



Producing Your Purpose with Stephen Love





Lesson 1

Identifying

Your Divine

Mission

The first lesson Stephen covers is one of the most important: defining your purpose as a producer. Your purpose is a bit different from what your tangible business goals may be.

Purpose is how you imagine yourself in the future. It relates to the impact you want to have, what you want to represent, and what you want to put into the world. For Stephen, finding his purpose was harder than it looked. But he knew he had to define his purpose to work through the pain and discomfort of his journey. Soon, he realized what he wanted his purpose to be: to focus on how images of people of color are

created, portrayed, gatekept, and underserved. "I wanted to be the change that I sought," he said. And that's what he held onto from the start of his career to the present day.

Identifying your mission and purpose may involve grunt work and grinding to reach where you need to be to serve your purpose. "It's a very real thing to be doing side hustles to be able to keep going," Stephen said, reminiscing on the early days of PB&Js and ramen noodles for every meal. But the grunt work can lead to great things.

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“I Need to Get Fired”

Typically as a producer, you start as an assistant or development executive at a production company. For Stephen, he watched a lot of his mentors climb the ranks, get fired, and then get a producing deal. “I just need to get fired then,” Stephen joked. That was the path he thought he needed to take to get to his purpose, but he didn’t end up taking that route. He tells aspiring producers that they may not need to either.

Figuring out the first or next step in your own journey can be difficult. It all depends on the endgoal. One tangible first step is to think about your purpose as a guiding north star. Stephen likes to concentrate this into 4-5 words you can focus on when things become difficult. These words may change over time, but the spirit of the statement should remain the same.

Defining Producing

A producer encompasses various aspects throughout the filmmaking process, and it may vary depending on exactly what you want to do. For some, it’s the physical aspects of bringing a crew together and hiring all those people. For others, it could be developing the screenplay and attaching the director and actors to the project. It might also be taking responsibility for finding the right book adaptation, screenplay, or other ideas to bring to life in the first place. Sometimes it’s navigating the chaotic process of finding a studio to partner with or being the face of the project to market it to the intended audience. Some may also think producers are just the money guy. Or, like in Stephen’s case, you may be trained to do all of these things; he recommends getting acquainted with all the moving parts.

Lesson 2

Knowing Your

Pain Tolerance



Everyone's starting point is different. You might be an assistant or locked into a day job that prevents you from focusing on what you want to dedicate your time to. When you know you're not where you want to be, it can be painful to feel like you're not progressing.

For Stephen, he watched assistants be locked to their desks and miss out on access to meetings, high-level conversations, or connections with filmmakers and talent that walked through the door (unless they were bringing them coffee). That experience made Stephen realize he didn't want to take a traditional path, even if it might have been more difficult. "I knew that by making that choice, I had to have a certain threshold for the struggle that would come from not just taking a paycheck," he said.

Experiencing pain and hardship is an inevitable part of reaching your goals, and only you know your pain tolerance. That pain may



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stem from financial hardships, but it could also include a professional pain threshold if you take the road less traveled. Sometimes that gap is frustrating, especially if you compare yourself to others. "You may look around at your peers, and they may be further ahead," Stephen said. "But just stay focused on your lane. You never know what a peer may have experienced inside of what looks like success."

Even in the midst of pain, Stephen recalled one of the most valuable experiences from his early career. He interned a lot over the six years while he was in school. He took every opportunity to ask to be a part of things. Whether it was asking to take notes or to be in the room for important conversations, he found that asking always led to learning. "Know that people want to be a part of your testimony," he said. "People like being a major part of your success." He doesn't recommend so many internships for everyone. However, he hopes people recognize the value of meeting and connecting with as many people as possible, even if they are not in the exact place they want.

Lesson 3

Guerrilla Tactics



Once you figure out your purpose and pain tolerance, Stephen recommends a few tangible steps to move forward.

Stephen implemented these tactics during his graduate thesis. His task was to find a script, compile the marketing and business plan, and determine the action plan for creating the movie. Rather than completing a mock-up of everything, he decided to actually make the movie happen. Working with director Stephen Caple, they created "The Land." Here are a few things he learned along the way.

Know What's Available to You

Resources in the production industry can be difficult to procure without money or the right connections. In that case, Stephen recommends looking around and seeing what is available. Is there a way to rent or borrow filming equipment? Does someone on your team have a useful contact? Can you make do with what you do have?

Inviting the Right People

Once a project is in motion, it's all about inviting the right people to see your work. "Control what you can control," Stephen says. You may not be able to control who finances your production, but you can control getting the word out, finding a space to show it, and putting yourself in the right rooms to get the result

you want. This might not necessarily result in making money off your film, but finishing a project in itself is a huge accomplishment.

Getting Your Paperwork in Order

As a producer, one of the most important things you can do is have your paperwork in order – specifically your script. One way you might do this is by getting a screenplay option, which is an agreement between you and the screenwriter that allows you to take the screenplay off the market for a certain amount of time. If you're working with a screenwriter who also happens to be a close friend, this option could be arranged for a low price. This way, the option allows future team members to see that you are tangibly a part of the project and you own part of the rights to making whatever type of film you're working on.

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Lesson 4

The Gravity of Good Relationships

Although it's a bit cliché, building your professional relationships laterally is important. "Look to your left and look to your right," Stephen said. "That's who you want to be working with." The beginnings of Stephen's own career came from genuine relationships he had built with the people around him. He stresses the importance of building relationships with filmmakers and creatives you think are dope and talented and making yourself available to those people.

He also recommends partnering with people who are tangible attachments to your projects. You shouldn't attach someone to your project for the sake of their name; the people you work with should amplify your vision, whether that's financially, through contacts, advice, new perspectives, etc. Working with like-minded people will be critical to your success, especially those at the same level as you. The more you talk about your passion and purpose, the more like-minded creatives and professionals in your industry will want to work with you.





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