

## SCRIPT TO SCREEN

### Paerangi | Video 9 – Finding A Team and Top Tips

[intro music]

#### ***Collaborating***

[0:00:06 Eloise Veber, Programme Manager, Script to Screen] Filmmaking is a collaborative process and now you know that the writer, director, and producer all have a lot to do and it's really difficult to try and do these things all yourself, not to mention all the departments you need during production such as sound, cinematography, production design, and cast. A film needs a team behind it and this starts with building a strong creative team with people you trust and who share your vision for the project. Here are some thoughts from our filmmakers on collaboration.

[0:00:38 Emmett Skilton, Director/Producer/Writer/Actor] In the New Zealand film industry, especially when you're starting out, you're not gonna have a budget. You're not necessarily going to have the means to mount something as, let's say, 'big' as what you want, as monumental as what you want, but what's really, really important is having a drive of why you're creating that project. It's very easy to go, 'hey this is a good idea' or 'that's a good idea', but why is it a good idea and why are you telling it, and why should it be heard or seen by an audience?' So, when you're seeking out likeminded individuals for collaboration, I personally have found that *why* you make that project will bring people on a hell of a lot more than exactly *what* the project is, then knowing that it has a purpose and a direction to it and a plan of where it'll live and how it'll affect people and what the future of that and your team might be. For us with *Awkward Love*, we were driven by a desire to see women more accurately presented onscreen, to give opportunities to actors and actresses who weren't receiving it, and to give opportunities for females behind the camera. So, for us, we built our team of female writers, female actors, and then a female DOP, and communications with the crew that we wanted to bring onboard all came down to the 'why', why you're making it, and that justified why they should get onboard.

[0:02:24 Dianne Taylor, Screenwriter] Okay, the first thing is finding the right people to collaborate with. It's all about relationships, you're going to be in relationship with these people again for a long time, you have to trust them. You have to trust them so that you can share your ideas with them and not be scared that they're gonna think it's a crap idea. We all have crap ideas, I have 10 a day, but I want to be able to work with someone that I can go 'hey this might not work but... da-da-da' – so, talking, talking-talking-talking and asking lots of questions of each other.

[0:03:05 Karin Williams, Producer] It's critical to communication and to listen to each other, and that doesn't mean just talking incessantly about your brilliant idea or how you see the film; it's about listening to others' ideas and figuring how to all come together on the same page. I think also your relationship with funders, sponsors, financiers, those also are partnerships. People often look at funders in a sort of antagonistic or an oppositional type of way: 'the funder is trying to interfere with my film' or 'the funder just wants things out of me' or 'someone's gonna steal my stuff'. That is not a productive way to enter into your project. You want to see everybody that's involved, whether it's a grip or a caterer or an extra or a funder or a sponsor or someone who's giving you money in a crowd fund, as a partner, and that means having a relationship with that person and listening to what they have to say to you.

[0:04:11 Shoshana McCallum, Screenwriter/Actor] Choose people who give you confidence, choose people who make your work sing, who boost your self-esteem, who read something and aren't just 'yes' men, aren't like 'ooh this is perfect, let's do it!' but will tackle any kind of critique, any kind of feedback in a way that's like 'yes, *and...*' That would be my number one, and secondly it would be like, who's got the same kind of vibe as me, who wants to make the same movie as me, who wants to make the same show as me?

[0:04:44 Emmett Skilton, Director/Producer/Writer/Actor] Not only is it a hell of a lot more fun to collaborate with people, you're getting a chance to put together all your ideas and your skills towards one single idea or project. For example, I may not know how to operate a camera but I *can* write, so we get a DOP who knows how to operate a camera, but they don't know how to do sound, so we get on a soundie etc. and before you know it you've got a collaborative process where, and in my own situation, people put their ideas together and collaborate on building something bigger. There's no one person that leads the project fully; it's ensuring that you have a chance to work with likeminded folks who are driven by the same desire to tell that story.

[0:05:32 Jaimee Poipoi, Producer] I think if you're a new filmmaker, if you're looking for people to collaborate with, try and think about what is the best working environment for you – what do you enjoy? And then from there you can find people that are similar. For example, I do a cooking show online. I love food so I start looking at people who also love food: What kind of shows are we watching together? Are there any forums online that I can join where we can nerd out about things like recipes and stuff? So, I think find what you love and then look for where those groups would be, join them, and then just start, yeah, start making friends with them, and then naturally you'll start to do things together because you both like the same stuff. I think when you're looking for likeminded people, the best place to look is in your friends. Start with them first, start making stuff together. You can always teach somebody how to do something, you know, you can always teach them a skill, but you can't teach a personality and if they gel with you. Film is a long – it takes a long time to make stuff and so I think you want to make it with friends that you enjoy being in their space, you enjoy hanging out, nerding out, sharing ideas, and you can feel real comfortable talking to. So, I think that's a great place to start, and then from there you'll start to build up a bigger group and people will start coming in and you'll start expanding.

[0:07:02 Sophie Henderson, Screenwriter] When you're looking for likeminded people to collaborate with, I would look to the people you already know, look for the people in *this* group. You're in this great group of people doing this project and I think if you just found one person that you're excited to work with on something else, you make that your mission for *Paerangi*. Then you are introduced to all their networks and they're introduced to yours.

[0:07:26 Dianne Taylor, Screenwriter] So, collaborations can come between producers and writers, directors and writers, writers working with other writers, or, in this instance, I'm working with an actor who has a very good sense of story. What we did, we decided we wanted to work together, and we sat down and for a long time we just shared our stories with each other: stories of our lives and the things that mattered, like big moments, big moments that had happened to us. It was quite unusual because I didn't know her very well when we started this process, so it was like really opening up and sharing some stuff that I hadn't shared with many people, and she did the same. We'd look at each other and go 'ooh, can we use that?' and we decided just to be very brave and just always go 'yeah' and we could again go 'yes but what if we took that and twisted it and did this?' but it gave us the raw material before we ever decided what our story was even going to be about.

[0:08:33 Robyn Grace, Director] I found it really hard to find a team but only because I imagined that there would be 20 clones of myself around, and that's not how it works. When you're making your first film it's really important to find people who believe in you and really want to help you, but also, as the director you're really in charge of what everybody is doing anyway, so you have to – there has to be a certain amount of control from you. Finding people who understand your vision is really important and in each department that is someone who – like you could just be talking over a cup of tea and they go, 'yeah, yeah, yeah!' and that's the right person to have on your team: someone full of energy who really wants to help you make what you want to make. But also, if you're looking for professionals who have track records, then it is simply about someone who, when you have a conversation, they understand what you want to do, to say, and what you want it to look like, so ... and that, it literally is just sitting down over a tea or coffee, talking, and finding those people.

[0:09:45 Emmett Skilton, Director/Producer/Writer/Actor] In New Zealand we've got so many people that are hungry to make TV content, web content, short films, feature films, you don't have to go into the main centres

anymore. It used to be a big thing to go to Auckland or Wellington where the projects were happening, but there's people in your own town that are wanting to do what you do as well, so I encourage you to find people where you are, who have a similar drive as you do, and potentially a different level of skillset to go on creative projects. Myself and my team, we've done that, most of our team have found each other with that desire to tell stories and to become better as a team.

[0:10:32 Morgan Leigh Stewart, Producer] I think the silver lining from a pandemic is that it's opened up a lot of people to remote working, not just the technology, but the way that we can collaborate from anywhere in the country and anywhere in the world.

[0:10:46 Marina McCartney / Screenwriter] I think that now we have more of an online presence and we have meetings online, that's become normal for us in this day and age. Connecting through different social media pages, we're lucky that we have different organisations within the country that nurture connection between different filmmakers. I would go on two different social media sites and join as many of these groups as you can, I would join as many of the industry groups that you can because a lot of their newsletters as well, and their communication, will tell you about events happening that are either online or possibly in person in your region, but certainly I think that the online thing has definitely minimised distance between us and that's one of the ways I think you can find other likeminded people.

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### ***How to pitch your idea to a producer you'd like to work with***

[0:11:56 Jaimee Poipoi, Producer] I think when it comes to approaching a producer there's a few things that I like to receive. One is, I like it when people research the kind of things that I've done. Most producers are very vocal on social media about what they're working on and the types of projects that they are doing, so I think if you do a little bit of research you can see if your project fits into kind of what they're doing. Also, it's super flattering when someone comes up to you and they talk about work you've already done. You're like, 'ah!' If I know that you've researched me, you've actually thought about the questions you specifically want to ask me because you know I can actually help you, so I think it's really good to do a little bit of research on the producer. Another one is asking if they're available for pitches, and that's something that I've just learnt but it's really helpful because a lot of times producers have a lot of things on their slate, and they might love your idea but they just can't fit it in at the moment, so I think it's really important to just ask, are you looking for something to take on at the moment?

[0:13:05 Morgan Leigh Stewart, Producer] I'd say the dos and don'ts of approaching a producer would be: Do introduce yourself and what you want to do and why you want that particular producer, so do your research. Like, if you have a comedy series and you're approaching a drama feature film creator, why are you doing that, what is the alignment that you're looking for between those two projects? So, perhaps you'd like to look into more of a comedy series producer before you do that. I'd say don'ts would be: Don't send the full script straight up; I would say engage with the person first, have a bit of a chat, and then decide if you want to move towards reading something. I think it's important to just know that you're on the same page before you do go down that road.

When looking for a producer the way that I like to be approached would probably usually be with a small sort of intro, a bit about yourself and what you want to achieve. It's really hard receiving full feature scripts to read because they take a lot of time and energy – pretty much like anything more than a page is too much reading. A logline, a brief synopsis, an idea around tone and where you think it's gonna go. I'd like to know that we're sort of on the same page before delving into that, so it's good to have a clear about what you want and what your vision is.

[0:14:41 Jaimee Poipoi, Producer] When you do get time to pitch and send them something I encourage people to do a one pager doc, and I like this document broken down into four sections. The idea with this is it gives me a

really quick overview of what your project is, what you're looking for, who your team is, and then I can decide really quickly if I'm the right person for it. Or, maybe I can't fit it in my schedule, that way I can take your one doc and I can send it out to people who I might think would be totally available to help you.

So, in this document I like to break it down into four sections. One is, what is your project? That's number one and it's just a photo and a really short, maybe one or two sentences about what this project is, why you want to make it. The second is, who is the team? So, a photo, whether it's you the writer, whether it's your whole team if you've got them, just a little blurb of who you guys are and why you want to make this project. Then the third one is, what you're looking for: Are you looking for a producer in this case? What are you specifically wanting from me? Do you want me to take the project and develop it with you? Do you want to take it into production? That's a really good box to know exactly what you're looking for, and this is helpful if you're looking for crew members as well to bring on. If you're wanting a DOP, if you want an art director, you can say specifically what you're wanting for this project. The fourth box is your plan for your project: What's the goal, where would you like it to go? Would you like it to go in festivals, would you like to put it online? Just let me know there, so just a short picture, a short little blurb of what you're looking for, and that one page doc, it just gives me all the information I need to make a decision.

I would like to read scripts. A lot of times I do get the script but that takes a lot of time. We do read over it quite a lot to give feedback, so this one page is a really quick way to get that overview of what your script is, and a lot of times I get approached by people who want to make their project and I might be working on something and then I get a feel for who you are and I might invite you to come join that crew to help you build up to that project. A lot of times I'll ask people, 'what would you like to do, what role would you like to do?' and a lot of times I get the same answer and it's 'I'll do anything'. That actually doesn't help because I don't know where to put you if you say 'anything', so I think it's really important to have maybe one or two key areas that you're interested in. That can change, you know, that can change, but at least that helps me create a pathway of where you can go, where I can put you, so you can learn what you need to reach your goal in the future.

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### **Top tips**

Here are some top tips that our filmmakers want to leave you with.

[0:17:41 Alex Lovell, Producer] If I had to give one piece of advice my top tip would be, really utilise this time while you're emerging to learn every aspect of the filmmaking and creative processes that you can, and really do things thoroughly, don't look for the shortcuts, so that you're preparing yourself for that future ahead.

[0:17:59 Hamish Bennett, Writer/Director] Just be interested in people. From a writing point of view this is where all of your ideas are going to come from – and, from a directing point of view, this is how you're gonna develop the kinds of relationships that you'll need to make the kinds of films that you want to make.

[0:18:14 Robyn Grace, Director] So, top tip, *Oranges and Lemons* was a script that I wrote 15 years ago, and I didn't get funded and I waited and waited ... so, don't wait, just make your film. It's really important if you've got a story to tell, tell it.

[0:18:32 Emmett Skilton, ] If I could give you one piece of advice it's to just start. Wherever you are and whatever position you are, with whatever skillset, just begin and let it snowball from there. It's really easy for us as makers to question every element of our process, whether that be our skills or whether our project is good enough, or whether that person will like it or whether that person wants to get onboard, but really the greatest stories are told because someone is pushing their fear aside and letting their love for what they want to do drive it.

[0:19:03 Jaimee Poipoi, Producer] So, my top tip would be just to go for it, just start making things. What's really cool is that you can get apps on your phone like FiLMiC Pro, which turns your phone into a really cool camera. There's so many apps out there that can help you get started so I think just go for it, make something with your friends, make something on your own. The more mistakes you make now, the more faster you'll learn. You'll get better and this is a chance you can really play, so I'm like 'go for it!' Try different things and just have fun.

[0:19:37 Dianne Taylor, Screenwriter] Have lots of stories, have lots of other ideas. Ideas just will come and hit you out of left field, right field, you'll be having a shower and you'll think of something completely different – jot it down and come back to it. When you only have one project that you're working on you can become a little over invested in telling just that one story, and I know that you've got lots so ... Some stories you can go a long way down the track and you actually realise, maybe this isn't the one, maybe this just isn't sticking. Be prepared to let go of it and move onto something else. Be working on things simultaneously and just remember that your stories are like raw clay, you might think you're making a teacup and it could turn into a vase. It doesn't matter so long as you're the one shaping it and making the discoveries along the way.

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