

THE JORDAN HARBINGER SHOW

Worksheet for Brian Grazer | The Art of Human Connection (Episode 267)

A lot of people make their way to Hollywood so they can see their names in the bright lights of a movie marquee, and then burn out on the grind long before they even earn an entry on IMDb. But some people leverage very modest means and catapult themselves into the jaded old town's pantheon of silver screen immortals without damaging themselves or others along the way. It sounds like the plot to any number of screenplays a studio mogul might find stacked in a sprawling pile on their desk, except the story is true — and it happened to today's guest.

On this episode we sit down with **Brian Grazer**, the Academy Award-winning producer who co-founded Imagine Entertainment with his partner Ron Howard, together creating films and television shows that have been nominated for 45 Academy Awards and 196 Emmys. He is the author of *Face to Face: The Art of Human Connection* and co-author (with Charles Fishman) of number one New York Times Best Seller *A Curious Mind: The Secret to a Bigger Life*. Aside from his success on screens big and small, Brian is an incredibly curious person. For the past 30 years, he's made it his mission to meet a new person every week or so, and sit down with them for a very specific curiosity conversation. It sounds a lot like this podcast, in fact.

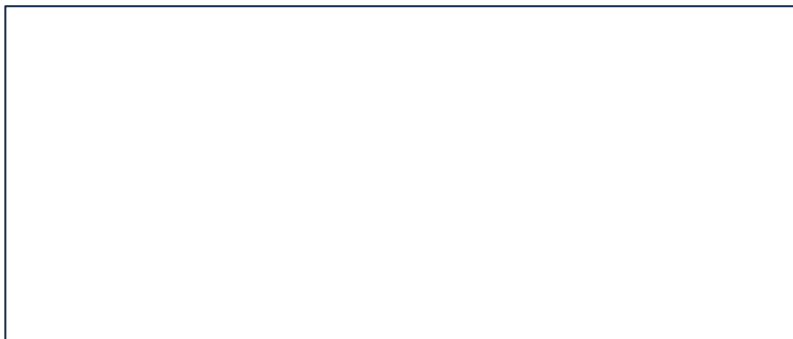
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Knocking for Opportunity

Brian got his foot in the door of Hollywood when he was a legal clerk — really, a glorified courier — in the early '70s at Warner Bros. studios. Most of the time he sat in a closet-sized office throwing pencils at the ceiling, but he spotted an opportunity when, after a week on the job, he was sent to deliver papers to Warren Beatty. And while most people in his position would only interact with an assistant, Brian had a plan.

Brian told the assistant, “Oh, the papers are legal documents that aren’t valid unless I hand them directly to Mr. Beatty.” And when the assistant wasn’t buying it, Brian would continue, “I’m sorry, but they’re invalid and I have to go back to the office to Warner Bros. in Burbank with the papers.” It worked, and he spent the next hour in conversation with Warren Beatty himself. This is when Brian realized, “I can do this all the time. I can do it every time I have to deliver papers.”

When opportunity doesn’t knock, sometimes you have to be creative and knock for opportunity. What personal and professional opportunities are sitting just out of view, awaiting your attempt to connect? What simple, creative methods might you employ to gain access to these opportunities?



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“I Do Not Want a Job.”

When there weren't letters to deliver during his time as a Warner Bros. law clerk, Brian soon discovered other ways to reach out and network with big Hollywood names of the day from the comfort of his tiny office.

Brian says: “I'd write a letter to Lew Wasserman — they didn't have emails in the day — and then I'd follow up immediately with a phone call saying, ‘I just sent a letter to Mr. Wasserman. My name is Brian Grazer,’ and they'd hear my excited, young voice, fresh out of college, and they always said yes. I mean, I did say, ‘I work at Warner Bros. This is unassociated with studio business, but I want to meet your boss for the following reason and I guarantee you I do not want a job.’”

This is almost a script for making big connections — note the very important “I guarantee you I do not want a job,” intended to reassure the assistant on the other end of the line that he wasn't looking for anything from their boss but time. How might you use this sentiment to similarly craft your own introduction to big names in your field?

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You Can't Say Nothing

Though Lew Wasserman agreed to meet young Brian, the seasoned studio executive didn't have time to waste — and sensed this was exactly what Brian had come to do. While the meeting was embarrassingly brief, it taught Brian early on the importance of having something — anything — to offer someone kind enough to give you even a moment of their valuable time.

Brian says: "He went to his office, came back with a big legal pad. It was a yellow legal tablet and a pencil and said, 'Take this.' He hands me the pad and then the pencil and he said, 'Put the pencil to the pad and it has greater value than they do as separate parts. Get out!' I got in the elevator feeling pretty embarrassed that he did it in front of a bunch of people, but it was the most valuable lesson I learned. I learned that you have to come in with something — you have to own something — meaning you have to give life to ideas, and so write them down and then you own something. It doesn't even have to be perfect. Don't have someone say, 'What's going on?' and you go, 'Nothing.' You can't say 'Nothing!'"

What do you own? What would you bring to such a meeting that would be valuable to the person on the other side of the table?

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Remedial Curiosity

Sometimes the only thing you have to bring to a conversation is a host of interesting questions about something near and dear to the person across from you. By maintaining a level of remedial curiosity about the world at large, you'll find these questions begin to ask themselves — all you have to do is observe.

"If you're interested in anything — architecture, how a building looks — you realize, 'Oh, I like the looks of that building,' and then you say to yourself, 'Why does that building look that way? Oh, it's the architect.' Then it's not just the design on the inside, it's the architect. It's Disney Hall. Then you go, 'Why does Disney Hall look like that?' 'Oh, it's this architect.' 'Really? Who do you think that is?' 'His name is Frank Gehry.' 'Wow, he must be a young guy.' 'No, he's 90.' 'Interesting. Wow, I'd like to meet a guy, like, that could do that at 90. I'd like to know what it's like to still be vital at 90. Plus, I'd like to know how he was able to come up with this sort of design, and is that a consistent design in all of his architecture?' You have to like sort of iterate all these questions."

If you were to go for a walk around your neighborhood right now, what commonplace things might tell you a story if you focused your attention on them and dug deeper than the surface observations you probably make every day? What questions can you iterate to begin uncovering these stories?

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Curiosity Conversations

Brian reminds us that we don't have to sit face to face with the world's (or even our industry's) most well-known in order to reap bountiful rewards. He makes a point of having a *curiosity conversation* with someone new every week or so, but even random encounters with the people we meet every day can teach us things we didn't even know we were looking for.

"I've learned a lot from my Uber driver," says Brian. "Just recently from a Serbian. First of all, I didn't know he was Serbian, but I had to ask him. And he was a very big guy and he was an Uber driver. I started talking about martial arts, which I'm very interested in...I have done three different disciplines. And he said, 'Oh, well, in Russia, we have one called Systema.' I didn't know what that was, so I said, 'Can I pay you to teach me this?' and he did."

Remain open to the possibility that everyone you meet has something new to teach you — and it's up to you to coax this from them. Remember, too, that you have your own knowledge to impart. Consider every conversation a chance for an exchange of ideas. This week, deliberately try to extend a random encounter with someone into a curiosity conversation. It doesn't necessarily have to be with a stranger, but try to come away from the conversation knowing something you didn't know before.

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Don't Outsource Your Networking

Brian has plenty of assistants who could filter out all “nonessential” contact with the outside world, but here’s the thing: Brian insists on making those phone calls that a lot of people at his level would consider beneath them. He understands the power of personal connection, and this is why he doesn’t outsource his network.

“There was a director I was trying to get approved by Universal Pictures,” says Brian. “So I called the boss, the executive. I called and said, ‘Hey, is so-and-so in?’ and [the assistant] said, ‘Well, he’s leaving.’ I said, ‘Before he leaves the country, he needs to have a meeting with this one director.’ ‘He’s got no time.’ I go, ‘Please. He’s got to meet this director, please, please, please?’ ‘Who are they?’ I say the names, and the assistant goes, ‘We love them!’ We showed up. They approved them, they’re now directing *Friday Night Lights*, the new movie.”

What opportunities are you missing when you try to streamline your life to move along as “efficiently” as possible? What areas of your life would best benefit from your personal touch no matter how many promotions you get and how much of a budget you have to outsource tasks you might dismiss as being a waste of your valuable time?

Full show notes and resources for this episode [can be found here](#).

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About



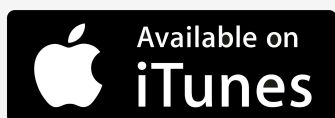
Join us as we get deep into the untapped wisdom of the world's top performers — from legendary creators to intelligence operatives, iconoclastic writers to visionary change-makers.

We deconstruct the playbooks of the most successful people on earth — and learn new strategies, perspectives, and insights you can't find anywhere else. Then, take these valuable insights into your own life and live what you listen.

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