

# 36 fuck up's not to make in a film production

- an examination between authenticity and compromise in a film production.

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## Summary

In this master's thesis, I have closely examined the mistakes that can be made in connection with a film production, which I call "Fuck ups not to make in a film production." The original question I have investigated is the balance between authenticity and compromise in a film process. Furthermore, it has led to understanding what authenticity means in this context and what compromise actually signifies - whether it is detrimental or beneficial to a film process. I have approached the entire work through the lens of a director and screenwriter.

The method I have used is to write the script and direct a short film ("Shut it, Dad", 2024), which has been the starting point of the study. In the text below, I have simultaneously conducted my own interviews and engaged with studies and interviews from other directors, actors, and screenwriters about filmmaking as both an idea and insights into practical execution. The format of the thesis is presented in bullet points where, with the double negation as the starting point in the headings, I list a number of important points to

consider as a filmmaker to achieve success more quickly in their creative process. The sources I have used are indicated in the running text and span a wide range of industries and disciplines.

The conclusion of the study is that authenticity is paramount to all kinds of ambitions for success, that success is relative, and the desire for material and worldly success can be a dangerous poison that should be avoided to preserve the artistic persona. When it comes to compromise, the conclusion of this thesis is that compromise is dedicated to the budding filmmaker. Compromises are still a natural part of a film process, and there are no dichotomies between compromises and a successful film - furthermore, compromise constitutes a natural phase of decision-making that is part of the entire film production.

## **Introduction**

Watching a movie is a favorite pastime for billions of people, where moving images and sound make us feel and think in often transformative ways. Most, if not all, would agree that the subjective experience of watching a film is highly motivating, soothing, and entirely different from our usual daily rest with thoughts wandering freely. Watching a film also feels very different and more relaxing than our often stressful experience of working and needing to solve problems in our real lives.

Working with film, on the other hand, is one of the most demanding jobs that exist. The profession demands physical endurance, highly developed social skills - where there are high demands for managing both actors and technical functions, political attention at macro and micro levels, understanding of economics at the corporate level, and an artistically advanced work. You must work with high artistic integrity while also being the world's best salesperson. You must have both patience and the ability to change pace when necessary. You must be passionate about every project you work on and at the same time be able to

reload when you understand that your film will not receive funding or for other reasons cannot be produced in the way you want or at all. Therefore, this text also contains many reflections on how to work on yourself as a person to be resilient. Because it is only when you feel good that things can go well.

Most people don't have careers. Most people have different jobs that they exchange for promises of time and dedication. Those who subsequently have careers may not always have them out of pure desire to become skilled in that discipline - but it is other external goals that beckon. Cars, spouses, houses. Climbing a few rungs on the social ladder. Being liked, admired, loved, perhaps even feared. Exclusive vacation arrangements and, not least of all - what everyone else will say. That others will speak well of you, or that one, who has created a dazzling career. Preferably against all odds. Preferably with two empty hands. However, such stories can only be signed after success has occurred and is enduring, for the story of the poor man or woman without opportunities who against all odds achieved success reinforces individual effort and personal genius while eliminating any suspicions of nepotism, luck, or inherited money.

There are jobs. There are careers. And there is also a calling. When you ARE something. Most employers want their employees to identify with their profession. They should have skin in the game. They should identify with their profession. Because it creates peace in HR departments and management teams. Employees who obediently follow and give their all without complaining are an employer's dream. That's also why the job market in Sweden favors young people between 22-29. Because they don't know any better. They still have Christmas in their eyes and want to please. Want to belong. Want to be someone. Exactly who they want to become is unclear. But if you don't have your own dream, you can bet that someone else will make sure you work to fulfill theirs.

There are jobs. There are careers. And there is a calling.

Most people who have jobs don't think that they ARE what they work with. Sure, the job occupies a lot of mental activity, but it's mostly about maneuvering through intrigues and solving various challenges. But they identify themselves, as most people do, as so much more than what they work with. Most people live like that. Most people think like that. Most people have jobs, even fewer have careers, and the very fewest have a calling.

It is a curse and a blessing to have a calling. When you follow a calling, you also make yourself ready to sacrifice much more than others would be willing to do. You can't read a two-year vocational education part-time and get a license for a calling.

People who have followed a calling have created works that we can see framed in galleries. We can see their films, listen to their music, read their poems when we get married or broaden the perspectives on our lives when we read their novels.

People who have followed a calling are also on the other side of the coin. They can wade through rejected manuscripts, artistic stray courses, and bitterness. Often, it's difficult from a distance to understand what distinguishes a successful person who has followed their calling from a failure. Upbringing, parents' contacts and capital, hard work, luck, good self-confidence, the spirit of the times, the network.

Often, they are different, independent verticals that need to converge for success to be achieved. And there's not always much you can do about it - whether it goes well or whether it goes to hell.

Elon Musk said in an interview he gave on Joe Rogan's podcast that there are a couple of things that beat genius and contacts. Diligence. And even though it doesn't necessarily guarantee success, you'll never get anywhere without it.

People who have a calling often experience themselves as being on the sidelines of society, observing the lives of others through a thin glass.

Not because people with a calling understand more about life, they are just more sensitive to it.

It's a dangerous path to walk if you imagine that you know more about life than other people.

After all, there is a reason why most people do what they do. They settle. They have their lives, their oatmeal in the morning, their children in preschool, their car with a broken windshield wiper. They have a few friends, a favorite restaurant, and weekends filled with relatives, friends, and family. It's a good life. For many, it's what life should be about. But it's not enough for those who have a calling.

This is both a handbook of concrete tips in working with film, as much as it is also a book on finding your authentic self.

Robert Kegan, in collaboration with others, developed a model at Harvard called the model of adult development. Where after childhood, we move from reciprocity to increased self-awareness and a sense of what is true for ourselves. We move from seeking approval from our environment to forming a more grounded understanding of who we are as individuals. Who we are. What we like. What values guide us. This has also been written about by Carl Lindeborg in his book "The Authentic Shift" (2023), and it's a book I will come back to, among other literature.

Most people have jobs. Some have careers. A few have a calling. A calling is both a curse and a blessing. Because you can have a calling without either having a job or a career. If you have

a calling, you can reach such heights that neither employment nor career are on the same scale for what you have accomplished.

The blessing of having a calling is fully felt in its manifestation. When the idea of a story takes shape. When we plant a seed for something that we imagine will be fantastic. Then to work with other creative talents and collaborate to achieve a result, that's where the great charm comes for me. That's why I don't just write but also direct.

I haven't always been like this. For much of my life, I was a self-absorbed devil with a Bergman complex. I read everything I could find about Ingmar Bergman. This was during his lifetime when not much had leaked out from his children, his wives, and mistresses. Much of my image of Bergman changed after I read Daniel Bergman's "Hjärtat" (Polaris, 2021).

There, a man with a calling is depicted. But also a cold man with a calling. When I read the portrait of Ingmar Bergman in "Hjärtat", I thought of the oil magnate Daniel Plainview played by Daniel Day Lewis in "There Will be Blood" (2007), who finds a parentless, newborn boy in a basket and decides to take care of the child. Not out of care but because he understands it will be good for business.

Bergman, I allow myself to argue, was a man with a calling. He wanted to make theater, he wanted to make movies, he wanted to write. Everything else that happened around this (wives, mistresses, children) was of secondary importance. Perhaps the relationships provided good material for scripts. The world forgave him, and he got to keep going. That time has passed.

### **Which stage of your own development are you in?**

Back in my youth, I thought a lot about Bergman. I looked up to him. Wanted to be like him. Never good. And here it might be worth referring back to Robert Kegan's model of adult development.

In Robert Kegan's model of adult development, there are five stages. (Svenska Dagbladet, 27 July 2019. Link:

<https://www.svd.se/a/AdJm3r/vuxenutveckling-ar-att-bli-allt-mer-mentalt-flexibel>)

1. The impulsive stage of the child 2–6 years.
2. The need-centered self – 6 years–late teens.
3. The socialized self/group identity – late teens and onwards.
4. The self-authored self/independent thinking, inner compass, multiple perspectives.

The integrated self/changing deeply and taking responsibility for a larger whole.

5. Robert Kegan's so-called subject-object theory built upon the theories of the Swiss psychologist/philosopher Jean Piaget about children's mental development during upbringing. Kegan argued that the human capacity for transformation continues throughout life and added some clear developmental stages for adults.

Researchers have, in parallel and in the wake of Kegan's model, developed and refined models containing more stages than that.

I bring this up because it is of particular importance for you to understand which stage you are in yourself. Where are you in your own development? Are you self-absorbed in your own genius, do you want to be loved by the market and try to see what Hollywood is looking for (it's almost impossible), or should you follow your own compass?



Now I became rhetorical, I know, but it's the inner compass, our own values, our authentic self that must guide us forward in knowing what it is we should pursue.

Making a film isn't difficult, as David Lynch put it. "Write 70 scenes. Connect them together and you have a movie."

Musk said that diligence beats genius. Many business owners and entrepreneurs often come back to the same realization: if I had known then what I know today about what it means to start and run a business, I might never have started it.

Why do so many films end up being bad?

But then, why is it that so many films end up being bad? There are 500-700 films released per year, approximately, just in the USA. Only a fraction of those are even considered for nomination by the Oscars jury. You also don't have 1000 films per year that reach a rating over 7.0 on IMDB.

Considering how many films have been made, and how much literature has been written - why is it then that so many films are not perceived as good by the audience?

David Ayer, the director of films like Fury, said that "it's hard to make a bad film, even harder to make a good film, and it's almost impossible to make a fantastic film." (The Real Ones Podcast, August 29, 2013. Link:

<https://open.spotify.com/episode/1WF0lqYk0Fc9DMxCtlC0Ip?si=J7Q-xEenRD67z53JqSyMOQ>)

This is addressed to you as a director. It's also aimed at you who have no money but still want to make a film.

Alongside writing this text, I have also written the script for and directed my first dramatized short film: "Shut it, Dad," which I will refer to several times in the following text.

### **1. Adapt the story to your set design, not the other way around.**

Film director Ruben Östlund was interviewed on the podcast Värvet on January 9, 2023. A quote from the interview with Ruben Östlund is: "I found it harder to work with an unlimited budget. I can make compromises in my projects, but on the other hand, my projects are so long and extensive, so for me to make adjustments... in the long run, you never really think about it, the compromises you've made, and they really don't matter because you've moved on instead. And maybe when someone tells you 'you can't do this or that,' then I can just relax and move on."

When I started writing the script for "Shut it, Dad," I initially had a thought of a supernatural story and driving the narrative forward with metaphors.

I had seen a clip on YouTube where a rough carpenter was renovating an apartment. When he smashed a wall, a window behind the wall was revealed. In the window, a face appeared a second later. Horror. Cozy. Lovely. Intriguing. However, I soon realized that it wouldn't be economically feasible. We would need to hire carpenters, build a room in a studio, with a window-filled wall behind. Moreover, we would probably need to buy several hundred liters of blood. It was also not entirely clear if we would be able to handle everything in one take with the blood explosion I envisioned. Would there be a budget to buy double sets of walls, wall paint, and blood? Not a chance.

Then I had to go back to the core of the story. What is the purpose of the story? What effect do I want to achieve?

It turned out that "Shut it, Dad" did just fine without ghosts, torn walls, and pig blood (although I haven't let go of the idea - ever since I saw the blood gush out from the closed elevator doors in *The Shining*, I have always wanted to orchestrate a blood explosion.)

A set design can never override the purpose you have with your film, but don't get blinded by the audience.

## **2. The Audience Comes Last**

Rick Rubin is a world-renowned music producer. He has worked with many of the biggest bands the world has seen. Johnny Cash, Metallica, Nick Cave, Weezer, Beastie Boys, Public Enemy, Red Hot Chili Peppers, and so on. In 2022, he released the book "*The Creative Act - A Way of Being*," in which he states that the audience, in your creative process, comes last. In an interview with "*The School of Greatness*," he elaborates on his insights from the book and why the audience should come last.

"I don't create what I create for anyone else. I do it for myself. And it turns out that when you create something truly for yourself, you do the best possible for the audience. A big reason why, if you go to the cinema... So many big movies just aren't good. It's because they... they're not made by someone who cares about it. They're made by people trying to create something they think someone else will like. And that's not how art works. It's something else. It's not art. It's business. So if we create art, we create... it's almost like a diary entry. Could anyone... would I worry that someone else might not like my diary entry? It's incomprehensible. You know, it has nothing to do with them. My diary entry has nothing to do with anyone else. So everything we create as artists is essentially diary entries."

(Link: <https://www.instagram.com/p/C0KD-Miprwh/>)

With that said: I have worked commercially for almost my entire adult life. To this date, I have run my company for ten years. I have directed over 200 commercial films, over 500 commercial podcasts, and written thousands of pages of scripts commissioned by clients. In all these cases, the target audience has always been the focus - because it has to be. Who are we targeting? Girls or boys? Men or women? People who identify as neither? What age group? What demographic? What do they eat, what cities do they live in, what do they want with their lives?

That's why I never care a bit about target audiences when I'm in the artistic creation. It's neither my job as a screenwriter nor as a director to think about the audience's sexual partners, where they grew up, or what they want in life. I can choose to make it my business if it helps my story. But such work is the responsibility of distributors. It's the channels' responsibility. They are insanely interested in it. That's also why we see sequels, Terminator 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 ad infinitum. That's why most money in Sweden goes to cinema films with a family theme. Because it brings in the most money. Should you have to care about it? No, because it diminishes your scope for action. If you feel compelled to make "Sune in the Mountains 7," then you should do it. But not otherwise. Because it stifles your perspectives. You'll never be someone for yourself if you only think about what everyone else wants.

During the acceptance of an award, screenwriter Charlie Kaufman (Adaptation, Being John Malkovich, etc.) expresses what he believes a screenwriter should be and do. (Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u2v6-caIxxM>) We're not here to please the producers, our own perceived success, or even the audience, which has also been trained to know what they're supposed to like. We're here to tell the truth about the world as it is - cutting

through layers and layers of character play, taglines, and advertising messages. I believe this is the hardest and strongest form of compromise. And when you collaborate, you will encounter people who express opinions that they often don't know if they truly believe in their hearts. Do they fundamentally believe that what they're saying is true? Or are they just representatives of a zeitgeist? As a filmmaker, I have struggled with these questions in almost every artistic work I have done.

The creator of the Star Wars saga, director George Lucas, has been interviewed several times about storytelling, where he claims that no Hollywood companies are willing to take risks. To discover something new, you have to take risks. Unfortunately, because everything is controlled by capitalism, all companies - Hollywood or not - want to go on paths that have already been discovered and proven to work in the market. Being a pioneer in an industry where it's very important to take risks, but where no one can stand behind you - that's a tough decision to make. Any sensible person who wants a roof over their head and food on the table should leave it be. But the Swedish film industry should not only consist of rich kids spending their parents' money to fulfill their dreams - we should create an environment where more creative people are encouraged to persevere.

### **3. There are plenty of good-looking films - make a film about something that concerns you**

How can your project relate to societal issues and concerns? The major question I had with the Blood, Laundry & Fools project was a standpoint exaggerated in the book, which I was unsure about when the film project was created. In the book's narrative, society has turned its back on fathers of newborn babies, where society expects men to be both vulnerable and strong at the same time. As a therapist told me: Women don't really want men to express

their emotions. If men do, it often leads to the man having to comfort the woman after he has upset her by showing his emotions in a more fluctuating way. Therefore, the discussion about women wanting men to be more vulnerable is just a fashion statement influenced by the spirit of the times. But in reality, women still want men to be strong, provide, lead. I'm not saying it's good. But this was the topic I wanted to explore in the book. When it evolved into a film project, I was afraid the subject would be too provocative and that I, as an artist, would not be accepted. Therefore, I handed over much of the creative leadership to other creators, which led to a diversion from the overall vision and left a void in the creative result. And I wrestle with the same question in *Shut Up, Dad*. I want to explore the ideas of class and the presumed class perspectives in the film. I know it can be considered provocative. Yet, I have never considered myself a provocateur. I want to say what I believe is true and create a discussion if people are willing to discuss. But I can feel a kind of mass psychosis around certain topics in society where people are not willing to challenge their beliefs. As an artist, I would argue that this is the greatest ethical issue hindering me from exploring the vision without any boundaries.

#### **4. Even if you don't stand a chance - take it**

The quote for this headline is dedicated to the singer Michael Bublé's grandfather, a plumber and immigrant who came to Canada with nothing but empty hands. It was Michael's grandfather who strongly contributed to Michael's successes. When Michael decided he wanted to become a professional singer at around 13, the whole family rallied behind him to make it happen. Grandpa the plumber booked venues, and then the family mobilized ticket buyers. Aunt talked to all her colleagues at her job, who came along with their partners. Mom, brothers, cousins, grandma, and grandpa. After a while, interest began to slowly increase in who this Michael Bublé could be, selling out concert halls in Canada.

Maybe he was worth a shot? (Source: interview on the Diary of a CEO podcast on December 23, 2023).

Michael Bubl  undoubtedly had great talent, but it wouldn't have amounted to anything if his family had never believed in him. It takes a village to raise a child, as the saying goes. It also seems to take a whole village to make a person successful.

The same could be said of the Swedish painter Anders Zorn. Anders Zorn was literally born in a barn, a few miles outside Mora in Dalarna in 1860. His mother, Grudd Anna Andersdotter, had worked in bottle washing at a brewery in Uppsala the year before. The German brewmaster Leonard Zorn took notice of the sweet Dalecarlian girl and soon she became pregnant. The boy never met his father, but grew up with his grandparents at Gruddg rden outside Mora. When he herded the animals, he used to entertain himself by carving figures out of wood that attracted general admiration. Even though Anders never met his father, Leonard and Anna continued to correspond with each other. Leonard had advanced and become wealthy in Finland. When Leonard died, Anders's family used the correspondence to prove inheritance rights. The money they received, about 180,000 in today's value, they invested in sending Anders Zorn to art schools, first in Sala and then in Stockholm. It was these studies that opened the world's eyes to the fatherless genius from Mora, and the rest is history. At his death in 1920, Anders Zorn had not only become one of Sweden's most famous painters of all time, he was also one of the wealthiest men in the country. (Source: <https://historiskamedia.se/artiklar/anders-zorn-1860-1920/>) If Anders Zorn's family had never recognized Anders's talent but had dismissed it and invested the inheritance in new horses or a timber house, we would never have understood what ability was lost. We can never choose the family we grow up in, but it is always possible to choose

the context that strengthens us and makes us successful. History has shown that it is almost impossible to succeed on your own. There always needs to be someone who believes in you.

## **5. Top of Your Mountain Is the Bottom of a New One**

It's easy to imagine reaching a point where you feel accomplished, where there's a bucket list of things you want to get done before you can feel satisfied. Cheek kisses to be shared, reviews to be done by this or that publication, talk shows you'll be invited to, friends you'll have, and eons of possibilities lying ahead of you.

I want to revisit Michael Bublé, whom I wrote about in the point above. Michael got his dream at the age of 13 of wanting to become a professional singer. Then it would take over 10 years from when the dream was awakened until he got a real shot. Then he got a record deal from Warner and began touring the world. What Michael Bublé reiterates during the interview is that he must continue to evolve. He summarizes his life somewhat fleetingly and blasé, saying, "write an album, promote the album, and then tour with it for a year and a half." Now he says he wants to evolve and stop being so strongly associated with Christmas. In 2011, Michael Bublé's album "Christmas" was released, which has become one of the best-selling albums, with 16 million copies sold as of 2022. (Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christmas\\_\(Michael\\_Bubl%C3%A9\\_album\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christmas_(Michael_Bubl%C3%A9_album))) In the interview, he says he can get frustrated when another global artist reaches out and wants to collaborate, as long as it's for a new Christmas song. Now he wants to act, make movies, something else. The life he described, writing, promoting, touring, could be a life that many would give their right arm to live. But he's done. He wants to move on. The top of the mountain he climbed has now reached the bottom of another mountain he's preparing to tackle.



Try to put yourself in that situation.

Film director Axel Petersén was interviewed by Dagens Industri in November 2023, where he talked about what he's been up to in recent years.

"Besides *The Scapegoat* (2023), I've been working on a documentary about the Egyptian actor Omar Sharif for several years. In addition to that, I've been working on two other projects, the development of a feature film and a TV series, which I've been paid for, but the projects were canceled before they went into production. That's often how it ends up in my industry, unfortunately." (Source:

<https://www.di.se/nyheter/okanda-maltasvenskar-blir-film-folk-som-tar-genvagar/>)

These are words from a director who has won critical acclaim at the Toronto Film Festival, had a film selected for the Golden Bear, and another film nominated for no less than nine Guldbagge Awards. Yet, all projects come and go, receive funding, are forgotten, prioritized out, and suddenly premiere and achieve great success.

What does this tell us? That the industry is fickle and unpredictable? Certainly. That it takes perseverance to break through all the setbacks? Absolutely. For me, it primarily tells about loving the process and being resilient. It must be about embracing setbacks.

## **6. Embrace Setbacks**

In a study published in *Science Advances* (L. Kringelbach et al., 2023), researchers investigated what happens in the brain when we engage in one of the most common relaxation activities: watching movies. The results of the study clearly show that the activity serves its purpose—it is very relaxing. The study involved 167 participants who were given various tasks. The first task involved watching several different films, including *Ocean's Eleven*, *Home Alone*, *Erin Brockovich*, and *Star Wars*. By creating models of the entire

brain and its activity both during movie watching and when the individuals were resting or performing minor discreet test tasks, researchers found that the hierarchical organization of the brain's information processing is "flatter" when watching movies. This, the researchers argue, indicates that we require less effort when watching films because we are exposed to various stimuli from different activities (moving images, light, and sound). The brain doesn't have to work; we don't need to exert ourselves; we can simply immerse ourselves in a stream of experiences crafted for us.

The lead author of the article, Professor Morten L. Kringelbach, adds: "This study provides fascinating new evidence of how movies can alter the hierarchical organization needed to orchestrate brain computations. The brain abstracts coherent narratives from still images and sounds, freeing us to transcend the rat race of survival, if only for a brief moment. The study confirms the truth in the words of the great French director Jean-Luc Godard: 'Film is the most beautiful fraud in the world.'"

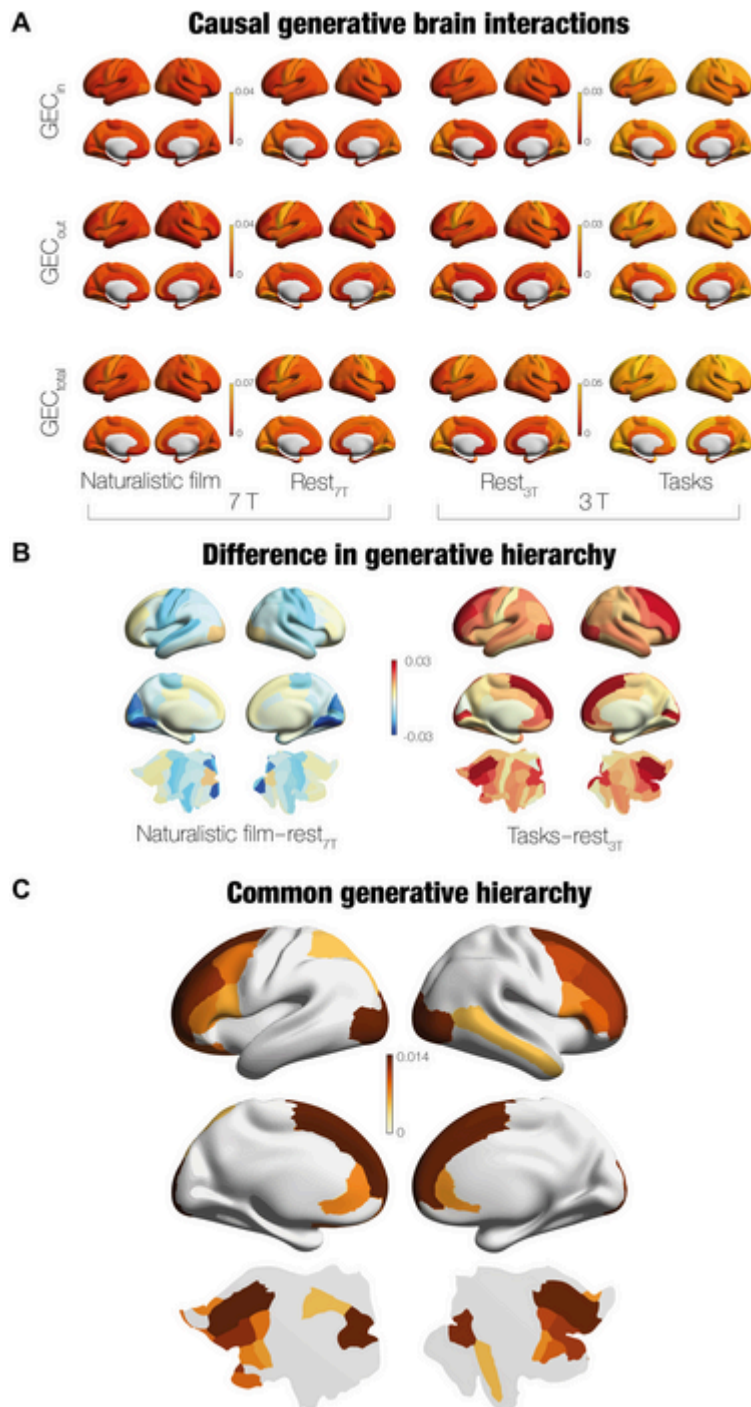


Image from the study "Toward naturalistic neuroscience: Mechanisms underlying the flattening of brain hierarchy in movie-watching compared to rest and task."

I wanted to highlight this example because film consumption stands in stark contrast to actually working to produce a film. Perhaps film is one of those phenomena where the consumer's experience of the end result is farthest removed from the filmmaker's operational insights into what it actually takes to make a film.

Lars. G. Lindström is a Swedish film producer with extensive experience in the industry, also serving as a film consultant at the Swedish Film Institute. He revealed during a lecture at Stockholm University of the Arts on September 23, 2022, that he rarely talks at parties or dinners about what he works on, as he wants to avoid people pitching their ideas to him in the wee hours.

Lindström made a striking analogy during his lecture. He has a summer house on Öland, which is connected over the Kalmar Sound to the mainland by the Öland Bridge.

"So, I've crossed the Öland Bridge several hundred times," Lars G. Lindström shared. "And what kind of person would I be if suddenly, after the five-hundredth crossing, I get it into my head that I probably know how to build bridges? How insane would it be for me to think that I can equate myself with a bridge engineer just because I've crossed a bridge a few times? But that's how people think about film. They think they understand film just because they've watched a film."

## **7. Get to know different acting performances to gain clarity on the relationship between authenticity and compromise.**

In this chapter, I've taken a closer look at various forms of acting and how they manifest. If you want to follow along with what I'm writing, I suggest you watch:

- "Småstadsliv" on YouTube
- "Strandhotellet" from ViaPlay
- The movie "A Beautiful Boy" (2018)
- "UFO Sweden" (2022)
- "Triangle of Sadness" (2022)

Our world consists of different types of performances. My suspicion is that it depends on two main factors: the actor's experience and talent, a well-written script, and the director's ability to create a safe and trusting environment for the actors to perform in. Below, I've gathered some clips that I will try to interpret and categorize based on the actors' performances, considering the context of the performance.

"Småstadsliv" is a comedy concept consisting of a variety show performed in rural Sweden, along with film productions where short sketches are shown on social media. The acting is exaggerated, almost like what you see in animated performances in children's movies. The actor is "very sad," "very disappointed," or "very happy." The characters display some clear traits that are emphasized and recur in the performance. Comedy acts like this can either bring characters to life to make people laugh at some recognizable traits of everyday characters or to prove a political or societal point.

Moving on to the TV series "Strandhotellet." The scene I've chosen is when two women are talking on a couch. The subject concerns a strained relationship. This performance is a bit more melancholic than the previous ones. Series like "Strandhotellet" can be seen as classic TV dramas, where the arcs of the story are built on private relationships between the characters. People are unfaithful, fall in love, die, kill each other, and so on. One could call this genre Gossip Drama. Just like in the comedy cases, the characters' traits are not exaggerated; instead, the character's expression is characterized in the dialogue and colors each line. "Strandhotellet," viewed as a gossip TV drama, creates archetypes rather than reliable characters that we can relate to. There is still a sort of thin membrane between the people we see acting on the screen and who we are as people watching the drama. We as the audience can be transported into the story, but never into the characters' inner lives, which leaves us somewhat empty. "What did I just watch? Was it worth it? Can I remember anything from what I saw?" If I were to imagine what is missing on the set during the filming of the "Strandhotellet" series, or at least this specific scene, it's a lack of understanding of the characters' own journey and where they are heading with themselves.

The same applies to the Swedish film "UFO Sweden" (2022), created by Crazy Pictures - a film collective in Norrköping. "UFO Sweden" is their second feature film. "UFO Sweden" is an action film, and therefore, all scenes must be told at a fast pace. Unfortunately, the actors cannot keep up with the pace, and they are not skilled enough to act authentically.

The next example comes from "Beautiful Boy" (2018). In the scene, a father meets his son, who is a drug addict, at a café. They start talking, the father tries to reconcile, forgive, and perhaps move on. The son is caught and hindered by his addiction, making him impossible to meet and handle. "Beautiful Boy" is written by the acclaimed author, poet, and

screenwriter Luke Davies together with the film's director Felix van Groeningen. In this scene, you can really see the characters' struggles as they collide and try to approach each other. For anyone who has been in a family with drug addiction, the dialogue and goals of each person in the scene are very relatable. There is also a lot of subtext in the dialogue, where we as the audience can easily see that the relationship is both intimate and infected.

The next example is from Ruben Östlund's film "The Triangle of Sadness" (2022). A Russian millionaire talks to the captain on board the ship. They joke with each other about the Soviet Union and capitalism. The style of play seems almost improvised, as if it could have been a well-made documentary. Östlund has said in interviews that he usually lets the actors repeat a scene many times before they reach a satisfactory result. I don't know if that's the case here, but the dialogue is candid and leans towards comedy, although it's a dark comedy as the ship is sinking, and in the scene, we as the audience are not sure if the two men will drown or not.

Summary: In the book "Directing Actors" by Judith Weston, the author argues that there are some stereotypes among directors who end up directing actors. I list three of the archetypes below:

- The Photographer
- The Writer
- The Actor

In the clips from "Småstad," it's clear that it's the actor who is also the director. A person with something to say and show in the form of functions to take a stand for a social issue or a function resembling an exaggerated person in real life. Since "Strandhotellet" is a large

franchise, an ongoing series with lots of episodes, the organization around "Strandhotellet" consists of four different directors (2023) and five different screenwriters (besides Camilla Läckberg, who is credited as the "creator"). In addition to this large team of creators and the four different producers, Daniel Ottoson is titled as the "creative producer" for the show. All these titles can sometimes be mixed up, and since I haven't spoken to the team, I can only guess what a creative producer means. But if the series has a creative producer, it may be the same role as American producers often have, where they co-direct with the director, oversee the screenwriters, and hold the story together. Daniel Ottoson is credited on IMDB for writing and/or directing sketch formats for Swedish television such as "Aina 112," "Karatefylla," and "Jävla klåpare." Therefore, Ottoson's experience in the creative film industry comes from the same format as "Småstadsliv." Short sketches with exaggerated characters. The experience is limited to sketch programs. And as soon as there are more than two people sharing the work on the script, the authentic vision is at risk, depending on collaboration methods and which producers are responsible for the project.

With "UFO Sweden," it's quite clear to me that the filmmakers are primarily photographers and not directors for actors. Each frame is carefully orchestrated in terms of color, props, and vision. The script doesn't seem to be regarded as a highly creative work with enough value in relation to cinematography. Victor Danell has directed, produced, edited, and written the script for UFO Sweden. Victor Danell has also been one of the VFX supervisors, along with his brother Daniel Danell. VFX takes up a lot of space in UFO Sweden, almost playing its own role in the film. Perhaps that's why the acting comes in second or third place. The ambition of the film was not to make every scene a Meryl Streep moment; these guys wanted action! Yet, this is also the reason why the film never really captures the experience for me as an audience.



In "Beautiful Boy," the director hired a skilled writer to help him tell the story. Each key role in the ensemble is performed by different individuals, which (presumably) forces the director into a "trial and error" dialogue with many different creators before filming begins. I consider this type of dialogue crucial for achieving a quality result. Therefore, the authenticity and vision of the filmmaker must be both robust and flexible (a difficult balance) in dialogue with other creators. Compromise is a poison, but dialogue is crucial.

### **8. Be the world's best salesperson**

Just as producer Lars Lindström notes, you must be able to sell your film a thousand times over, not just once. Film festivals want to hear about your biography, your vision, and the plot of the film. PR agents, sales agents, actors, photographers, talent agencies, producers, and financiers also want you to pitch the film. Everyone wants to believe in what you believe in. That's why you need to be a top salesperson. Because who else is going to do it? There are so many creators who make fantastic creations but struggle to sell them. So, sell. And before you start getting anxious about trying, think about the anxiety you'll feel from never having tried.

### **9. Casting accounts for 80% of directing work**

On November 4, 2022, Swedish director Ninja Thyberg was invited to the Art of Impact class at SKH to talk about her feature film "Pleasure." In "Pleasure," a young Swedish girl decides to move to Los Angeles to start a new career as a porn star. The film follows her through obstacles as she tries to make a name for herself in a cynical, nihilistic, and dark world.

"Pleasure" was Ninja Thyberg's first feature film. During her visit to SKH, Ninja told us that she auditioned nearly 3,000 girls for the lead role. She said she used the extensive casting process to test the script she had written. During the casting process, the script also evolved as Ninja integrated dialogues told by the actors during the casting sessions. In this way, Ninja believed she could get closer to a more authentic expression in the dialogue, as some actors who participated in the casting were also porn actors.

I did the same during the work on "Shut Up, Dad." The casting process to find four roles spanned from April 2022 and was concluded in October of the same year. I started by advertising for actors for the film. Those interested who emailed me were tasked with recording a self-tape with some character-defining lines from the script for the short film. Then I called in a group of people for callbacks. There, aspiring actors for the role met, and we worked with various forms of improvisation and tested different parts of the script. It was also here that I tried to see how they responded to my instructions. Are we on the same wavelength? Do they understand what I'm looking for? Can they be autonomous in such a way that they can take my instructions and be self-sufficient in developing a character?

**10. The most important thing is the look in the actor's eye that transports the viewer.**

"No one from any film school had ever made a feature film. I kind of had a big advantage when I went to UCLA because I had been a theater student. One of the basic things a theater student has to learn is about writing and acting. Writing and acting are the magical ingredients in any theater or film performance. You can see a film that has beautiful cinematography and fantastic art direction, but if it has bad acting and a dumb script, it won't be successful. On the other hand, a film that has a wonderful story and wonderful

acting, but bad cinematography and bad art direction and everything else, can be a success. So I always say that acting and script are oxygen and hydrogen forming water. That if you focus on writing and acting... I mean, of course you want the music and the cinematography and everything to be beautiful. But that's really, I believe, where the magic happens. Coming from theater, I knew much more about acting than any of the other film students, who were much more interested in the camera. The great film director Orson Welles once said that you can learn everything about making films in a weekend, meaning the camera, the editing. Maybe he's exaggerating a little, when he made his first film he had a fantastic cinematographer. But still, it's somewhat true. The camera and stuff is not the hard part. The hard part is the writing and the acting. Because I had focused on that in theater, I had an advantage when I went to film school, because there were philosophy students... Terrence Mallick was a philosophy student. They were crazy about getting cameras."

Francis Ford Coppola, lecture at UCLA (<https://www.instagram.com/p/Cwt782Qsm9E/>)

Tarik Saleh, the Swedish/Egyptian film director behind successes like "The Nile Hilton Incident" (2017), said in the radio program Sommar, on August 13, 2023, that it doesn't matter if your budget is 500 million dollars or 500,000 kronor. It's the expression in the actor's eyes that will determine whether the story you want to tell is believable or not.

(Sveriges Radio, Sommar i P1, August 13, 2023. link:

<https://sverigesradio.se/avsnitt/tarik-saleh-sommarprat-2023>)

## **11. You don't need to know everything - except your vision.**

In a 1960 interview with Orson Welles, renowned for his iconic film 'Citizen Kane,' he offers valuable insights on overcoming fear, dealing with criticism, and harnessing the power of ignorance. Under the distinguished guidance of Huw Wheldon, the host of Monitor - BBC's flagship arts program, Welles shares his wisdom on embracing exploration, overcoming limitations, and using the virtue of ignorance as a catalyst for excellence in the creative process:

Q: "What I want to know is where did you get the confidence from to make the film with such..."

A: "Ignorance. Ignorance. Pure ignorance. You know, there's no confidence to equal it. It's only when you know something about a profession, I think, that you're anxious or cautious or"

Q: "How does this ignorance manifest itself?"

A: "I thought you could do anything with a camera that the eye or the imagination could do. And if you come into the film business from the top, you learn all the things that the cameraman doesn't want to attempt for fear of being criticized for having failed. And in this case, I had a cameraman who didn't care if he was criticized if he failed, and I didn't know there were things you couldn't do, so everything I could think of in my dreams, I tried to photograph."

Q: "You got away with tremendous technical advances, didn't you?"

A: "Simply by not knowing they were impossible. Or theoretically impossible. And of course, I had again a great advantage, not only in my cameraman's real genius, but in the fact that he, like all great men, I believe, who are masters of their craft, told me from the beginning that there was nothing in camerawork that I couldn't learn in half a day, that any intelligent person could learn in half a day. And he was right."

Q: "That's true of an awful lot of things, isn't it?"

A: "For all things."

## **12. Create two different accounts of services and counter-services**

Film can essentially be made in two different ways. Either you set off with your own camera, two mosquitoes, a relief lamp rigged on the camera, and then you start filming. The other way is to hire actors, screenwriters, first assistant directors, script supervisors, digital imaging technicians, directors of photography, location managers, line producers, electricians, grips, gaffers, catering, extras coordinators, etc., etc., endlessly and make a film out of it. The latter has better chances of becoming a better film - but it's not guaranteed. However, if you want to step up - without money - and do something that at least resembles a drama production, you need an account of services and counter-services. If you don't have a mom, dad, or a generous and not so meticulous uncle who can finance everything, you need to rely on people's willingness to follow your vision. You will need to ask for their help. They will need to sacrifice time and perhaps their own money to help you make your film. What can you offer in return? Consider that.

### **13. Start from what you have, dig where you stand.**

Scorsese's film *Killers of the Flower Moon* (2023) had a budget of 200 million dollars, his first feature film had a budget of 70,000 dollars. Before that, he made three official short films with much lower budgets. Don't let money stand in the way of your idea, but start with the assumption that you are creating an idea that you can actually afford.

### **14. Be aware that your time is always limited and prioritize accordingly.**

Someone once gave me an example of chronological time versus perceived time. The time between being 0-20 feels as long as the time between 20 and 80. Even though I haven't been able to find any scientific evidence for it, it doesn't feel far from the truth. We live our lives forward and understand them backward. The brain is designed to label, rationalize, and contextualize its surroundings. Unlike the child's fantasy world, where a bathtub can be the Atlantic, a lawn can be the Serengeti, and a car can be Apollo 11, we learn over time to label objects, places, events, and people. This makes it easier for us to navigate on one hand, but on the other hand, it becomes harder for us to stop and see things from new perspectives. With increasing age, we need to make an effort not to jump to conclusions about what is happening around us. As the brain labels, the speed of our perceived time increases. When we've brushed our teeth twenty thousand times and we've had coffee at grandma's on her birthday thirty times in the same apartment, we rationalize and feel that time is passing much faster than when we were eight years old.

The brain rationalizes and we fall into old habits. The wheel tracks become deeper. Similarly, we also become comfortable. The young brain is ready to do anything as long as it's new. The old brain is also ready to do anything as long as it's comfortable. My thought is

to challenge both of these truths and be rational as "stay on track" when you're younger and at the same time challenge yourself and try new things when you're older. Because it's a bit like the ancient Greek philosopher Epictetus stated: "It is impossible to teach a man anything he thinks he already knows."

Arnold Schwarzenegger writes in his book "Be Useful - Seven Tools for Life" (2023) about when he was at the peak of his bodybuilding career. He had won the title "Mr. Olympia" for the fifth time and he was approached by Jack LaLanne. LaLanne was well-known in the industry and owned hundreds of gyms across the United States. He wanted Schwarzenegger to become an ambassador and figurehead for the gyms. This was in the mid-1970s, and Schwarzenegger was offered \$200,000 per year if he took the job. It was a lot of money at the time. It's still a lot of money. But he declined. Being an ambassador for a gym chain didn't align with the goal he had set for himself. To become a movie star.

I have often been guilty of making the wrong priorities. Curiosity has led me to pursue other courses and explore other areas, despite always knowing what I really want to do. That's why it's important to have a "sense of urgency," where you stick to your direction.

### **15. Be transparent, but keep some secrets**

When you're selling your film, you'll need to repeat the selling points ad infinitum. Many will ask questions, argue, and challenge you and your ideas. Therefore, you need to decide what to keep open and what to keep secret. I often made the mistake of telling too much too early to too many people. What I noticed was that it diluted the work of completing what I promised God and the whole world would be clear and fantastic. At the same time, I have encountered many filmmakers who are too afraid and protective of their idea, resulting

in no outcome. And we know: there is a place where dreams go to die - the planning phase. It's more important to do than to plan. Filmmaking is a craft profession.

### **16. Believe in yourself**

"Learn to work harder on yourself than you do on your job. If you work hard on your job you can make a living, but if you work hard on yourself you'll make a fortune." (Successful Living, Nightingale Conant, 1996)

This quote is attributed to lecturer and entrepreneur Jim Rohn.

### **17. Worry about the right things**

What is something that never stops, yet always runs out? In a hundred years, you'll have been laid to rest alongside your family, your relatives, nearly everyone you know or will know. Strangers will inhabit the home you worked so hard to build. Someone you don't know will own everything you own now. The car you've struggled for will be on a scrapheap. Most of your possessions will either be sold, given away, or thrown out. Those in the third or fourth generation after us probably won't even know who we are. Don't believe me? What was your great-grandmother's name? Exactly, not many know—unless you're almost a hundred and have started genealogical research.

Once we've ceased rowing and lie in the ground, it won't be long before the only remnants of us are a photograph in an album, a recurring loop of memories on a social media account the survivors can't or won't bring themselves to close. A few decades later, all our



achievements, struggles, conquests, loves, and relationships will be completely forgotten. As if they never existed.

In a few decades, all your anxiety will be gone, all the worry you've ever felt will be as insignificant as your gains. Seen in this perspective, most of what we worry about is meaningless. We have a gift, and it's the time we've been given. Time is all we have. Let's say you're promised an Oscar for your next film—on the condition that you won't live for more than a year. Or say you're promised five hundred million dollars, on the condition that you'll be seriously ill for the rest of your life. Or that you'll receive ten billion in exchange for your entire family and everyone you know ceasing to exist.

What is something that never stops, yet always runs out? That's right, time. None of us wants to trade our time. Ultimately, time is the most valuable thing we have.

Worrying is like paying a debt you owe to no one, as Mark Twain said. Worrying about what has happened and what will happen is a waste of time on the wrong things.

Worry can be constructive, some might say. Worry can mean we envision future ominous scenarios and devise a solution before they happen. Sure, but that's not worrying. That's being calculating, strategic, tactical. Planning isn't worrying. I'm talking about the kind of worry expressed in thoughts like: "what if I don't amount to anything", "what if I fail", "what if I'm on the wrong path", "what if they don't like me", "what if I'm worthless".

There's a recipe for eliminating your worry, keeping it at bay and driving it away before it has a chance to infiltrate your brain and poison your synapses. Keep busy. Master Shi Heng Yi is the head of the foremost Shaolin temple in Europe, located in Otterberg, Germany. On November 29, 2022, he gave a lecture as part of the TEDx lecture series. For over 30 years,

Master Shi Heng Yi has studied and practiced the interaction between mind and body. His strength lies in smoothly combining this knowledge with physical exercises and practicing martial arts - Kung Fu and Qi Gong.

In his lecture, he says the following:

"In the Shaolin tradition, we have a different way of looking at peace. Everyone wants peace, and I too would like the whole world to have peace. But we have a different way of looking at it. Peace comes through the power of thought. We will experience a lot of suffering in our lives. Suffering is inevitable. What depends on us is that we always have a choice to view our suffering in our own unique way. Does our suffering mean anything, can we find meaning in our suffering? Do you flee from your suffering, or do you face it? This is Shaolin thinking. We face our suffering, and we ride through it. It is when you overcome your suffering that you become strong. Resistance makes you strong. With all the technology available today, you don't need to use your body. It makes us lazy, it gives us too much time to think. Redundancy in thinking makes us sluggish and anxious. It is by putting ourselves to work and going through suffering that makes us free."

(Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Iq0Y5QN8WQE>)

The brain is like any muscle. Legs get stronger going uphill, so does the brain. Ultimately, your attitude determines whether you have worry or not. And it's discipline that forces worry down. Keep busy. Replace your worry with a plan.

## **18. Write a manifesto**

In connection with my master's studies in film and media at Stockholm University of the Arts, we were tasked with writing a manifesto. The manifesto could be interpreted as guidelines. With the points below in my manifesto, I will share the rationale for each point.

A story must begin with what you want to tell, not what you think others want to see.

For much of my life, I believed that the path to success lay in satisfying the audience. I also believed that, as long as I could crack the code, it would entitle me to achieve success.

Education has encouraged seeking answers to one's own questions that one finds relevant.

Even if others will never want to see what you want to tell, it is still of subordinate value.

Life is a process. Life isn't worth a damn, yet it's valuable beyond all imaginable limits. It depends on the perspective you have on the process you find yourself in.

A storyteller must always believe that he/she is good; otherwise, it's presumptuous to assume that anyone else will want to delve into the story.

Perhaps doesn't need to be explained.

A storyteller must always be aware of the power perspectives depicted in a story.

The one who tells the story always has the interpretive prerogative. The one who is listened to always has the interpretive prerogative. Therefore, humility is required.

The power perspectives are manifested in all parts of the process, and the storyteller must be aware of it.

As above.

A filmmaker is responsible for ensuring that everyone involved in the story gets to have their say.

A storyteller should never be afraid to steal ideas but must never lose humility in the face of others' brilliance.

### **19. Free yourself from the modern shackles - to focus on what's important.**

For over 20 years, Carl Lindeborg has been working on the development of individuals and organizations, both in Sweden and abroad. He is affiliated with SSE Executive Education at the Stockholm School of Economics and also with Oxford Leadership. In 2023, he released the book "The Authentic Shift - Inner Development in a Changing World".

Carl Lindeborg himself has not always been authentic. He began his career as a management consultant at one of the larger consulting firms. Numbers, charts, pie diagrams. Hotels, travel, parties - speed without direction. Then, at the age of 27, he hit a wall. Perched high above the ground in a hotel room somewhere in Europe, he felt empty. He had followed a compass, but it wasn't his own.

Through psychedelics, soul-searching, conversations, literature, rest, and encounters, a journey began that would take Carl Lindeborg several years before he emerged on the other side. Today, he can almost be likened to a spiritual leader for many prominent leaders and organizations, with much of his expertise rooted in business models and growth, but at the same time, with a unique perspective on humanity. At least, that's how I would describe him. I attended one of his programs at the Stockholm School of Economics during 2020 - 2021.

In his book "The Authentic Shift," he describes what happens in the brain when we submit to the social media and information overload that inundate us like a tsunami, every day, hour, minute,

and second. Dopamine levels used to be scarce. Now they wash over us in abundance. This causes us to lose focus on what's important. As Carl Lindeborg himself puts it:

"Our intense reality combined with the desire to use the precious time we have to quickly move forward makes it tempting to do multiple things at once. To juggle many balls in the air. But here we encounter an inherent neurological limitation whose violation has negative consequences for both well-being and effectiveness."

Many fantastic projects have come to naught due to distraction. Time is infinite if you choose to manage it. Make a half-hour schedule of what you do during a typical week, from when you wake up to when you go to bed. 24, 36, 40 half-hours multiplied by seven reveal a lot about your priorities. Because by now, you've come to understand that success as a film director depends on the degree of diligence you're willing to put in to be successful.

## **20. Get acquainted with authenticity**

Gabor Maté is a Hungarian-Canadian physician and author. He has a background in family medicine and a particular interest in childhood development, trauma, and potential lifelong impacts on physical and mental health. In an interview, he highlighted the relationship between humanity's inherent drives for authenticity and the desire to belong. In an interview he gave in 2022 regarding a new book he had written, he discussed the relationship between humanity's two fundamental drives: the desire to be authentic and follow one's gut instinct, balanced with the desire to please, belong, and align with the group.

"Our brains are wired for attention. The connections in our brain are dedicated to attachment relationships /.../ The second need is authenticity; we need to be ourselves, connected to our bodies and our gut feelings. Because we don't survive without access to our gut feelings. Out there in nature, where we evolved and lived up to 15,000 years ago. So authenticity is very important to know if you are safe or not. You know what you want and what you don't want. You know when to

say no and when to say yes. When you do that - that's authenticity. Being ourselves. That's the case with (Prince) Harry. He couldn't be authentic. He had to play a certain role and conform to certain expectations about how to act and who to be, and he could never figure out: 'who am I really'. But that's so general. Many of us face that question: who are we really? Who are we authentically, compared to what is expected of us. So we have these two needs. Attachment on one hand, authenticity on the other. Ideally, these two are not in conflict. Ideally, you can be in a relationship without compromising either of these basic needs. But what happens to a young child if they are authentic but not accepted?"

Dr. Gabor Maté, (The Diary of a CEO podcast, October 12, 2023)

### **21. If you're going to be strict about anything, never compromise on light.**

As a co-owner and CEO of a production company, my niche from the start was podcasts. With a background as a reporter and presenter with a tech interest from Swedish Radio, I had many years of experience in sound. I am humble about my knowledge of sound, and there are thousands of people out there who are far more skilled than I am. However, it has always been a great interest. Therefore, I know that it's not always the microphone that plays the biggest role in a studio recording. A sound technician once told me, "you can almost have any crappy microphone, as long as you have a good preamplifier." He's not entirely wrong. A preamplifier amplifies the signal from the microphone before it is sent to the sound card. The primary goal of the preamplifier is to amplify the amplitude. Amplitude is a key factor that can determine the intensity or volume of a sound or signal. It is also an important factor that determines the effects of vibrations or waves on the environment. In short, the quality of sound improves if it is "washed" in a preamplifier

during its journey from the mouth, microphone, and onward to the recording device. The same goes for light. You can, almost, have any crappy camera - as long as you are careful about the light you rig with.

In connection with the recording of "Käften, Farsan," I had a budget of 90,000 from Stockholm University of the Arts. It can be a lot or a little depending on how you look at it. I know some filmmakers who have spent millions of kronor producing a four-minute short film, but 90,000 kronor was the limit. Of these, 20,000 went to an electrician. And this lighting guy was very experienced. Daniel Svanberg has worked on several feature films, music videos, TV series, and short films. The only requirement Daniel had was that he also wanted to bring a gaffer, a lighting assistant - and he got it. If you've seen an electrician in action on a film shoot, you know that it often involves "cable management." It's tape and clips and stands and Velcro straps and cables and relays and cloths and papers in an organized chaos that needs to be moved around between rooms, in corridors, on floors, and ceilings. Daniel and his gaffer/best boy Joel Sundqvist did a formidable job with the film shoot - even though they had the 1st AD Johan tearing his hair out over the schedule.

With the help of light, the rooms were shaped into their own little universes. Daniel and Joel, in collaboration with the cinematographer Palle Lindqvist, gave a dramatic dimension to the film that made it drama and not just some sloppy student project. Many people say that sound is the most important thing in a film production, Coppolla said that it is the performances of the actors and the script that are the most important. All of this is true. It is also true that light makes a big difference in the experience. Try it yourself. Use your remote control when you sit in front of a TV next time and mess up the picture. Make it pale, make it too clear. Many modern TV sets sometimes reveal too much of the lighting in movies and make the experience worse than if the picture had been more grainy. Like with QLED. QLED TV sets are especially good at reproducing colors accurately, in both dark

and light scenes. The color volume across the entire light spectrum is measured in color volume. The challenge with QLED is that the image reproduction becomes super realistic and naked. You suddenly see everything. That it's not a sun reflection but a lamp with a Kelvin temperature of 5250 K placed outside the window. The reproduction in many modern screens manipulates the image into something that goes beyond the natural, as if we could hold a filter in front of one of Anders Zorn's paintings and turn impressionism into a simple photograph. The dramatic effect disappears. The story is watered down. The difference between drama and "filmed documentation" is whether you as a viewer step into a room - or into a universe.

Therefore, light is of utmost importance.

## **22. To be clear is to be kind**

Caroline Thunved is the CEO and Secretary-General of Sveriges kommunikatörer (the Swedish Association of Communication Professionals). Throughout her professional life, she has held both board positions and high-level executive positions for organizations such as Världens Barn, Hyresgästföreningen, and Rädda barnen (Save the Children). It's safe to say she knows a thing or two about leadership and communication. In her leadership, she talks about how clarity is synonymous with being kind. In an episode about trusting leadership, Caroline Thunved delves deeper and argues that clarity is about showing respect towards the person you are communicating a decision or opinion with. (Link: [here](#))

The same applies in a film production. Making a film often takes a long time. And that's good – because it allows you as a filmmaker to reflect and adjust both the cast and crew according to what's best for the production. Making a communication film for a commercial entity doesn't require much, but making a drama requires everyone, including sound technicians and the guy pulling



cables along the floor, to have signed off on and understood the type of production we are aiming to create.

During the casting of "Käften, farsan," there were actors whom I needed to reject. One of them was a young woman who had just completed an acting program as a post-secondary two-year program. She overacted and performed more like in a sketch than in a drama. When I then rejected her, she asked in an email why she didn't get the role, and she was upset. So, I replied to her in the following way:

"... One thing worth considering is how you internalize the text. How does your own frustration manifest itself, how do you look when you're happy, angry, hopeful? Often, we all find new expressions when we delve deep into ourselves and base our interpretation of a text on that. In this way, one can avoid copying a feeling and instead discover a feeling that resonates within oneself.

I hope that these words, written with all good intentions, give you a push in the right direction. ..."

I'm not sure if it was the best way, and there are certainly better ways – but I wanted to be clear, and this was my way of respecting her and her honest question – and I gave an honest answer.

### **23. Understand the influence you have on other people's lives.**

Emotions help us make decisions, that's something we've all heard at one time or another over the years. But it might not be as well-known that emotions are necessary for us to make decisions at all.

In the 1990s, neuroscientist Antonio Damasio received a patient. Let's call him Tom. At the age of 30, Tom had a good life ahead of him. He was married, had children, and had a good

job in the service sector. Then Tom began to complain of headaches and, after a visit to the doctor, found out he had a benign brain tumor the size of an orange. The operation was successful, in the sense that the patient survived, but Tom's life was fundamentally changed nonetheless. After a while, he lost his family and also his job. He then contacted Antonio Damasio, who tried to understand why Tom had lost his entire life. Tom's IQ was completely unchanged, as were his cognitive abilities. Nevertheless, it could take him a whole workday to decide whether to sort documents by date or size, and it could take him hours to decide which pen to use to fill out a form.

Antonio Damasio, thanks to his research background, concluded that Tom's frontal lobe had been so damaged during the tumor operation that his emotional life was greatly affected. He no longer expressed any emotions. This was also confirmed through tests. When Tom was shown video footage of accidents, weddings, cute dogs, and unhappy people, he did not react. Antonio Damasio was able to establish something fundamentally crucial, and the above study became part of the book "Descartes' Error" (1994). Culture such as film and literature has also intrigued his curiosity, both privately and in his function as a neuroscientist.

"I was very interested in film when I was young and was actually a film critic for a while. Above all, I liked (Alfred) Hitchcock, who is very skilled at exploring emotions and using them in his films. ... The beauty of great art, especially narrative art like film and novels, is that it throws you into a person's mind, who is in the midst of an emotional upheaval and experiencing lots of different emotions. I believe this may have influenced my path in life," says Damasio in an interview (Modern Psychology, edition 8, 2023).

In the research article "Transportation into Narrative Worlds" (Green & Donahue, 2021), the authors assert that images and events we experience through reading or watching a film are close to a personal experience. Through our empathic ability, we even have the potential to transform experiences in someone else and interpret them as our own. This happens through the transportation we, as an audience and readers, make into the narrative. The hero's journey is our journey. We get involved to the extent that we ourselves feel like the protagonist in the story.

The authors of the article further develop that the audience's transportation into the narrative is not influenced by the choice of media.

"These results may suggest that the content of the story itself is the most important factor, so practitioners in the borderland between entertainment and education can choose the medium that is most suitable or practical for their audience or that they believe will convey their story most effectively. For example, production costs are often much lower for printed stories than for video-based stories, and some media forms are easier to distribute than others, especially if the audience may not have specific devices (for example, if they do not have computers or televisions). However, it is also possible that even though the results across different media are similar, the psychological processes elicited by different media may be somewhat different."

#### **24. Don't be afraid of your actors.**

For many years, I had an aversion to approaching actors. I have always had a deep respect for the profession and did not know how to engage in dialogue with the actors in the right way.

Swedish film director Lukas Moodysson also expressed in an interview on Sweden's Radio P1 in September 2023 that he too felt fear of giving direction. During his time studying film directing at the Dramatic Institute (now SKH), he chose instead to be tough and unreasonable with the actors, out of fear of engaging in dialogue with them.

Film director Francis Ford Coppola elaborates on his thoughts about actors below:

"And I had already worked with actors, and also there's a sort of prejudice against actors. There's a sort of jock mentality about actors among the film crew. They say "oh my god, they're such this and this'. But you know what an actor does is really hard. Because if you play a violin, not only you be good in playing the violin, you still have the violin between you and the audience. The actor has to sort of do what a violinist does, except the instrument is himself. So it's really terrifying to be an actor, at the same time fight the self-consciousness that anyone would have, to act."

During the pre-production of "Käften, farsan," I chose a different approach, which can be described as having more confidence in myself as a director and seeing myself as a necessary tool that the actors needed to make decisions about how to approach their work. I conveyed the vision, had several phone calls, made myself available, and communicated the background I envisioned for the different characters.

Niklas Hald is a lecturer in acting at SKH. Below is a brief interview I conducted with him regarding the relationship between actors and directors.

What mistakes do directors often make?

When it's been difficult. The experience when I don't receive any information about what is expected of me. When directors say "let's do it again." Was it wrong? Someone whispers somewhere, then "let's do it again." Or if it was too much or too little, so I have a chance to do something else. What should be done? Some actors like to improvise. You have to understand the boundaries. The improvised comes through. Communication is the foundation for so much. Even if I'm not in every scene, the director needs to describe the context to me. When I make my efforts, I have the opportunity to listen, so it's so important to get information from the director.

How does a director create a good working atmosphere for actors?

Talking about it, and being consistent. My function is very simple. And it doesn't matter what backstory I have. Then it just gets weird if someone has a hunchback. Then you can't have too much creativity either. In what way do I contribute to the whole. What I talk to our students about when rehearsing is a negotiation. You come up with different proposals. A secure actor is a better actor. Then you know which leg to stand on.

“/.../ And I had already worked with actors, and also there's a sort of prejudice against actors. There's a sort of jock mentality about actors among the film crew. They say “oh my god, they're such this and this”. But you know what an actor does is really hard. Because if you play a violin, not only you be good in playing the violin, you still have the violin between you and the audience. The actor have to sort of do what a violinist does, except the instrument is himself. So it's really terrifying to be an actor, at the same time fight the self-consciousness that anyone would have, to act.”

- Francis Ford Coppola

## **25. A mistake that makes you humble is better than an achievement that makes you arrogant - and I've experienced both.**

When I was 17 years old, I was nominated for two of the most prestigious awards at the time for a radio program I helped research. Can you believe it? I was even too young to buy a beer on the night of the awards. I didn't win, but just a couple of months later, I became a host at the National public service television. A series of 8 episodes aired in prime time. I was barely eighteen, and my self-confidence went through the roof. I was in heaven, I thought. But boy, did I have a rough road ahead after that. Because, you see - nothing ever comes for granted. Just a few years later, I found myself studying literature at a university in Stockholm. Nothing bad about that, unless you thought that you were supposed to be hosting a prime-time talk show by that time."

## **26. Learn to challenge your negative thoughts**

If you're navigating through setbacks, as all creative professions require learning to do, you also need to be able to manage all the negative thoughts that arise along the way.

And challenging and pushing away negative thoughts has proven not to be so bad after all.

A new study (LINK:

<https://www.science.org/content/article/scienceadviser-suppressing-negative-thoughts-might-not-be-bad-you-after-all>) presented in September 2023 by researchers from Cambridge University shows that it can be beneficial to suppress negative thoughts.

The experiment involved 120 adults writing down 20 of their fears (things they were worried might happen in the future), followed by 20 hopes they had, and finally, 36 neutral

events lying ahead of them. Participants were then tasked with coming up with words to remind them of all the events. Half of the people in the experimental group were instructed to look at their words marking their fears but were simultaneously told to "push it away" and not let their thoughts wander into more anxiety-inducing negative scenarios. The other half of the group was instructed to do the same, but they were only to focus on their "neutral" words. The experiments were conducted twelve times a day for three days. The study found that the individuals originally assigned to focus on their negative words reported that their anxiety and negative thoughts were less intrusive. Their self-reported well-being was also higher than for the group instructed to suppress neutral thoughts.

Let this, if you will, also become an exercise for you.

## **27. Write a shot list**

Ari Aster shared in an interview with Eli Roth on the podcast "Eli Roth's History of Horror" about how he chose to work on the films "Hereditary" (2018) and "Midsommar" (2019). Before anyone else in his crew was hired for the project, a shot list was the first thing Ari Aster wrote after the script was finished. The next step was to introduce the shot list to the lighting, editing, and Director of Photography (DOP) teams and go through the film together with these functions.

I borrowed his method and did the same when I had my first discussions with the composer and editor for one of the short films I directed and wrote the script for. It makes communication much easier because it often involves transferring the images you have in your head to the others you are working with.

(History of horror, October 5, 2020, link:

<https://open.spotify.com/episode/0jqRQF5Zwq9ZIUpiXvTSM5?si=5ceb87f6f71e402b>)

**28. Tell what type of director you are towards your actors, and therefore get to know yourself - which direction you come from.**

In Judith Weston's book "Directing Actors" (McNaughton & Gunn, 1996), she writes about how directors often come from certain backgrounds, which can be divided into several categories. Weston further writes that depending on directors' backgrounds, it can also affect how they act as directors.

A film director who previously worked as a photographer (Bille August)

A film director who previously worked as a theater director (Sam Mendes, Ingmar Bergman)

A film director who previously worked as a screenwriter (Woody Allen)

A film director who previously worked as an actor (Clint Eastwood)

You also need to reflect on which direction you come from and thereby what focus you have in your directing work. What is your "primary tool" in your directing work?

During this work, I am on an odyssey to discover what kind of director I am myself.



I also want to find the most feasible method for directing, with the intention of maintaining the authenticity of a story throughout the entire filmmaking process. One person I became interested in was the sound technician and director Carolina Jinde.

Jinde had previously presented an audio drama in the fall of 2022. The drama is about two women in the early 1900s who fall in love and decide to have a child together.

The audio drama was presented in a large room with 5.1 surround sound at SKH. When I heard the audio drama, I was greatly impressed by how authentic the language between the two actors in their roles could sound. It almost sounded as if someone had made a high-resolution recording a hundred years ago with hidden microphones, capturing a secret conversation between two women expressing forbidden love for each other.

Carolina Jinde had also integrated soundscapes with illustrative sounds from trains, carriages, and environments that placed the two women in different life settings that the audience could easily associate with real places, easy to visualize.

I met Carolina Jinde at SKH on March 22, 2023. Our meeting became a meeting place for exciting insights due to the directing methods she chose. During our meeting, Jinde was clear that she is a sound technician and not a director.

Furthermore, she emphasized the importance of having a non-authoritarian view of the process, which means that Jinde did not want to "steer around" with the actors in the role of director. My interpretation was that since Jinde calls herself a sound technician, she has a respect for the director's profession to the extent that she needs to reshape work processes and methods that are usually associated with a director's work to cope on her own.

Despite this, the result of the process was excellent, and I asked Jinde about the process.

Instead of working in a classical way, where the director decides to guide a team of actors to visualize the vision he/she has, Jinde chose a different path. Since Jinde has worked most of her life as a sound technician (for example, at Sveriges Radio), she felt comfortable in the radio studio environment, with sound, music, and soundscapes. When she met the actors, Jinde had not written a script in advance; instead, she started discussing the roles with the actresses playing in the drama. The actresses improvised within their roles together. While the actresses improvised, they listened to a soundscape compiled, mixed, and edited by Jinde. The soundscapes were created to build a background in the intended scene that hopefully could make it easier for the actors to "tune in" to their respective roles. Jinde then collected the recordings from the improvisation sessions and began writing a script based on the recordings.

By doing this, Jinde makes it easier for the actors to use the same language they have used before, making the script comfortable and easy to absorb. Along with the sound played when the actors improvise, Jinde creates an integrated form of storytelling that I had never encountered before.

The result was a very intimate dialogue that was very smooth and naturalistic between the actors. Although Carolina Jinde's initial idea was to have the actors' voices performed on a theater stage in front of an audience, the theater was out of reach due to a lack of budget, and the audio drama was performed instead through speakers in a film studio at SKH.

Jinde herself told me, in my interview with her, that she wanted to start from "listening."

"I wanted to see how I could use time, space, and continuum. I created soundscapes or sound spaces for the different dialogues. In the beginning, I created quite ambitious soundscapes. One where Hjalmar Branting is giving a speech. You hear horses and people walking, and it starts raining, and the actors had to listen to it. We read plays that the characters are based on. And then the actors had to improvise their encounters. We were sometimes in a park or at a train station."

Ruben Östlund was interviewed on January 9, 2023, in the podcast "Värvet" about his filmmaking. (Link: <https://open.spotify.com/episode/32xTlYnVdWOxWYBFZkPwDr?si=8bf700b71d3d40c9>)

In the audio clip above, the Swedish director Ruben Östlund was interviewed in episode 554 of the podcast Värvet on January 9, 2023. In the clip, he talks about working on his latest feature film "The Triangle of Sadness" and the compromises he had to make to drive things forward. Just before they were about to start filming, Ruben Östlund says in the clip that they received a call from one of the financiers saying that the budget could not be stretched any further. "And in such cases, limits can almost feel liberating because otherwise you have unlimited options," says Ruben Östlund in the clip.

## **29. Fight your bitterness**

It's almost impossible to have a profession without having to deal with setbacks, challenges, rejections, refusals, and doubts. I went through a career crisis between 2010 - 2014. In 2010, I had just been laid off from the Educational Broadcasting Company where I had produced

several major productions as a host and producer. It had been some of the best years of my professional life. After the contract ended and I realized that I could not get a new job at the Educational Broadcasting Company in the near future, I was thrown into "denial." Denial is the second box in the model "The Four Rooms of Change," a quadrant created by the Swedish researcher Claes Jansson.

In the first room, you have "contentment." You may be satisfied, even happy with your life. Regardless, you have chosen to settle for the situation you are in and are ready to live that way indefinitely. Then something happens, and suddenly the cards are shuffled. Your reality changes drastically, and without your own choosing, you are thrown into "denial." You have arrived in a reality you did not have a say in, and you now deny that it happened at all.

In my case, I initially did not want to tell anyone that I no longer worked at the Educational Broadcasting Company. That time had given me so much; it had been intensely enjoyable, and now it was suddenly gone. It could almost be likened to a romantic love that without warning cut off contact, without explanation. In the four rooms of change, you then enter the "confusion" period. I got a job as a researcher, a step down from what I had previously done. I was not good at it, and I did not like it. Actually, I am good at it, but I could not accept that this was my next step in my career and did not handle the job well. After a year and a half of sitting on the phone conducting pre-interviews and talking to celebrities about divorces, wine trips, and book releases, I got a hosting job at Swedish Radio - in Gävle. I had previously worked at Swedish Radio in Stockholm but now found myself as the host of the morning programs in Gävle. God, how I hated that city. I was too proud for my own good and did not think Gävle or anyone in it was worthy of my presence. I was miserable and cried several times in front of my wife before I boarded the bus on Sundays to commute to Gävle. Pathetic, but true. I was in the denial phase and tried to make it seem like I was

"entitled" to a lot of things that no one is entitled to. Sometimes you need luck too, even though luck usually follows hard work.

I had underestimated the housing shortage in the student city and ended up getting an old taxi office on the outskirts of Gävle - in the middle of an industrial area. The old office had a hotplate and a toilet without a shower, and I lived next to a tractor garage. Therefore, it was guaranteed that I was up with the rooster when the large wheel loader on the other side of the cardboard wall backed out at 5:20 every weekday morning. I suffered like I had never suffered before. Then I got a call that would change my life. My wife called and said she was pregnant. Suddenly, it became urgent for me to get a steady job in Stockholm. I applied and got a position as a press secretary at the Swedish Migration Agency in Stockholm. This was during the escalating refugee crisis, and no one - I mean, no one - liked the Migration Agency at that time. Sorry, I think I used too mild terms. Everyone hated the Migration Agency. The media hated the Migration Agency. The asylum seekers hated the Migration Agency. The relatives hated the Migration Agency. Everyone who worked at the Migration Agency hated the Migration Agency. And I hated the Migration Agency too. What had happened? Just a few years earlier, I had traveled across continents and worked as a host and producer, making history programs for young people. Now I sat and clenched my fist in my pocket when a stubborn substitute asked insinuating questions about "deportations." I was at an all-time low. And on top of that, my personal life had turned upside down with a baby on the way - with all that entails (but that's another story).

Parallel to my time at Swedish Radio in Gävle, I had started pitching ideas to Swedish Radio in Stockholm, and together with a few colleagues from Swedish Radio Gotland, we produced a comedy series that aired on P4 and was well received. We wanted to do more but were not allowed. Unclear why. I realized then and there that something more drastic

needed to be done. I began to step out of the confusion and into the change, which is the last of "the four rooms of change."

For a long time, I had wanted to start my own production company but had been too afraid to move forward. The fear of failure was overwhelming. At the same time, I found myself in a place where I could not appreciate anything about my work life, and it affected everything else. Therefore, I chose to think about Roy Andersson and his "Studio 24." Roy Andersson had early in his life started combining his film productions with advertising work. The revenue from advertising financed his artistic work. I thought I would do the same. Together with my wife, we started "Storstad." A production company focusing primarily on commercial productions. Getting a production company "up and running" is not the easiest, but I had, however, found a new box. Contentment was back, and that's where I still am - until something else happens.

In my desk drawers, folders, and disks today, there are hundreds and hundreds of ideas that have been rejected. Parallel to working as a researcher and in Gävle, I sent at least one new idea to some program director, producer, or the like every week to try to move forward - none of it bore fruit, I thought. But the most important and fruitful thing I got was that it is the striving that is worth the effort. You need to continue working to do what you believe in, even if it feels like the world has given up on you.

Did I mention that I applied to the Swedish Film School, where I am now, seven times before I got in - and they only admit students once every other year? After fourteen years of chasing the dream, it suddenly came true.

Everyone can get stuck in any of the four rooms of "the four rooms of change." You need to ask yourself how you act in the face of defeat and how you ensure that you move forward.

This model presumably hits hardest against people who have a goal - and where the goal is usually set higher than just having a job to lift a salary. I was on my way somewhere. I had a plan. Everything was calculated. But the universe wanted something else. Bitterness is said to arise in the overlapping area between the circles called "I could do that" and "but I don't." Therefore, continuing despite setbacks is one of the most important skills you will need in your quest to become a successful filmmaker.

### **30. Success and the desire for success are dangerous poisons that need to be avoided.**

You've figured out that this text is about authenticity related to compromises. Entrepreneur and lecturer Jim Rohn has repeatedly emphasized that every promise has a price ("if there's a promise, there's a price"). If you make a promise to yourself to be successful (whatever that may entail), it comes with a price. You need to ask yourself what price it demands of you and, above all, what it means for you to be successful.

David Lynch was interviewed by KSMG Productions in 2006 (Link: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_6koYFk6jIA&t=0s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_6koYFk6jIA&t=0s)) where he was asked if his film "Eraserhead" (1977) was a way for him to kick-start his career, but he strongly denies it.

"No, no, no, it's not about starting a career. They call it the film industry, but money is the last thing a person should think about in my opinion. The last. You fall in love with those

ideas. And you get inspired and you try to translate those ideas into film. And it's a beautiful, beautiful journey. So it has nothing to do with any kind of career; it's about the love of doing it. Eraserhead took five years to make because I ran out of money from the American Film Institute, and I had to raise money to shoot one scene and then stop, raise money and shoot another scene, and so on."

The Directors Guild of America organized a Latino Summit in 2023 where they invited several different workers in the film industry. Celebrated directors Guillermo del Toro (Hellboy, Pan's Labyrinth, The Shape of Water, Guillermo del Toro's Pinocchio) and Fede Alvarez (Panic Attack!, Evil Dead, Don't Breathe, The Girl in the Spider's Web) had an intimate conversation where the two visionaries discussed their illustrious careers and offered wisdom on navigating Hollywood as Latin creators.

In this conversation, Guillermo Del Toro brought up his thoughts on success. (Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z592chAts8I>)

"We (directors) do something that is truly special. We are basically specialized idiots. We don't stand above anyone. Most of the time, we find ourselves below them in terms of social functions in society. And we should be happy that if there were no films, we would all be thrown off a cliff. We are human beings, and that's one thing Hollywood can make you forget. And success is the most corrupting poison. There are two things that are toxic, it's success and the desire for success. These two are genuine poison. I've been through it a couple of times. When you achieve success to any extent, you must ensure that you don't need it. I did it; I disciplined myself after Mimic (1997), which was extremely difficult - to go back to make a film in Spanish (Devil's Backbone, 2001). The producer tried to get me to postpone producing that film. They said, 'no, make Blade (1998) first, we'll pay the



Spanish producers for you to do it.' But I said no, that's not the order I want to do things. I want to do the opposite. If you want me, you'll have to wait for me. And they did. They did it, and luckily because I was broke. I was cocky but had no money. Then when Pan's Labyrinth (2007) came, it was a film that nobody wanted me to make... Again, if you strive for success, you are screwed. We have to take care of who we are."

Pan's Labyrinth would later win three Oscars, among many other awards.

### **31. Convey Your Vision to the Actors - and Don't Fear Them**

How can I convey an artistic vision to an actor? When I know that there are expressions from the actor - which I have seen her perform before and have access to -, how can I persuade her to act in the way I want her to act?

I am sitting with two well-experienced actors, one woman and one man. It is autumn 2019. We are about to record a radio play, and they have received the script long in advance. They test, twist, and turn the text they have received from me. The only directing trick I resort to in this economically tight situation is that we read and record the text "until it sits." If I had asked for more rehearsal time, they would have asked for more money, and I don't have it.

I have both written the script and will direct.

I think the actors want to distort the text I have written. Especially one of them. They come up with suggestions about the text without me feeling that they have taken it in or even read the entire text. I notice in the studio that the female actor has not done her homework. She has not read through the script and is only now starting to feel the text, integrate it, and

try different approaches. It irritates me that she has not done what she promised. And that she simultaneously undermines passages in my text. As if she wants to shift the responsibility to me, or perhaps distract me to make it easier for herself to avoid responsibility or just to have time to read the lines we are about to record.

I think of Ingmar Bergman and all the anecdotes that have circulated over the years about how he could scold his actors if they were just two minutes late to a meeting. I'm not inclined that way, although I would like to give her a scolding right now. Patience is short with divas.

In Nils Claesson's text "Texts that nobody reads" (2021, SKH), he writes about Ingmar Bergman's script for *Fanny & Alexander*:

"...the status of a text varies: a film script is unequivocally an intermediate form, except in exceptional cases such as Ingmar Bergman's script for *Fanny and Alexander*, while a play is an artwork in its own right. A drama."

Without making any specific comparisons otherwise with Ingmar Bergman, I find in my own opinion that I have written a text that is well-balanced, playable, and with a clear character description. It can stand on its own. As a published author and member of the Writers' Union, I take the liberty to draw that conclusion.

Should I scold her? Or should I meet her criticism with the same currency, and criticize her? Expose all her shortcomings, about not keeping to schedules, not doing her readings?

At the same time, there are certain maxims I have always lived by, a solid moral foundation regarding treatment and dignity - which at the same time encounter resistance and

conflicting emotions. Tore Nordenstam writes in "The power of example" (2009) about Emmanuel Kant's "The Categorical Imperative" and the main maxims Kant establishes. One of them reads:

Respect for Persons: Kant's moral philosophy places a strong emphasis on treating individuals as ends in themselves, not as a means to an end. This means respecting the inherent worth and dignity of each person.

What at the same time creates a conflict in me is the actress's questioning of my text, which contradicts another of Kant's maxims.

"Duty and Good Will: Kant believed that morality is a matter of duty, not of consequences. An action has moral worth when it is done from a sense of duty and out of a 'good will,' rather than being influenced by personal desires or potential rewards."

But based on these moral maxims, which I was born and raised with, I therefore want to respect the actors. I think of an interview that director Francis Ford Coppola gave at the Stockholm Film Festival in 2016, where he offered his perspective on working with actors.

"And I had already worked with actors, and there is also a kind of prejudice against actors. There's a kind of 'jock' mentality about actors among the film crew. They say 'oh my God, they are such and such'. But you know, what an actor does is really hard. Because if you play the violin, you don't just have to be good at playing the violin, you still have the violin between you and the audience. The actor somehow has to do what a violinist does, except the instrument is themselves. So it's really scary to be an actor, while at the same time you are struggling against the self-consciousness that anyone would have when acting." - Francis Ford Coppola, in an interview with Jon Asp during the Stockholm Film Festival 2016.

In hindsight, in the fall of 2023, as I look back on these for me cramped attempts at consensus in the studio in 2019, I notice that I have become somewhat wiser today. I now know that I should have been calmer and taken the actress's comments lightly. I think of what physician Gabor Maté stated in an interview he gave in October 2023, about the basic drives of human beings, as I wrote about earlier in this text.

Back to the studio, autumn 2019, and my desperate attempts to create order. Ideally, I would have wanted a curious, cheerful, and light-hearted, creative atmosphere in the studio. Now it's something else. I have financed much of this venture myself, and it is progressing slowly, in which direction is unclear.

The actress questions the text. If I had known in 2019 what I know in 2023, I would have understood that I had no gut feeling or inner compass in the situation. I lack authenticity, as I look up to these two actors and underestimate my own value as a writer and director. I want them to feel comfortable. I want them to like me. I want them to be drawn to the text. I know it's a good text!

Ultimately, I choose (what I would describe as) the cowardly director's path. I opt for retakes. We redo it, and redo it, and redo it. I remember that Harvey Keitel, who was originally cast as the male lead in *Eyes Wide Shut*, chose to leave the production when Stanley Kubrick asked Keitel for the umpteenth time to walk up and open a door. It became too much. Keitel was replaced by Tom Cruise. I have always thought that this type of directing, wearing down the actors through retakes, shows confusion and helplessness on the part of the director. What the director is aiming for, he doesn't even know himself, he's searching for answers while he says "action!". This is what I actually believe should be established in the script. A good script structure and reading through it with the actors

should be enough for a lively, credible performance to take place. But now I'm doing the opposite.

During the takes, the actress's questioning of the text starts to gnaw at me. Maybe the text is crap? Maybe it's not playable?

In Tore Nordenstam's book "The power of example" (2009), he writes about the similarities between art and science, in that they need to withstand being questioned.

"Arts and science are paradigmatic examples of open concepts. Creative work, including revolt against established values, is a distinguishing feature of artistic and scientific activities. Since at least the beginning of the 20th century, the question 'Is this art?' has been part of rules of the game. And something similar is also true in the scientific world."

What strikes me afterwards, in 2023, is why I did not, in 2019, apply the critical perspective also to the actress. I acknowledged her experience, education, and age as evidence that she could question my competence and the quality of the text, but not vice versa. If I were to advocate for art at the same time, I might as well say "what the hell do you know about this text, what do you know about how art should be practiced?"

The retakes surprisingly yield good results. The actress becomes initially introspective and self-critical. She asks for a break and over a cup of coffee, asks me for advice. We have a discussion about the interpretation of the text, after which I feel that she now has "skin in the game." She wants it to be good herself. She's not doing it for me. She's not doing it for the audience, her CV, or for the text. She's doing it for herself.

### **32. Ensure that your actors have a good memory**

Directors' styles are probably as numerous as the number of directors who have walked this earth. There are no right or wrong ways. My approach is to work with small details continuously during the recording. "Add this movement," "Say that word in that way - let's try it!" This requires that the actors not only know the script inside and out but also have the ability to maintain a good working memory during the recording. I tested this during call backs in the casting process. Several times, I asked the actors to improvise, after which I added new directions on the fly. I noticed that some became confused and often forgot what I had said. They couldn't participate later in the work and were ultimately not selected.

### **33. Ensure that your actors can wash away theater from their expressions**

Sweden has a long-standing tradition of theater. Both national stages, private theaters, nonprofit organizations, and county theaters have been and are important breeding grounds for many skilled actors, while also serving as vital contributors to Sweden's cultural offerings and artistic development. Prior to working on my short film, I took on a job as an actor in a children's theater because I wanted to explore what it meant to work in a theatrical environment, collaborate with other actors, work with text, and also explore what it means to direct. I worked on certain mornings and scattered weekends at Ormteatern in Haninge where Josef Szabó directed an adaptation of Stina Wirsén's book "Heja jorden" (Go, Earth). It was an incredibly educational and enjoyable experience to work with motivated artists who created entertaining performances for hundreds of elementary school children who came to see the show.

When working as an actor in a theater, especially with a children's production, you need to raise your voice so that you can be heard at the back of the auditorium. You need to accentuate your facial expressions and reactions to make it easier for the audience to perceive how the character you're playing reacts to their encounters and the emotions that arise as the performance unfolds.

It's nothing like what it means to work with film. In film, at least the films I work on, the acting should be subtle and naturalistic, yet heightened - but in presence. You can be present without being grandiose in your gestures. The viewer needs to buy into the premise of the story. In a naturalistic world, we need to see ourselves mirrored in the actor and their struggles, emotions, and aspirations. Borrowing expressions and tools from the theater can cause problems.

Working as a director with an actor whose main experience is from the theater world is a challenge. It's a bit like asking an Italian chef to cook Swedish cuisine. It will probably be good, but basil, mozzarella, parmesan, and tagliatelle are far from horseradish, side bacon, and mashed potatoes. It's somewhat the same with theater actors. It requires an inner dialogue, and they need to start with their gaze. One directing trick I tried with some success was to let their eyes handle all the dialogue during rehearsals. Otherwise, neither their faces nor any physical gestures revealed what they were thinking or wanted to say. From there, they slowly built up an expression that matched the other actors who are more accustomed to film acting. Another method was to bring them into their own everyday events and conflicts. How would they handle a conflict if it was their own mother or brother sitting across from them, how would they talk then, or act? Many actors have access to an infinite number of instruments, but some, I've noticed, can regress to their theater training when they feel unfamiliar, pressured, or unsure how to portray a text in a scene. It

is therefore of the utmost importance to pay attention to the difference in acting and ensure that people move in the same universe. Otherwise, the whole show risks becoming a parody.

### **34. Maintain a McDonald's vibe among your crew**

Every time I've visited a late-night burger joint, I've always been amazed by the great working atmosphere behind the counter. Often efficient, you get your order within two minutes, and no one is yelling at each other. Someone chops the onions, someone handles the fryer. It's a well-oiled machine.

That's also my goal when working with a crew during filming. It's stressful, there are many artistic and practical decisions being put to the test. There can be long days, stressful days. How can you, as a director, ensure that everyone is doing well during this time?

My experience is that all organizations and cultures have a trickle-down effect. The owners' intentions for an organization affect the culture of a company. The CEO's attitude affects the employees' attitude. Similarly, as a director, you influence the group you're working with. And if you look past grand visions communicated about collaboration, helpfulness, and team spirit, much of the culture is determined by what happens in the small details.

How do you create a workday that functions?

In my opinion, it's often the non-cognitive qualities that create a good work culture.

Be on time

Be helpful

Say thank you

Greet in the morning



Acknowledge your colleagues' presence by asking how they're doing today, what's on their to-do list, and telling them what you have on your agenda.

This list might not work for you; it might require a completely different system. Regardless of which model or method you choose, it will largely be you who determines the atmosphere in your workplace.

### **35. Be playful and make a fool of yourself**

The time for being a mysterious director sitting behind a monitor, in a chair, in a tent twenty meters from where the scene unfolds is over. At least, that's what Sofia Norlin, the director behind the award-winning film "Broken Hill Blues" (2013), believes.

I met Sofia in a one-on-one conversation in early February 2024 to discuss the role of the director. She talked about the importance of being playful and engaging in directing work. During your directing career, you will encounter actors who have blockages. One mistake I've made is not knowing how to address it other than with clarity and structure. However much I love clarity and structure, it's not always the right way. Instead, it has turned out to be counterproductive. The blockages I'm referring to occur when actors resort to their little "toolbox." They build up a shield, and you can see that they don't want to show vulnerability and display their full range. Instead, they hide behind various acting techniques they've learned in independent courses or drama schools. Allowing theater to seep into the camera is devastating. During the 20th century, TV plays were common in Swedish Television, and many portrayals and expressions that one can see in films and dramas on the screen are the same acting styles seen on the theater stage. Of course, this is a matter of taste, but personally, I think it creates a distance when facial expressions are

exaggerated and speech is too loud, as if they were adapted for the audience at the back of the auditorium to perceive what is happening on stage.

I've experienced this firsthand. Theater-trained actors who can't wash away their armor and "play a role" instead of internalizing it. It's like sitting down for coffee with a friend who's trying to keep a big and difficult secret from you and doing their utmost to act as if nothing has happened. It's an unbearable experience.

Sofia Norlin focuses on playfulness. She acts in front of the actors the way she wants them to express themselves. She asks them to run quickly before a scene or, if it's crowded, to jump up. Shock the body, clear the mind, sweep away distractions. And I agree. We must be clear in our minds and leave the world we came from outside. Lars von Trier was naked himself during the filming of "The Idiots" when the nude scenes were shot. Even though as a director, you don't have to undress as the first thing you do, the "undressing" is an important procedure to create a new universe and a world of focus.

### **36. How big of a team do you really need?**

Furthermore, the conversation with Sofia Norlin led to another important detail. She often works alone with her cinematographer and just a couple of others in her feature films.

There are no more people on set. No script supervisors, makeup artists, costume designers, or props masters. It's her, the cinematographer, a sound person, FAD, B-photo and the actors. What a condition for intimacy! The same applied to Stanley Kubrick at times when he was filming scenes for "Eyes Wide Shut" (1999). He was alone with the camera and the actor. No crew present. The same goes for Paul Thomas Anderson when he chose to film "Phantom Thread" (2017) by himself.

With often only Sofia and her cinematographer on the set of "Broken Hill Blues" (2013), they managed to create an award-winning film. And it's easy to understand that the conditions for collaboration and dialogue with the actors improve if you don't have a crew of forty-five people waiting for you to fine-tune a scene until it really works. Or that the actors are drained of energy while your team spends hours adjusting a lamp or setting the right atmosphere in a room. What matters is the conviction the actor has in their eyes when they portray the script in a scene. Nothing else is of paramount importance.

### **37. Conclusion**

How should I proceed myself? First, I need to delve a bit deeper into my own interpretations of the words I use to describe the practice of a skill. For example: What is authenticity? When does the team feel that I, as a director, am using an authentic voice? Am I authentic when I approach the actors? Am I truly listening to the team and the actors? Am I capable of recognizing an authentic voice? What makes a good film? What makes a good performance? What makes a bad performance?

The relationship between a film director and their actors is a crucial factor in the film production process. A director's approach to working with actors can have a significant impact on the final outcome as well as on the actors' overall experience. A common method is for the director to have a practical and collaborative relationship with their actors. This may involve giving specific instructions and guidance on character development and performance, as well as working closely with the actors during rehearsals and scene blocking. Some directors may also use improvisation and experimentation as a way to find the most effective performance from their actors. Other directors take a more hands-off

approach, allowing their actors more freedom to interpret their characters and contribute their own ideas. This can lead to a more organic, spontaneous performance, but it also requires a lot of trust and communication between the director and the actors. Regardless of the specific method, it is important for a director to have a clear vision for their film and to be able to communicate this vision effectively to their actors. This may involve providing context and background information about the characters and the story, as well as giving feedback on performance and making adjustments as needed. Ultimately, the most effective directors are those who can build a positive and collaborative relationship with their actors and who can bring out the best in their performances through clear communication and a shared understanding of the film's goals. So, the director's relationship with the actors is a very important factor in the film production process. There are several ways that a film director can bring out the best in an actor: Clear communication: It is important for a director to clearly communicate their vision for the film and the specific character the actor is playing. This may involve providing context and background information, as well as giving specific feedback on performance. Rehearsals: Rehearsals can be an effective way for a director to work with actors to refine their performances and ensure they align with the overall vision for the film. Collaboration: A director can foster a positive and collaborative relationship with their actors by inviting them to contribute their own ideas and by being open to their input. This can create a sense of trust and mutual respect, which can lead to better performances. Trust: Trust is an essential component of the relationship between the director and the actor. A director who trusts their actors and allows them to interpret their characters in their own way can often bring out their best performances. Support: A director who provides support and encouragement to their actors can help build their confidence and inspire them to give their best. This can include providing feedback, offering constructive criticism, and offering encouragement. Finally, the most effective

directors are those who can build positive, collaborative relationships with their actors and create an environment where the actors feel comfortable and supported, which can lead to the best possible performances.

I want to conclude with an uplifting quote from Samira Vivette:

"Don't be an example of wasted potential. You must do whatever it takes to make it happen."

You are the best. Believe in it. Believe in the huge void that would exist in the universe if you weren't here.

Max Landergård