



Stanford eCorner

Learn More by Starting at the Bottom

Gale Anne Hurd, *Film and Television Producer*

April 18, 2012

Video URL: <http://ecorner.stanford.edu/videos/2945/Learn-More-by-Starting-at-the-Bottom>

Acclaimed film and television producer Gale Anne Hurd tells the story of leaving a role in marketing to take an entry-level position on a film set. It was hard to watch peers in other industries succeeding during this period, says Hurd, but she values the decision she made to accept the challenge of starting over, making herself indispensable on set and earning the respect of her colleagues.



Transcript

Be careful what you wish for. Never assume. You learn more from your mistakes than your successes. Roger promised me a job on set; he never said what that position would be. I learned a big lesson there. But it was - he was right and I was wrong. I assumed that I would go from director - from head of marketing to producing. I thought that was a lateral move. Well, what you learn in marketing is helpful in producing, but it is not the job of a producer. Roger insisted that I start out again, at the bottom.

So once again it's important to remember that it's all a learning experience. And so what did I do? I went to work as a production assistant on *Humanoids from the Deep*. Tagline, they hunt human women not for killing, but for mating. Remarkable at the time, the movie was directed by a woman. Women did not get opportunities to direct then. They very rarely get opportunities to direct now. But under Roger Corman, you could direct films, you could write films, you could edit films. It was an equal opportunity, take advantage of talent, factory, anyway. So here I am, I'm two years out of Stanford and I have to tell my parents I graduated, elected to Phi Beta Kappa as a junior, so I was top 2% of my class, two years later I'm broke. I've been demoted from head of marketing at New World Pictures to a gopher, I'm working on a movie about monsters who rape women.

I'm still making \$180 a week and now I'm working seven days a week, 20 hours a day, up in Fort Bragg in Mendocino. Looking back, it was the best decision I ever made. Because working with me on that set were people that I would work with again, which I will get to. Anyway, I learned every job on the set. I chose to become indispensable whether that meant preparing call sheets or emptying chemical toilets in motor homes. I didn't say no, I didn't say I'm too good for this. I did it and I did it well. And if you do that you will never have to do it again because they will give you more responsibility. So, I never complained. There were days just like in a start-up, I would work 36 hours straight.

I was the lowest person in the totem pole, but I was earning my way and I was earning the respect of everyone on the set.