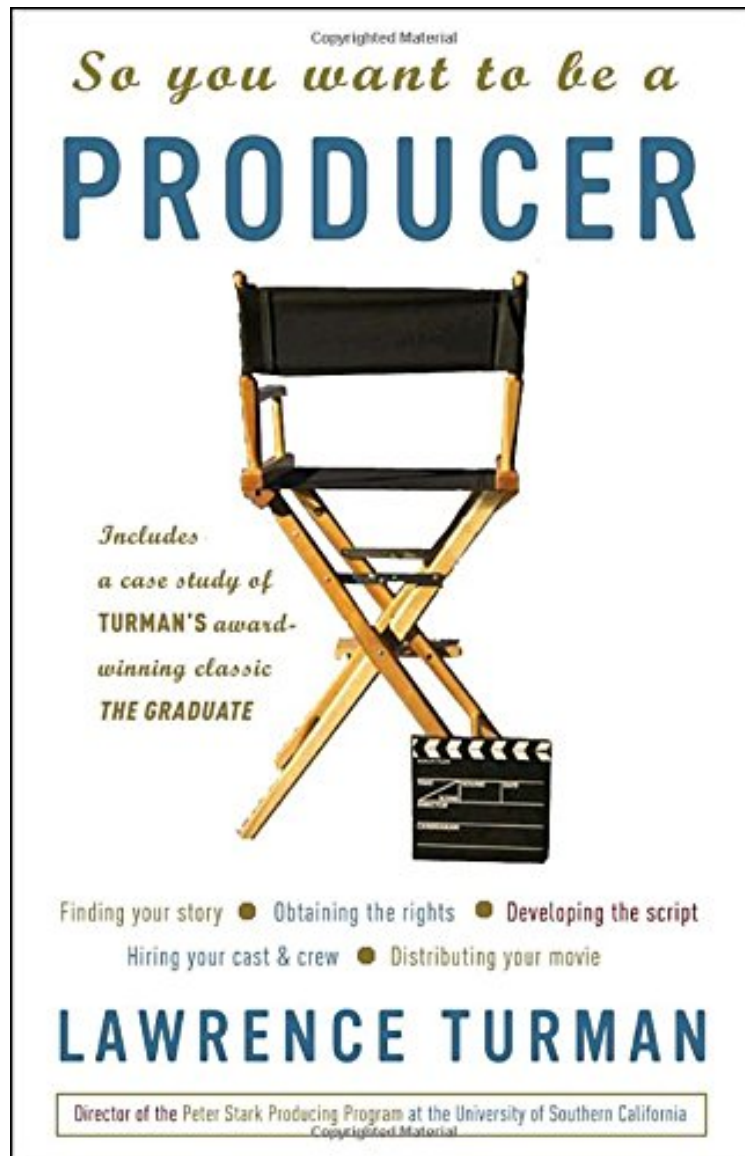


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So You Want to Be a Producer

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Few jobs in Hollywood are as shrouded in mystery as the role of the producer. What does it take to be a producer, how does one get started, and what on earth does one actually do? In *So You Want to Be a Producer* Lawrence Turman, the producer of more than forty films, including *The Graduate*, *The River Wild*, *Short Circuit*, and *American History X*, and Endowed Chair of the famed Peter Stark Producing Program at the University of Southern California, answers these questions and many more. Examining all the nuts and bolts of production, such as raising money and securing permissions, finding a story and developing a script, choosing a director, hiring actors, and marketing your project, *So You Want to Be a Producer* is a must-have resource packed with insider information and first-hand advice from top Hollywood producers, writers, and directors, offering invaluable help for beginners and professionals alike. Including a comprehensive case study of Turman's film *The Graduate*, this complete guide to the movie industry's most influential movers and shakers brims with useful tips and contains all the information you need to take your project from idea to the big screen.

Turman has made smart, superior films for forty years. This is a no B.S., straight-forward, and clear guide to being a producer. Paul Newman, Oscar-winning actor A smart, savvy survivors guide to the glamorous (and treacherous) producing game. Peter Bart, editor in chief, *Variety* Far more than a simple how-to book, Larry tells you what it really takes to get a movie made and how you can make a career of making movies. Jeffrey Katzenberg, cofounder of DreamWorks and executive producer of *Shrek 2* and *Shark Tale* Its worth four years of film school. David Brown, four-time Oscar-nominated producer of *Chocolat*, *The Verdict*, *A Few Good Men*, and *Jaws* Whether you're just starting in this business or a seasoned professional, there is something to be learned from Larry's book. This is a must-read! Jane Rosenthal, cofounder and producer of the Tribeca Film Festival About the Author Lawrence Turman has produced more than forty films, including *The Graduate*, *The River Wild*, *Short Circuit*, and *American History X*, and is the Endowed Chair of the famed Peter Stark Producing Program at the University of Southern California. Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. WHY BE A PRODUCER? This [RKO Studio] is the biggest electric train set any boy ever had! Orson Welles Why not be a producer? Would you rather sell shoes for a living? Or be an accountant? Both are honorable occupations, but wouldn't you like to wake up eager to go to work, use every part of yourself while at work, and maybe, just maybe, have a tiny impact on the world? That's why I'm doing it. We all like movies. Heck, that's why you bought this book. We're all critics, too; we know what is a good movie, and we know what isn't. A lot of times we even think we know why. I know I do. Indeed, I felt that way long before I got into the movie business. So, how about a job where you're the one who decides what movie to make, and how it should be made? A producer. That sounded exciting to me a long time ago, and it still does. What's more, producing is that rare profession where you can start at the top if you control a super, terrific, dynamite script. There are many levels and categories of producing: line producers, executive producers, co-producers, associate producers, assistant producers. Line producers are physical production specialists. Executive producers get their credits for anything from arranging the money, to controlling the property, to being manager of the star or director, to being the studio executive overseeing the film. The associate producer title is a catchall, bestowed upon anyone the producer deems worthy. But the real deal is the producer. He or she runs the show. It's the producer, and only the producer, who accepts the Academy Award for best picture. I actually feel the same today as I did in 1967, when I was interviewed by a young kid writing for the now-defunct *Cinema* magazine. That young kid was Curtis Hanson, who has since entered the top echelon of writer-directors with an Academy Award best-screenplay win, plus best-director and best-picture nominations, for *L.A. Confidential* (after having directed *The River Wild* for me). When Hanson questioned why I chose to go into filmmaking, I replied: Nothing could be more rewarding or stimulating. I think everyone in the business feels the same way. If every salary were cut in half, not one person would leave. I chose producing because it would coalesce both my background experience and modicum of ability in business with what I immodestly and laughingly thought of as my good taste and judgment. Boy, what fun to decide whether a picture should be made, to decide or influence a decision that something should be done this way instead of that way, and to see if I can get this artistic quality here within the framework of that kind of budget money there. Each day has new challenges, new battles, new struggles, new frustrations, new satisfactions. Each day as I wake up I figure I'll walk into the office and get hit with a right to the heart and a left to the kidney, but I love it. It's uphill all the way because it's so competitive and ephemeral and frustrating. There are many frustrations within the framework, but the satisfactions are just enormous. Even the complainers love it. There's hardly a better job around. A producer is the person who decides an idea, a character, or a story is worth telling. I initiate every single film project upon which I work; most of them would not have seen the light of day had I not decided to make them. I really believe that there are things nobody would see

unless I photographed them. Diane Arbus That's exactly how I feel about most of the films I've produced. I'm the starter and also the finisher, and am therefore involved in every aspect and most details of production. It may begin with an original idea of mine (Caveman), a book (The Graduate, The Flim-Flam Man), a play (Mass Appeal, The Best Man), reading a play prior to its production (The Great White Hope, Tribute), an original screenplay (Full Moon on Blue Water, Second Thoughts), or an idea a writer brings to me (Running Scared). In all cases, I arrange for the financing, without which a project can't get off the ground. I work closely with the writer structuring and detailing the story. I select the director and, with him or her, select the actors and consult about the look and style of the picture, as well as the actual production of the film, including hiring the crew, editing, selecting the composer, and discussing what kind of music is to be used and where it should be placed in the film. I am also involved in the ad campaign and the overall marketing and distribution strategies. As producer, I am the editor and sounding board for all the other creative talents, hopefully enhancing their work and coalescing all into a unified whole. As a producer, you use every part of yourself. It's always challenging; you're never bored. It's creative, it's working with interesting, diverse people, exercising your taste, your judgment. You also get to meet and know unusual, accomplished people. In my case, everyone from Werner von Braun, father of the space program, to Noel Coward, to Henry Kissinger. The job involves travel to unusual places, for me from the Kentucky Derby to the car races in Le Mans. Each movie project becomes a journey of discovery. Each has different types of characters; each is in a different setting or environment; each deals with things you haven't seen or heard before. You're learning and growing all the time. And each movie involves a new, different set of collaborators—all worldly, creative, and stimulating—and many will become lifelong friends. I love making movies . . . so much. I mean, there's plenty of pain and heartache, and every day is a roller coaster. . . . I will never retire. I am a person who wants to discover and learn, and that sort of drives me. . . . The experience of every movie is a different experience of the variables in that equation, and that's not only exciting and dynamic, but it's challenging in that trial and error, hopefully, if you're aware, moves you to a better, more evolved place the next day. Brian Grazer (Academy Award-winning producer of A Beautiful Mind) What could be more gratifying? Very little, I think. And I've just been talking about the icing on the cake. The cake for me is my personal expression. The idea or theme behind each film I choose to do is my conscious or, sometimes, unconscious signature, through which I express my values to my peers and to the world. I like to think I do think that I can affect the world, or at least a few people in it. My concerns, my themes, seem to be consistent. American History X, a film I executive produced, made audiences confront how destructive hate can be. It's the story of an American racist neo-Nazi skinhead who ultimately rejects that way of life, but whose own brother is murdered as a consequence of his actions. The Great White Hope, which I produced thirty years earlier, was also about racism. It was the story of the first African American heavyweight boxing champion, Jack Johnson, who, by merely holding the title of world's best, inflamed not only the white boxing establishment but many people throughout America. When Muhammed Ali visited the set, he told me, That's my story! The idea of getting to sit in a room with a cup of coffee and talk about a story for a few hours is really one of the privileges and pleasures. There's nothing more fun than talking about some movie like Memoirs of a Geisha, and you sit around with some really smart writer, and you're talking about how some woman might behave in 1920s Kyoto. And then, literally a half-hour later, you're talking about Custer and how he changed American history. I just love a day that takes you from ancient Rome to the Old West. Doug Wick (Academy Award winner for Gladiator) Even the seemingly guns and giggles Running Scared (Billy Crystal's first screen role), which I co-produced, had a serious underlying theme: two cops (Gregory Hines is the other) who are near retirement decide to play it safe and avoid getting hurt by not tempting danger. Except all hell breaks loose and they succeed by reverting to their true natures, by not running scared. The moral? You've got to try your hardest all the time, whether you're a cop, athlete, or producer. The Best Man, based on Gore Vidal's play and which I co-produced, is a political movie about compromises, backroom deals, distortions of the truth, the power of the press, and the glare of public life, all of which are as pertinent today if not more so than decades ago when we made the film. Those themes are pieces of myself. I'd like the titles of those films, plus others I've produced, engraved on my tombstone. (Well, there are a couple I'd like excised.) Is there anything more exhilarating than completing a film that began life as an idea in your head and then sitting in a crowded movie theater, hearing the audience laugh, or hold its collective breath, seeing tears flow, and perhaps hearing some applause? For me, none unless it's seeing my sons grow and flourish. But they also began life as an idea in my head. Is it a roller-coaster ride? For sure. One reason to be a producer is that it's a damn exciting life. I guarantee you'll never be bored. But you'll also never be relaxed. As the great baseball player Satchel Paige said, Don't look back. Someone might be gaining on you. It's not that it's a competition with your fellow producers. There are just so few movie slots at each studio, and so many too damn many producers chasing them. That's why you have to be creative. And isn't using your creativity in trying to make movies, and then actually making them, the biggest reward? I think so. You're constantly using your imagination, your ingenuity, and your brain power. Each day at work you'll be living to the fullest. So why not play the game, where you decide what movie to try to make, and sometimes get it made? What beats that? Maybe scoring the winning touchdown in the Super Bowl . . . but even that takes less creativity than producing movies. Each movie presents a genuine new challenge. On every movie I feel like you learn something you need to know, that I didn't know. It never gets dull. Christine Vachon (Far from Heaven, One Hour Photo, Boys Don't

Cry, Happiness) If your imagination is fired about becoming a producer, I say go for it. Or go for whatever your dream is because if you don't, you'll live to regret it. I shoulda; I coulda, are words you do not want to even think, much less utter, five or ten years down the road. My favorite line in all of musical literature was written by Oscar Hammerstein, in *Carousel*: I let my golden chances pass me by. Or, as the poem by Whittier says, Of all sad words of tongue and pen, the saddest are these, it might have been. However, if someone family or a friend, perhaps can talk you out of it, beware . . . you probably won't make it. It is tough and it is competitive. If you're not prepared to give 100 percent, just about all the time and I mean more than an eight- or nine-hour workday forget about it. But if you are, if you do, I guarantee its worth it. Until one is committed, there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back, always ineffectiveness. Concerning all acts of initiative (and creation), there is one elementary truth, the ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans: that the moment one definitely commits oneself, then providence moves too. All sorts of things occur to help one that would never otherwise have occurred. A whole stream of events issues from the decision, raising in one's favor all manner of unforeseen incidents and meetings and material assistance, which no man could have dreamed would have come his way. Whatever you can do or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has genius, power and magic in it. Begin it now. J. W. von Goethe