

Actors Think Tank

Wednesday, 2/10/21

The guest was producer, screenwriter, comedian, Dani Faith Leonard, co-founder of the company, Big Vision Empty Wallet. Dani is a writer, producer and host of the film, “Lez Bomb” and TV show, “Adult Sex Ed”.

The Actors Think Tank (ATT) actors slated. ATT member, Gabi Faye, introduced Dani to the group. Gabi and Dani met years ago at a Pitch workshop. Dani taught how to give a good pitch. Per Gabi, the way to befriend Dani is through strange subculture context. Dani’s production company just celebrated its 10-year anniversary. Dani’s tagline is: “Lover of Dangerously Good Ideas,” which means she will work on good ideas. Her favorite is brainstorming. The cover of her journal also has the tagline, “Lover of Dangerously Good Ideas”.

Rich welcomed Dani and asked her how life had changed for her during the Pandemic, as well as, for feedback on the ATT group’s slates. Dani stated that she enjoyed learning unique information about the ATT talent. For example, skiing that was said in one of the slates. Dani stated that she does not like not knowing about people that she works with. For example, she had a former baseball player on staff that she didn’t know had that athletic skill. It would have been beneficial to know his athletic skill.

Rich asked Dani about talent categorizing themselves. Per Dani, we were taught to stereotype, however, we have to find our lane. You may not be sure what area it will be. People now Zoom from everywhere. We are in an era of industry leaders wanting to know about people they work with.

Dani attended a Real Screen Conference last week for unscripted TV, that normally would probably have been too expensive for her to attend. The keynote

speakers were Hillary and Chelsea Clinton. During the conference Chelsea's daughter ran into the room and changed the meeting to very fun meeting.

Rich asked if categorizing is branding and if this is how we stand out. Dani said branding categorizes, opening up more categories to put yourself into. As women, we ingenuer or dumb down. Episodic says don't overact.

Rich asked what big projects were in the works for Dani prior to the pandemic. Dani said before the pandemic she signed a deal for a comedy show and a second deal for a film she had written called "Rush Island". She had also visited Cyprus and London and had raised seven million dollars for the project. By July the project had gone away. Dani said she took it hard initially then shifted or did a pivot. She understood she would not be performing live and what she was planning was not happening, so she developed new things to do due to Covid. She considers herself a creator. Rich asked Dani about projects she is working on. She discussed that she likes to tackle difficult social and political topics and make them more accessible through comedy, taking audiences through deep dives into little known cultures and illuminating historical facts that you never knew about. She also enjoys creating fictional worlds that are just as detailed. She is currently in preproduction on a dark comedy/adventure feature film called "Rush Island," originally slated to shoot in 2020. Dani also hosts "Adult Sex Ed", which plugs holes in your education through hilarious deep dives, interviews and sketches that tackle the role of sex in history, culture and politics. Dani also lets friends know that she is looking for things to develop into TV shows. She was hired to write and produce a pilot which she's working on. The projects she was working on previously she says are not gone forever.

Rich asked how life has been eight months in the incubator and if things have evolved organically. Dani called her company an incubator. She bounces ideas off others, saying it's great to learn new things. Dani is a big traveler. This is the longest she's been in one place.

Rich asked ATT members who has created new projects during Covid. Several hands went up. Dani said friends in other industries also pivoted to stretch. New income sources were started. For example, those in the food and wine fields have done virtual tasting and they are making five times more money than they did prior to Covid. Everybody is figuring out how to make things work. Rich

asked about her writing projects. Dani said we can always write, whether paid or not. She is currently working on a project called "Investing in Women," which is a hybrid project. Dani and a friend were hired to develop the project. She said it's nice to be chosen. So far, they only have a theme, which is investing in women. The series will be about women Before & After, as women tend to lift the community. The pilot shooting will be in May or June.

Dani stated that those in the film industry figured out what to do in this time. Those producing live events are into interactive things, as we may never go back to life as it was before Covid. Dani said she went to a conference that was expensive. Friend's there were writing for Netflix and were in the Writers Room. Virtual opens up careers for all income levels and creates opportunity where there previously would have been required a move.

Rich asked Dani to explained what constitutes a great pitch. Dani said she sees the pitch an extension of performing. She delivers it as a performer. The pitch should match the tone of the project. Communicate what the project is, your connection to it and why you? Dani tends to write bigger world. A new project represents a family on an island that thinks it's still the gold rush. Dani explained her obsession with media. Dani has a format for her classes. The pitch must have a log, a summary, and characters who bring you. Know who will watch the project. Dani writes the pitch before the project. What is the project about? She writes the log line next, which develops holes. The log has six elements, which are: the protagonist, antagonist, the goal, urgency, the setting and stakes. The logs show holes in the project as it's easy to forget if you're not writing an action movie. Dani says to research what makes the project unique. Are there similar projects? Figure out your unique take. Define if it reaches a cult audience or different audience. With some projects pitched they only want to know which celebrities are attached to the project. Others are attracted to the concept. Dani said you are pitching yourself along with the project. Every job is based on previous connections, so build relationship and make friends. The best connections are made at events without agendas. All meetings form personal relationships even if the project doesn't work. The deal will not work if others don't get to know you.

Questions were taken from the ATT creators. Mike Provenzano stated he is in the second season of his show called "Quarantine Island" and he wants to know

how to get it to the masses. Per Dani, you cannot plan going viral. You have to tap into culturally relevant things not in your home. Work another element into it.

Rich talked about why she hand writes and Dani said she likes to hand write as she brainstorms. She started script writing in college and after that she began sketch comedy. Sketch comedy has a clear arch, to include: the beginning, the middle and the end. Dani said she learned how to structure scenes in college. Her first sketch class was feature. Dani feels that it should have been shorter scenes before feature. Dani said she doesn't feel projects have been taken from her, but rather sometimes a producer or writer is added for culture.

Rich asked Dani if she misses doing live performances and she said she misses working with other performers and the audience more than performing.

Rich told Dani that she will receive a link to the recording on the Actors Think Tank website, that her information was insightful and he thanked her for the new direction. Dani had to leave the call at four p.m.

Rich summarized that Dani gave us good information on pitching, he reiterated what Dani said about meetings with no agenda and that Dani is very open minded. Rich also reminded everyone of the special call Friday, 2/12/21, at 2:00 p.m., with, Thaa Penglis a 75-year-old celebrity, soap opera star of more than 30 years, starring on Days of Our Lives and General Hospital.

Respectfully submitted by,

Rosalyn T. Jamal