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## STAY CURIOUS

Inside Film, National

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FEATURE

# STAY CURIOUS

*Connections and upskilling are crucial components for weathering disruptive times. Emmy and AACTA Award-winning producer turned screen sector executive coach Ellenor Cox explains how keeping curious will keep you employable.*



**M**y first producing credit occurred before we had mobile phones, emails and access to the internet. In today's hyper-connected world this reality seems almost inconceivable and yet this was how it was in our industry less than 30 years ago.

Mornings would start with phone calls made on land lines and evenings concluded with the sound of the fax machine sending out the following days' call sheet. The squawk of the dial up modem connection would not yet grace production offices for another couple of years and broadcast quality images could only be captured on cameras that cost about the same as an inner-city apartment. 9GB of storage would turn up in a microwave-sized box that cost \$9,000 and usually incurred a bank loan. Films were cut using scissors – literally! DVDs were but a figment of our imagination with floppy discs considered cutting-edge, state-of-the-art technology. Feedback was limited to your newspaper critic's review and annual award ceremonies, and we connected with our audience only at an opening night screening or in a film festival foyer. Industry broadsheets and print magazines were almost the only way to stay connected with the industry and if your contact details weren't printed annually in The Production Book then you may have well not existed!

How did we communicate with one another? How did we research our film projects and get them financed and sold? Most importantly, how did we feel part of the ecosystem of our industry without our smartphones and the internet?

We managed, we thrived, we adapted and most importantly, we remained curious and open-minded to the technical revolution all around us that was enabling us to refine and perfect our craft, and master new skills and methodologies. These developments not only assisted us with feeling connected and up-to-date on industry trends and developments but also kept us employable, by opening up new opportunities and hitherto unimagined career pathways.

The reason for this reminiscing is born from a regular lament that I hear around the disruptions that Covid has caused over the past two years. Many people feel isolated and lack connection and currency with the industry.

While conference and festival cancellations have been hugely disappointing and set closures and production delays immensely frustrating,

throughout this time our ability to remain connected online, to upskill and to self-educate ourselves has remained. In fact, in certain areas more vibrancy and connectivity has been possible by embracing technology, discovering our niche tribes online or making a decision to use these disruptive times to expand our skill sets and seek reinvention.

Thirty years ago we didn't have the luxuries the internet now affords us. Our smartphones, tablets and computers are literally a portal to anything that we're curious about, a way to connect with anyone that we want to and a means to self-mastery and upskilling in any direction that we choose. As long as we have a curious mindset, we can truly become masters of our own universe!

In these disrupted times, your curiosity is your key ally and your two most valuable assets are your connections and your skills.

### IT'S ALL ABOUT CONNECTIONS!

The breakout box alongside contains a comprehensive but not exhaustive list of key connection points in our sector that in most cases are freely accessible. If you're feeling the need to up the ante on your networking and connectivity, then I trust that you'll find this list a useful one. Make your first port of call a deep dive into all the material available on the Screen Australia portal and your relevant state agency website, and subscribe to their newsletters and social media feeds.

Being a member of an online group however is not sufficient if your engagement is a passive one. Take the time to post and comment and engage more deeply with these groups. In return you'll be amazed at the vibrancy and generosity of many of these online forums. Many of these groups have incredible resource links that you can also access, so remember to review these and not just the chat activity.

Similarly, with newsletters, subscribing only is not the means to an end. Newsletters are there to be read! Read them with the purpose of not just absorbing news but focusing on future networking or job opportunities. Keep a file on companies, projects and people that you're interested in

connecting with and as you update these lists reach out via socials, LinkedIn or direct email to congratulate them on their news. These 'deposits' into your emotional credit account will pay off down the line when you want to make a more directed connection for work opportunities.

### THE VALUE OF UPSKILLING

When you're actively seeking work, the best currency to have is an up-to-date and in-demand skills set. Below are five great reasons for investing in developing your skills right now.

#### 1. FUTURE PROOF YOUR CAREER

Unpredictability is the only constant in our industry, with no position or company ever being 100 per cent secure. Upskilling enables you to keep skills current as well or move into new areas of growth.

#### 2. BE OPEN TO OPPORTUNITIES

Seek out mentors and resources to help you explore opportunities that you're curious about. Opportunities rarely jump out at people who aren't actively seeking them

#### 3. MAKE YOURSELF INVALUABLE

People who are willing to upskill are also likely to exhibit stronger problem-solving abilities, a higher level of productivity, and better performance overall and this is noted by future employers.

#### 4. MEET INSPIRING PEOPLE

It's not just 'who you know' but 'what you know' as well. Upskilling helps with both. By actively engaging with your community through courses and online networking forums you're more likely to meet like-minded people who inspire you and who may become valuable contacts for future opportunities.

#### 5. DISCOVER NEW PASSIONS

Until you give something a go, you'll never know what your natural interest or aptitude is for this new skill. Upskilling is great for more than career development as it also enables you to develop more generally as a person.

In these times where we might feel that many things have been taken away from us, it's important to focus on what we can control. Remaining connected to our industry doesn't have to only be done in person. There's a myriad of touchpoints and online communities to engage with. Similarly, if you're finding that the industry is moving in a new direction without you, then ask yourself what you need to do to stay current. There's no shortage of cost effective or free upskilling opportunities available if you have the curiosity to seek them out. 

Ellenor has a range of free resources available to the screen sector at [www.ellenorcox.com](http://www.ellenorcox.com) and is available for individual and team coaching and workshop facilitation.



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### INDUSTRY CONNECTIONS TO MAKE

#### STATE AND FEDERAL AGENCIES

Screen Australia  
State screen agencies  
Ausfilm  
Australia Council for the Arts

#### ORGANISATIONS

Screenworks  
Australian Academy Cinema,  
Television Arts (AACTA)  
Australian Centre of Moving  
Image ACMI  
Australians in Film (USA focus)  
Women in Film and TV (WIFT)  
Women in Media (WIM)  
Australian Documentary Forum  
(OzDox)  
Documentary Australia  
National Film and Sound Archive  
(NFSA)  
Australian Teachers of Media (ATOM)  
Arts and Cultural Exchange (ACE)  
Jumbunna (Institute of Indigenous  
Education & Research)  
National Indigenous TV (NITV)  
Australian Film Television Radio School  
(AFTRS)  
Entertainment Assist  
Diversity Arts Australia  
Damechanger

Crew Dames  
Media Ring  
ScreenWell

#### INDUSTRY GUILDS AND MEMBERSHIP

Screen Producers Australia (SPA)  
Australian Directors Guild (ADG)  
Media, Entertainment & Arts  
Alliance (MEAA)  
Australian Guild of Screen  
Composers (AGSC)  
Australian Cinematographers  
Society (ACS)  
Australian Screen Sound Guild (ASSG)  
Australian Screen Editors (ASE)  
Australian Production Design  
Guild (APDG)  
Australian Writers Guild (AWG)  
Casting Guild of Australia (CGA)

#### FESTIVALS AND CONFERENCES

Screen Forever  
City-based film festivals such as  
Sydney Film Festival and Melbourne  
International Film Festival  
Flickerfest  
CinefestOz  
Australian International Documentary  
Conference (AIDC)  
Australian International Movie  
Convention (AIMC)s  
Antenna Film Festival  
MIFF 37°South Market (MIFF)  
Screenmakers Conference  
Screenworks Regional to Global Forum  
Arts Activated

#### PUBLICATIONS

IF Magazine/if.com.au  
The IF Production Book  
Screenhub  
FilmInk  
Mumbrella  
Mediaweek  
IMDB  
Deadline Hollywood  
Indiewire  
Variety  
The Hollywood Reporter  
Screen International  
C21  
The Wrap  
Screenrant  
Slashfilm  
FandomWire  
Peter Hamilton's Documentary Business  
Cinema Australia  
**FACEBOOK GROUPS**  
Freelance Jungle  
Diversity in Australian Media

Screen Vixens  
Film Fatales  
Impact Producers Group Australia  
Screen Producers  
Cack! Disabled + Deaf creatives across  
Australia  
Dear Producer  
For Films Sake  
I need an Editor Australia  
I need Camera Crew Australia  
ASC The Ladies Lounge  
Raising Films Australia  
Sustainable Screens (Australia)  
Production Designers in Oz

#### PODCASTS

Screen Australia  
The Short Film  
I love Scriptnotes  
The art of colour grading

#### UPSKILLING

AFTRS  
Masterclass  
Screen ABC  
Media Mentors  
Compton School  
Creative Plus Business  
Creative Live  
JMC  
SAE