

Hollywood Roundabout

By: Mark Litwak

Hollywood is a strange place with its own customs and practices. One custom that often confuses newcomers is when a studio executive or producer tells them that he or she would love to read their script but can only do so if it comes in from an attorney or an agent. The caller then seeks to obtain such representation because they think the intended recipient is genuinely interested in reading their script. Unfortunately, that is usually not the case. The executive is just looking for a way to get off the call without offending the caller. They know most novices do not have representation, so this is a diplomatic way of saying, "No thanks."

The truth is that most studio executives do not want to spend time reading material that comes over the transom from people who may not have experience or expertise in the craft of storytelling. Studio executives believe that 99% of the time such material from novice writers is not worthy of consideration. Since there are plenty of scripts to consider from the major talent agencies, there is little need to consider work from beginners trying to break into the industry.

Executives are also concerned about being sued for story theft. They are afraid that if they read a script and pass on it, and later develop something similar, they will open themselves to being sued. There have certainly been many such suits filed and more than a few of them have been found to be without merit.

Consequently, most studio executives and producers will not accept unsolicited submissions, especially from persons they do not know and those without a track record. Consequently, it is very difficult for newcomers to the entertainment industry to have their scripts read by industry insiders if they do not have representation. In the rare instance that an executive is willing to accept a script from a novice writer, the writer is often asked to sign a submission release or waiver making it more difficult for the writer to sue for theft of their material.

There is no law that requires that the material be submitted by an agent or attorney. You can be sure that if George Clooney calls Universal, they will be

delighted to receive material directly from him. In fact, they will send over a messenger to pick up the script. The fact is, a filmmaker with a successful track record can get a commitment just by pitching an idea for a film because the studio wants to work with that person.

Even if an unknown writer can submit a script to a studio, the chances of a bare script being given serious consideration is not likely. That is because nowadays studios and networks often prefer packaged projects. They want a star and director attached. When agencies submit scripts, they often are packaged with other elements which make the project more desirable in the eyes of a studio.

So then how does an unknown writer break into the industry? There is no easy answer. But often you break in because of a relationship with someone who already has a foot in the industry, such as your friend from film school or a producer who has access. Or if you produce something yourself that is so exceptional that it receives attention at a film festival or with critics.

Going the independent route has become more viable because the cost of production has gone down. In the days when making a film meant purchasing film stock and developing it, you needed some serious cash to get into the game. Nowadays, talented filmmakers can make films with low cost digital cameras, edit them on a computer, and then upload it to YouTube. For an enterprising person willing to hustle, a film can be made for very little