

Mental Health and Longevity in an Industry That Can Be Brutal
AKA
‘So Your Career Is Over’

I've been doing this for 30-plus years, at this point. I have done a lot of big shows, people know me, *blah, blah, blah*, and I still hear about operators doing other shows and wonder *Why didn't I get that call?* When I'm not working, I hear of folks doing shows that I have zero connection to and wonder why they got it instead of me. Because, of course, I should be EVERYBODY'S first call, right? When an **op** calls me because a **DP** I know is talking to them about a show that they didn't call me for, *Why Aren't They Calling Me For That Next Show?* When I'm working, it's fine, although if the phone isn't ringing and I'm not turning down work, I often think *Well, I'm finally done—it's over.*

And yet, somehow, I'm not. It isn't. The phone rings at some point.

I share all of this because someone called me asking about this exact issue a while back. He's got fewer years in than I do and I think he was surprised to hear that this never stops. Sure, at some point you can compartmentalize it, and you know you'll get a call (btw, my present show ends in three weeks and I have nothing lined up, so, clearly, I'm finished) but it never gets easy. Rejection never gets easy and even if you weren't even in the running for a show, it's still, basically, rejection. If that happens while you are working it can be a kick to the gut but if that happens in the middle of a slump, watch out. But know that it happens to every single one of us, and we all react. Why? Because we are human and that's the way humans work.

If for some reason a DP isn't calling who was before, you can either confront them or not. By 'confronting them' I don't mean attacking them, but having a conversation, and sincerely asking if something is up and what you can improve on. (Waiting outside their garage for them to come home at night, smoking a cigarette and wearing your Capybara onesie never works—trust me on this one). Some will talk, but most will feel put on the spot. In my experience, this tactic rarely works, which is why I always ask them at the end of the job, sincerely, what could I have done better for them. What can I do to be better? I explain that I am always trying to improve. I figure that's the time to get feedback, and it sets you up as well as it can.

But if a DP doesn't call you, it's not necessarily about you (at least that's the game we all need to play).

Here are some things that could cause that phone not to ring:

- Director wants the other guy
- Before you came in the pic, they were working with someone else and schedules finally connected

- Someone they like just called to say they were hard up for work and there just happened to be a job
- The producer on the new show heard your name and balked
- Your politics pissed someone off
- You dress better than they do

I mention all of these, specifically, because they have all happened to me (curiously, not that last one). And why didn't the DP just call and tell me? Because that's not their job and, frankly, it's awkward. So most don't.

No one else can determine what you are worth. You will decide that. And no phone call, show, shot or booking can ever take that away from you.

Bottom line, you're not alone in this – it happens, it will happen again. Look at that free time as a gift. Practice, yodel, connect with new DPs, write that book on Haiku you've been itching to finish. Before you know it, you'll be working and you'll wonder why you didn't do more with your free time, and the Haiku book will still be unfinished even though your publisher is really upset with you. On second thought, Haiku is where the big money is and you make your own schedule. Quit the biz and get to work.

When life shuts a door
Just open it. It's a door.
That is how doors work.
-anonymous

Thus Endeth The Lesson