

Finding Good Collaborators and Confederates

This is an important workshop for you if you feel isolated and cut off from the kind of creative and professional relationships you want.

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Collaborators & Confederates

Knowing the difference between collaborators and confederates helps you understand why you need both.

DISCLAIMER: I am not a doctor, therapist, or an attorney, and sometimes the reasons for an artists paralysis require help from these seasoned professionals. The advice in this workshop should not be taken as legal, medical, mental health, or financial advice, or used in lieu of accessing appropriate professional services. Successful creative pros thrive because they get the professional advice they need when they need it.

Being a creative professional (someone who seeks to make money from your creative work) can be pretty lonely business. But it doesn't have to be . . .

Collaborators: People you work with on projects of mutual interest. Requires you to determine and document who owns the work you create, or whether you both do and can independently use the work as you will, how work will be promoted, etc.

Confederates: "Fellow Travelers" who share common interests, experiences, feelings, and sometimes get together for mutually interesting activities, without a financial relationship between them. Everyone owns what they learn and they create, and the focus is on sharing the journey of being an artist at work.

You need both at one point or another, and people can slip from one relationship to another (as long as such shifts are clearly discussed and documented).

Confederates



Confederates are necessary because most creatives naturally feed off of one another. You see a movie you hate, you come up with an idea you like better. You read a script you love, you come up with a better one. A discussion about politics can make one person come up with *Animal Farm* and another come up with *A Christmas Carol*.

Creatives can be thought of as cells in a giant mind that are in constant dialog.

Generally, if creatives keep their work apart, their dialog about society, politics, children, religion, illness, pets, etc. will be so radically different you won't be able to tell they were thinking about the same thing.

Sharing thoughts, feelings, tips, roadblocks, frustrations, experiences can help creatives make great leaps forward on how they work by helping them change how they feel.

When you are stuck, you're looking at a problem from a point of view from which it cannot be solved. Your point of view has to change...

Collaborators

Collaborations always end. The period of actively working together may end after a few days, few months, few years, or when severed by death.

When you establish a relationship, deciding what you are working on and the duration of the working relationship is important, as is determining how control of the work and money and promotion of the work will be handled.

A shocking number of collaborations turn into bitter enemies after being the best of productive friends because they don't share [common values](#).

No one is making a big-budget feature film on their own. George Lucas didn't design every alien in the Star Wars movie by himself, he hired huge numbers of people to work with him to create, design, build, and shoot those critters.

Rogers (composer) and Hammerstein (Oscar Hammerstein II) were perfectly able as individuals, but together they were astronomically successful. The [Sherman Brothers](#) (Chitty Chitty Bang Bang, Mary Poppins, etc) were similarly more than the sum of their parts.

The requirements for a collaborating are more demanding because in addition to creative synchronicity, you need to share common business objectives and you need to create a business relationship/deal (or set of deals) that will last for the duration of your creative relationship. [That can 90+ years.](#)

It may be that you have an unequal relationship, where one is the employer, senior partner, or controlling collaborator when that makes sense to both partners.

It's Frustrating to Associate With and Collaborate With People Who Have No Clear Interest and/or Direction

One can handle some randomness in a confederate, as long as you have some interests solidly and routinely in common.

That said, someone who is really into filmmaking is going to be a looser confederate with you if your second love is writing books, and your third is playwriting.

In a collaborator, randomness in business objective and creative interest is really off-putting

If you are struggling to build relationships with folks as confederates or collaborators:

Firm up what you'd like to see, do, work on in the next 3 Months, 6 Months, 12 Months, 3 Years, 5 Years. Do you want to make low-budget films? Do you want to make a documentary about world peace? Do you want to create publish books? Focus on what you want, not what you think you can have.

It's okay to be ambivalent about these issues, it's just going to mean you're looking for confederates not collaborators most likely.

What makes you more productive? Someone to talk over ideas with? Someone to go to events and lectures with? Someone you can talk honestly with about your career / direction?

If you want a collaborator, you do have to have a pretty concrete idea of what you want in the next few months and years.

Become Visible

- [Write a book or short story and publish it](#)
- [Create a podcast](#)
- [Create an Microbudget Film or Documentary](#)
- <https://nancyfultonmeetups.uscreen.io/search?search=screenplay>
- [Create images and animations](#)
- [Create a course](#)
- [Create products](#)

Small is fine, cheap is fine, simple is fine, but [visible and promoted](#) is required. Create something good enough to put your name on, promote, and talk about.

One can think of the world as a vast battlefield (or a huge theme park) and for you to be “found” people have to be able to see your work and you.

Your work is like a red flag, or collection of balloons, and people will recognize that you are who they are looking for by that work.

How do you know who you want to work with? It’s because you’ve seen their work, heard them speak, and have recognized that you and they have interests in common.

When you have nothing for people to look at, you’re a black box and it’s hard for them to know if they want to work with you or connect with you creatively. Start creating content you like and sharing it with the world so there’s something for people to find. Start promoting that content so people of like mind, who stumble across it, can find it and you.

Where to Look for New Connections

- **LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Bookfunnel, Eventbrite, RadioGuestList.com, Current Film and Script Festival Entrants, the Trades** and anywhere else where people are actively and personally promoting their work. A person promoting something is looking for customers, contacts, and cooperative relationships.
- **Backstage.com, Craigslist.com,** and anywhere people are actively trying to hire people or get hired by people.
- Anytime you see someone paying for memberships or ads to meet people, you're looking at someone relatively more open to meeting confederates and collaborators as a rule

Creative pros pass through different states of mind as we work. When we have a paying gig that we have to actively create for, we're often not interested in new friends.

For example, a screenwriter with a commission, a producer with a cast and crew in the midst of producing a project, an author writing a book with a deadline, an expert/consultant who has enough work, are usually pretty busy and hard to interest. When creatives have something to sell (i.e. an author doing book signings, a producer promoting developing or promoting a project, someone looking for work) we are much more open to connections.

Chances are you know this from your own experience. When are you posting on LinkedIn? When are you running press releases? When are you running ads? When are you attending events (meetups, eventbrite meetings? When are you monitoring Craigslist or posting your screenplays on Inktip, etc? Connect to people who are actively looking for connections for best results.

Who to Look For

- Easily accessible people doing the genre and quality of work you want to do.
- Easily accessible people who need people like you in order to do what they do.
- People you can look up on Google, IMDB, and LinkedIn and find a track record for. Are they visible? Do you know who they are? It's totally cool to be just starting out, or only a few years in on screenwriting or producing, but someone who is 50 who has no past you can look up is a little scary.
- People who respond as you expect them to. People who are rude, unprofessional, angry, combative, dismissive, etc. at any point in your dialog with them are going to cause you and others problems going forward.

Most highly paid creative professionals are business owners. They are entrepreneurs, which is to say they set up deals and do them. We creatives invented the gig economy.

When you're used to a 9-to-5 job, your notion is to look for someone rich to hire you to do what you want to do and write a check to pay you month after month.

- When you're a creative pro, you're looking for lots of people willing to pay for work they need done, and
- You're looking for things you can make (films, books, courses, live events, designs, fonts, play, etc.) that you can sell to lots of people.

So while having a chat with a superstar actor or producer isn't a bad thing, finding people actively making the kind of work you want to contribute to, and people doing the kind of work you know there's a good market for is a better investment. Don't look "up" and struggle to reach big names, look for active people on their way up.

Reach Out

Make sure your [LinkedIn](#) and [IMDB](#) are up to date. Make sure they link to your work. You may also want to create a **Facebook Page, Youtube, or Twitter Profile** if you use those platforms. Be where your people naturally connect to people.

Create a website, if desired, to show your work.

- Connect with people via email, via linkedin, via twitter, via Facebook ads, etc.
- Connect with individuals you want to know
- Connect with types of people you want to know (i.e. people who are in SAG, the WGA, the Producer Guild, etc).

Offer:

- Mention the work you've seen them do that you really like.
- Mention something of value you can do for them, or give them, that they will find interesting. A link, a PDF, a Podcast you did that promotes them, go with something to give that they have good reason to like.
- Don't ask for something. Do not ask for a meeting, for help, advice, their feedback, etc.
- Don't connect until you know them well enough to offer something they'll appreciate. Repeat 2-4 times. Realize people's dance cards are sometimes already full, and they might not need new connections. Collaborators and Confederates are at your level or just above.

Sample Contact

Assuming you are a screenwriter and you've seen a short story by another screenwriter you really admire.

Dear Edward,

I've just seen the short film Walton's Creek Waltz at the Venice Film Festival. Wow that was amazing! I'm also a screenwriter ([link to work](#)) and I write in a similar genre. I've compiled a list of agents, managers, and producers who specifically produce character driven non-gory horror content. I thought I'd share it with you since they can't all hire me :) I hope, one day, we can find a way to chat by phone or in person about the kind of work we both like to write.

David (dwrite@mishwriter.com)

Sample Contact

Assuming you've seen a short film that won a festival recently, and you would like to connect with the producer.

Dear James,

I saw Wonderful Film on youtube, and wanted to reach out to you to say how great I thought it was. I wrote a review of it on IMDB you can check out here (link). I'm a composer (link) and it is amazing to see a film so beautifully scripted and filmed. Since you were the writer, cinematographer, and producer, I can't help be impressed. For your next project, when you're looking for a composer, I hope you'll reach out. I'd love to score your next film if we can find a way to work together.

Jane Lane (jlane34348@gmail.com)

Sample Contact

Assuming you are a producer and there's a writer you'd like to work with.

Dear Lindsay,

I just found and read your novel "Champion of the Underworld" after reading a post about it on Facebook. I've been telling everyone I know about it online and off. What a great story! I'm a film producer, and in my copious spare time I produce a podcast called Dante's Bard and Grill where I and my favorite actors tell stories (link). Do you have a scary short you'd like to see turned into an audio drama. I could only pay a token fee (\$250), but I actively promote every podcast I produce on Facebook (link) and I have more listeners every month. I would give you a podcast writer credit on IMDB that might be handy going forward. I look forward to finding a way to work together :)

Tony (tny10343@gmail.com)

Start Tiny

Whether you are looking for confederates, collaborators, or both, you'll find this formula works. It may not always generate a connection, but often it will (assuming you're approaching peers with interests in common).

Remember that the objective is simply to connect and see if "sparks fly". Nothing has to happen in order for a success to be declared. If the person remembers you kindly that's a big enough victory.

If they like what you've done enough to reach out to you for a chat by phone, or want to meet at some coffee shop, that's great. Be very wary if things start moving very quickly, and establish early on that you're a big fan of written agreements and attorney's on collaborations so there's no way deals can go south. Remember to do your [due diligence](#) on everyone involved in a project. It is the best way to ensure you don't waste your time on a project that's a step backward.

Expect A Few Bad Reactions

Many creative professionals, even some working at a relatively high level, are strongly conflicted and quite ambivalent about their work.

- They're running ads for services they don't want to talk about, tell people a price for, or sell.
- They are promoting something (events, media, books, etc) that they don't want people to know about.
- They want to dictate what is in customer reviews, and who leaves those reviews. So even a kind word or endorsement isn't welcome.
- They are prone to rage/anger (as are we all in periods of our life) so when people contact them or try to work with them they get very stressed out and angry (even when they are getting paid).

Making new connections is an exercise in openness, analysis, and tolerance. As you reach out to new people have the opportunity to assess how they react to discussions about their work, opportunities, and new people. A "bad reaction" to a nice overture says they don't share your values and may well be overstressed and unprepared to do good business.

Additional Resources

[Complete Index to VIP/PRO Resources](#)

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Success is Highly Likely If you reach out to at least 1 person a week for 52 weeks, you'll make at least 52 connections, and it's almost certain (if you've got good work to show, and you're approaching people as outlined) you'll end up with a few confederates and maybe a collaborator or two.

Even the process involved in thinking about who you'd like to connect with and how to help them will move you forward, because you'll be actively making a good impression on someone (assuming you're behaving sanely and they are nice people), and because you'll be thinking about the industry, how it works, what's valuable about your work, what's valuable about theirs, etc.

That hour or two stepping outside yourself gives you a new perspective on your work that can be incredibly valuable.

When you do participate in industry events, see great speakers on a stage, read an article about someone doing something admirable, make the effort to helpfully connect. Even when you don't end up with a connection, you are making the world a better place. You're and artist supporting a friendlier, more functional community.