom line: What's the key to success? – Tenacity.

If you truly love filmmaking, then keep trying. Don't give up. Only the people with the greatest passion and determination survive and thrive. Many aren't particularly talented, but they're tenacious. They hang in there.

Be Tenacious and stay true to your core values, your artistic vision. Don't sell your soul.

And remember what the word *camera* means.