

HOW TO GET INVITED TO RUN WITH THE "BIG DOGS"

By Paul Lawrence for Early to Rise

One of the most frequent mistakes unsuccessful people make is to take the position that nobody is ever going to sucker them into working for free or for way too little. For example, one aspiring screenwriter told me that a producer had been interested in one of his scripts -- but because the producer wanted him to do some rewriting on spec (do the writing first and then hope for an eventual payday), he thumbed his nose at the opportunity.

The writer went on to explain to me that according to the WGA (Writers Guild of America), he should receive a minimum of several thousand dollars up front for such an undertaking.

In fact, those are the WGA guidelines. But what the writer failed to note is that in order to become a WGA member and be entitled to that kind of money, one needs to have made several major script sales first. This is not the position that writer was in. So, he passed, and the producer moved on to something else.

While I've been working to break into the screenwriting business, my personal philosophy has been to accept where I am on the food chain. I haven't considered it demeaning for me, an unproven "little dog" with no track record, to be unable to command a strong bargaining position. So when a "big dog" producer asked me if I'd like to co-write a script with him on spec -- with no guarantee of ever getting paid -- I jumped at the chance and worked as hard and as diligently as I could. The producer was so impressed with my work ethic and skills that he offered me the job of rewriting a different script for pay.

The pay was very small. I made only \$250 for about 20 hours of work. But I eagerly accepted the job and worked hard on it. That resulted in an offer to do another rewrite ... and another. To make a long story short, I became so valuable to this producer that I now do similar rewrites for him on a regular basis for five times that money. And remember that spec script we co-wrote? Well, it now looks as if it is going to be funded and distributed by "major Hollywood entities." I will receive as much for that one script as I used to earn in a year -- and it will almost certainly lead to future writing jobs.

I argue that being prepared to do the work first will give you an advantage in any field.

Why? Because when you don't ask to be paid first. When you show (not tell) the "big dogs" how they would benefit by doing business with you, they can invite you to join their game without having to ask if you know how to play.

So, the next time an opportunity to take on a new assignment comes your way, even though the immediate pay seems inadequate, consider the bigger picture before you decline.

Being asked to join the pack is a hell of a lot more fun than standing on the outside begging to be let in.