

Handling Rejection

It can motivate... debilitate... or take a long time to see its meaning.

[Scott Myers](#)



Recently, I posted some reflections on this reader question: [How insane is it for a 46 year-old to try to start a Hollywood writing career?](#) It generated quite a bit of interest online and in comments.

One response was from Tim Plaehn which begins with this:

I received my rejection for the Orb Media Group China-Hollywood Screenwriting Fellowship sometime in the

night. I woke up, went to the bathroom, and read in front of the mirror the gentle, supportive, even encouraging let down. I kind of knew I hadn't won last week, but I appreciated the certainty: I had been rejected.

I gauged my disappointment in the mirror and then started the shower. It was time to move on, time to begin my day.

I don't, however, process rejection so easily — even though I like to imagine I am one who can wash disappointment off me with some sort of invigorating and manly soap and watch it swirl down the drain. In truth, I'd go back to reread that email many times in the day. I went back to attend to the body of the email to poke and prod, examining it for any and all meanings, apparent or otherwise. In a brutal little twist, I attended a writing workshop all day long — the most significant rejection of my screenwriting career tucked into my back pocket as I read published writers and reflected on all they do so well. What facility with language they have!

"We are keen to continue a creative dialogue with you," said the email.

Awesome! I'm keen as well! I mean really, I was keen back before it was cool, so this dialogue should be kick-ass.

The email went on, for they were impressed with “the wonderful potential that [I] showed.”

Yes? Don't stop!! What kind of potential? “Wonderful,” you say? You, me, and my mother are all on the exact same page! This is all good. A positive email filled with all sorts of positive signs.

But then I remember Suzanne Sullivan, dancing with me late at night at The Bell Buoy. It must've been twenty-five years ago now. She's smiling and laughing: “You're so funny!” And I remember thinking, I should kiss her right now. And in this remembrance, a wave of dejection comes over me . . .

“We are sorry to inform you that your work has not been selected for the final prize this year.”

Tim goes on to recall Suzanne and it's a [really good post](#), one well worth your time reading. As I went through Tim's ruminations, it brought to mind one of my own experiences with rejection. So I [wrote this in response](#):

Tim, I read your Suzanne Sullivan post, all the way through it. Proves you're a writer as it kept my interest!

Rejection is a strange thing. It can be debilitating. It can be motivating. It can also take a long time to see what it means in the long view of one's life.

I was just thinking about it yesterday. Many years ago, I

was living in Ventura, California. I was about 3 years into making a living as a musician and was at the time part of a quartet. We had a steady gig in Yosemite playing at various venues there. The guys had been talking with some other musicians in Santa Barbara about doing more of a rock band thing, a regular gig at a club in nearby Carpinteria. I joined in for a few rehearsals. Then I was informed they didn't have room in the new band for me.

It was an economic decision: Why split the pay 5 ways instead of 4? What hurt most, of course, was the fact these guys were my friends. That's a personal kind of rejection which stings.

Naturally I was bummed out. After living with that rejection for a few days, I was confronted with the question: What would I do now? The safest and most rational course of action: Go back into academics, get my doctorate like I'd planned to do. My year away from school to explore my creative interests as a musician had turned into three and what had it gotten me?

And yet...

After some long inner conversations, I realized I wasn't ready to give up. The pull I felt toward the creative was still too strong. Returning to academics at that point would have felt like resigning myself to something 'less than'.

I made a decision and shifted into being a solo musician. Applied myself even more diligently to the craft. Learning new songs. Practicing guitar. Studying songwriters. Reading books. Watching movies. Feeding my soul in the hopes I would become a better songwriter. And always writing.

For three years, I averaged 300 gigs per year.

I also developed my stage persona chops. That led me to try my hand at stand-up comedy for two years which ultimately resulted in my saying this: ["I can do that."](#)

*So while the sting of that rejection by my band-mates was very real and hurtful at the time, when I look back on it through the lens of my personal history, it's likely I never would have discovered screenwriting had I **not** been rejected.*

I don't know. Maybe the only way one can read the tea leaves of what rejection means is in the past tense. Look at where you are today. Or where you end up tomorrow. Then track the trajectory of choices and events which lead you to the present. Was there some causality at work?

Ultimately, we may never know. However, it brings me back — yet again — to the message of the Hero's Journey: "Follow your bliss." Discover that which enlivens you, an activity which brings you joy, a calling which provides meaning to your life, something you're

good at and passionate about... and do THAT. Measure what you do not so much by success in a material sense, but by the purpose pursuing your bliss brings to your efforts and life in general.

Rejection can be motivating. Rejection can be debilitating. But one thing to bear in mind with the sting of someone saying 'no' to you...

It may take years before you piece together what it means.

Meanwhile dust yourself off, get back up...

And keep trying.

How do YOU deal with rejection? Hit **RESPONSE** and share your thoughts.