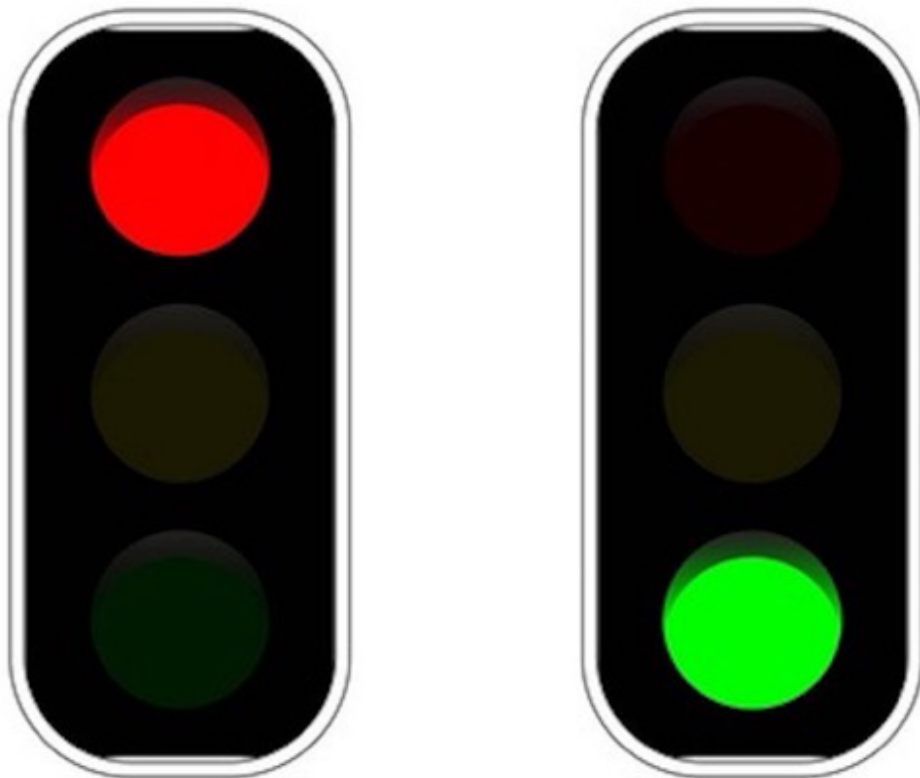


# The Business of Screenwriting: There's a green light...

[Scott Myers](#)



I'm attending a fundraiser for my son's elementary school. It's an alternative private school on the Westside, an institution that prides itself on its "diversity"... which I've discovered pretty much means they have parents who are agents and directors, entertainment lawyers and producers, studio execs and writers.

One of the parents is the president of production for a major movie studio and the fundraiser just happens to be at his house.

It also just happens that my partner and I recently turned in a draft of a writing assignment at that same studio, our script well received there. So I am feeling rather jaunty as my wife and I enter the lavish home of our hosts.

The studio chief is at the door to greet us. His first words to me are these:

“Congratulations. We just green lit your movie.”

Feeling even jauntier, I bump up the amount of money we had figured we'd give the school. Hell, I have a green lit movie. Why not splash some of that cash around?

Uh, not so fast.

Later that week, our agents tell us the studio has hired a well-known screenwriter to do a rewrite on our script. Nothing serious, we're told. Just some minor character work and a polish to “bring the script home.”

Several months later, the screenwriter's draft comes in. The studio's reaction? Not so good. He does another draft. The response is even more tepid. Whatever heat the project had is now dissipated.

And the supposed green lit project? Dies on the vine. A little game that gets played out in Hollywood all the time: Green light. Red light.

I had a similar thing happen two other times. One was a remake of a 50's comedy. The script we wrote got a major

comic actor attached. The news was announced in the trades. Studio green light. The talent and his writing team were going to do a "polish" on the script. When the draft came in, they had completely retooled the story. The studio's reaction?

Green light. Red light.

On another project we were in active pre-production, busy doing a polish on the script with the film's director. Budget, casting, locations, schedules, the whole nine yards, all in progress. Then a movie came out with one similar narrative element to our project, much more prominent than anyone had anticipated. Basically blew us out of the water.

Green light. Red light.

Which goes to show you, there's a green light... and a GREEN light. The regular old green light turns out to be a provisional one. A blinking green light, if you will. A GREEN light means they are actually by God committed to making the movie. How do you know when you get a GREEN light? Honestly, you can't really know until that first day of principal photography, the director yells "Action," and the cameras roll. Because any number of things can go wrong in pre-production that can turn a green light into a red light.

So a word of advice: When someone says to you, "Congratulations, your movie is green lit," nod your head, smile, and reply, "From your lips to God's ears." Then get your ass back to work on another story. Hopefully, they'll

make your movie, but you always want to have something else going on... in case that green light turns red.

*The Business of Screenwriting is a weekly series of Go Into The Story posts based upon my experiences as a complete Hollywood outsider who sold a spec script for a lot of money, parlayed that into a screenwriting career during which time I've made some good choices, some okay decisions, and some really stupid ones. Hopefully you'll be the wiser for what you learn here.*

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