

What Hollywood Knows About Resilience, That YOU DON'T!



Love it or hate it, one thing you can say about many producers in Hollywood is that they are remarkably resilient. They don't give up, and in some cases keep pitching ideas for years. There's something to be said for that, because in my experience, when people outside Hollywood hit a wall, get rejected, or suffer a defeat, nine times out of ten, they give up. But in Hollywood, you'll find producers that are still pitching ideas, concepts, and scripts they developed decades ago – and in an amazing number of cases, they eventually strike gold. For instance, back in the 1980's, Ken Wales, who's had a long career as a producer in Hollywood acquired the rights to Catherine Marshall's book "Christy" – about a pioneer woman living on the American frontier. He pitched that book to every studio in town and did it for years. But time after time, he was turned down. Studio after studio, financier after financier. Turned down flat.

But Ken never gave up. In fact, he just wouldn't let it go, to the point that I started feeling really bad for the guy. So one day I pulled Ken aside and told him to give it a rest. "Ken, nobody wants to make a movie about a pioneer woman. Give it up. Move on with your life." But Ken refused to listen. Then in 1994 – about six months after our conversation, Jeff Sagansky, then president of CBS, bought it and turned the book into a TV series that ran for twenty episodes on that network. Series regular Tyne won an Emmy Award for her work on the series.

Needless to say, Ken Wales taught me the value of resilience. Just like the old Timex watch theme, Ken could take a licking and keep on ticking. So when it comes to resilience, here are a few lessons we could learn from Ken Wales and other producers in Hollywood:

1. Don't be a "One Trick Pony." Ken pitched that book for years, but it wasn't the only project he was developing. He was also working on other movies as well, but always looking for the right opportunity to produce "Christy."

2. Don't burn bridges. I'm sure Ken was laughed at a few times because the 80's weren't a prime era for making movies about pioneer women. Even the "Dr. Quinn Medicine Woman" TV series didn't start until the 90's. But no matter what reception Ken received from studios or other producers, he was always gracious. As a result, he never burned bridges and still has those valuable relationships for pitching other projects.

3. Be open to change. Ken always thought about that project as a movie. But when CBS suggested it could be a dramatic TV series, Ken agreed. But in other situations, I too often hear responses from writers and producers like "It can't be changed," or "This is the way I've always dreamed it would be and I'm not interested in changing it." I'm all for fighting for your vision, but all the artistic vision in the world won't amount to much if you don't have any finished projects to show for it.

4. Learn from Ken Wales. Be resilient. You never know when the right time and circumstance for your project will happen. Only God knows the big picture, so learn to trust, keep your attitude high, and never give up.