



**Ela Thier and her producing partner, Inna Braude
on the set of *Foreign Letters***

ALL YOU NEED IS LOVE: A Guide To Producing Movies

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The two most important things that go into making a film are exactly the two that people usually overlook. We focus on the screenplay or the actors or getting a camera, a location, a copyright, on money, but we forget the two things without which nothing ever happens. So let me outline them here:

1) The most important thing to making a movie is finding a producing partner who will make the movie with you. You can't go it alone. By partner I mean someone who is *personally invested* in the project. It will matter to them as much as it matters to you that the movie gets made, and that it gets made in the best possible way.

How do you find this magical partner?

The first thing you need to know are the exact roles that you plan to play in the film. If you're a writer-producer, you can find a fabulously talented director who would be thrilled to direct the piece and join you as a producing partner to make sure it happens. Conversely, you could be a director teaming up with a writer and the two of you embark on this journey together. If you're a writer-director, you could team up with an actor who'll be playing the lead role. I know a couple who works together as a writing-directing team. They often partner up with actors who are looking for projects that would showcase them and propel their careers. The actor they partner with joins them or entirely takes on raising money or paying to get the film made. If I was a talented and aspiring actor, I would join a producer as their producing partner in a heartbeat, and I would do whatever I had to do to get the film made, if it meant that I would have an opportunity to star in a film I want to be in.

While the above-the-line people (writer, director, cast, producer) are often your most likely candidates in terms of getting a producing partner on board, you don't need to stop there.

I have a friend who is currently packaging a feature film that she wrote and plans to direct. Her producing partner is a talented cinematographer who is ripe and itching to shoot a feature. He is just as eager as she is to get this film made, and is working alongside her to create a package and raise money for the film.

Your producing partner could be a hungry editor, sound designer, musician, even a production designer, costume designer, or make-up artist. The point is to find another artist for whom the film is a yummy opportunity to do something great that they would love to do, then reel them in to produce the film with you.

You need to be a pair. You need a person to call when your one investor decides to pull the plug, when nobody returns your calls, when a location falls through two days before your shoot, when the DP with a camera springs it on you that the rate he quoted didn't include the camera. The number of challenges that you will face in trying to make a film are simply too great and numerous to face alone. You need a buddy who will love the film as much as you do and go the distance with you.

Having a producing partner is the key to having staying power. The opportunities to get discouraged along the way are too many; without a partner, the enthusiasm will die, and with it your project. Not to mention the fact that without a partner, you simply won't have any fun making your film. The film will turn into yet another opportunity to do the whole alone-in-the-world thing, and you've already done plenty of that. Don't turn your film into another alone-in-the-world thingy. Your film is your big opportunity to enjoy working closely with another human being, and few things in life are as fun as that.

When you were a kid, did you ever form one of those secret clubs? You then all got together, excited to be part of this club, and then you were like, "Umm, what are we supposed to do?" You didn't know what your club was for. You just knew you wanted to be together.

Making films is nothing more than a giant and awesome ploy to get a bunch of people off their couch, out of their house, and off to working on something fun, creative (and hopefully meaningful) together. If you have fun making the film, the fun will show on the screen. In fact, whatever goes on behind the scenes, is what ends up showing on the screen, whether literally or in spirit. Have fun behind-the-scenes, and your film will be a blast to watch. The key to fun is to abandon the notion that your film is a solo project.

And yes, while you will end up with a group of people having a blast together, you need to start with that one personally invested partner who won't jump ship, no matter what. One excellent partner is worth more than a crew of three hundred.

Get that partner before you do anything else.

Where to find this buddy? Often the mystery partner is right in front of your nose. You know the story about a guy who dreamt that he would find a treasure? He traveled all over the world but couldn't find it. When he finally gave up and returned home, he found the treasure under his bed.

Your partner might be a sister, a parent, a spouse, a neighbor. If they have production experience, that's great, but it's not necessary. You could be the blind leading the blind. As long as your first project costs a few hundreds dollars and not a few thousand, that's totally cool. You'll have a blast learning together. The person's devotion to the project and working with you is more important than their experience.

If you can't find your producing partner in your backyard, you can post notices online. Shootingpeople.org and mandy.com are two places where you can put a posting out.

You can also post notices on my Facebook page, or heck, join one of my classes (insert shameless self-promotion here). In all seriousness, my classes are specifically designed to facilitate and foster these types of partnerships. In the last week, five partnerships formed in my two writing classes. These are five projects that will get filmed this term.

One more word about your producing partner before I move on to the second most important and overlooked item on your production to-do list:

At the start of your working relationship, work out your terms. Specifically, iron out:

- * What arrangement do you have in terms of owning the copyright to the film?
- * Is anyone being compensated, and if so what and when?
- * Who has creative control (final approval of script, cast, the final cut)?
- * How are each of you being credited in the film?

Iron these things out. The closer you are to your producing partner, the more important it becomes to iron these things out in advance. If you're working with a sibling, for example, it's that much more important to iron these things than if you meet someone on mandy.com. This is because people will spontaneously assume that they're entering the project with the same expectations, and this will rarely ever be the case. In fact, you can assume that you won't be entering the partnership with the same expectations. So expectations need to be clarified.

Ok. So you have a producing partner. That's huge. That's half your battle. Making the movie together will be the other half of your battle. Where to begin? You begin with the second item that most people overlook:

2) Come up with a shoot date.

That's right. Most people will focus on the script, the cast, the whatever. But truth is, until you have a shoot date, the project isn't real.

You can change whatever shoot date you've set, but at any given time, you know when you're shooting this movie.

Once you have a shoot date, the movie becomes real. You are now a train that has left the station, and folks will scurry to get on board. If you don't have a shoot date, if you approach people with some fuzzy-wuzzy thingy like "I'm thinking of making this movie..." then you'll get a lukewarm response like "That's cool. Let me know if you end up doing it..." But if you say "I'm filming on May 15", then people will want to know what you're doing between now and May 15, and what they can do to help.

Establish a shoot date with your producing partner and then approach everyone with the shoot date specified.

Once you have a producing partner and a shoot date, you can begin to turn your attention to the less important things like the script, the actors, the equipment, etc.

Your assignment when you finish reading this article?

1) Come up with a shoot date.

2) Brainstorm a list of possible producing partners.

3) Write the people on the list asking for coffee dates. This is your big opportunity to send one of those really exciting and mysterious txt messages: "Hey, Sam. You avail to meet up for a chat this week? I have a question for you."

4) Once you nail down a partner, adjust the shoot date to accommodate them.

Then proceed to make your movie.

Don't know where to begin? There's another article on my site called "Making a \$4 Movie".

Or, sign up for my producing workshop and let's make it happen. The materials alone are worth twice the workshop fee. But be careful: people who take my workshop do end up making movie. Don't say I didn't warn you.

Happy filmmaking!

Ela