

On not being afraid to pursue your ideas



Filmmaker Miranda Bailey on deciding to do more than one thing, learning to trust her voice, embracing fear, making real change, and why she's always happy to help other women in the industry.

August 5, 2022 -

As told to Miriam Garcia, 2234 words.

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You're an actor, a director, and a producer. How did the transition between different roles happen? Was it a smooth transition or did you become a filmmaker or a producer because you felt that there was something missing in the projects you were working on as an actor?

It's a little of everything. When I was eight years old, my dad took me to a film set where his friend was working with [Walter Matthau](#), and I just knew that's what I wanted to do for the rest of my life. I didn't know what that meant, but as a young woman, it kind of only meant being an actress at that time. So, I assumed that I wanted to be an actress, so I took acting classes and did plays.

In high school, I wrote, directed and starred in a play. Then, I went to a college to study acting. While I was there, I was also directing and writing. I remember the staff asking me to pick one position. There were a couple of guys that were actor/director combined, or writer/director combined, but they didn't have to pick one. So, I essentially was like, "No, I'm not picking one. I'll get enough credits to do everything, even if it has to be more than the guys that they're dual majors were different."

After graduating I moved to LA, I was acting in a bunch of stuff that, while the parts might be good, I didn't think the material was necessarily great. So, I decided I wanted to produce material that was good and maybe act in some of the smaller roles. Then I found this niche of producing because I have an organized personality. I also got pregnant, so that was what you could do if you still wanted to make movies. That's how I became a producer.

About directing, I guess I always was directing beforehand, but I didn't really realize it until I did my first documentary, which was called [Greenlit](#), but it was supposed to just be a little behind the scenes video. I had been doing the EPKs myself to save money. I was doing an EPK in the behind the scenes video of greening of the film [The River Why](#). It was so disastrous that it was hilarious and was its own movie. I submitted it to SXSW and it got in and premiered there. When you're a director premiering a movie, as opposed to a producer, you get treated a lot better. I decided that directing was something I was going to focus on because I like being treated better than just basically an assistant/babysitter as a producer.

You have worked with so many films as a producer. You were the executive producer for Noah Baumbach's, [The Squid and the Whale](#). You worked with Marielle Heller's [The Diary of a Teenage Girl](#), and also with [Swiss Army Man](#). These films are all really different from one another. What motivates you to get involved with a project? How do you choose the projects you want to work with?

It's interesting because it is the filmmakers. There's also James Gunn's [Super](#) before he went on to [Guardians of](#)

the Galaxy. As I look back now almost all of the directors that were not my business partner for a long time, those people went on to become really great directors on their own. The projects were picked because they had their own unique voice. I really admire that. You can really feel that when you read something fresh, or you meet someone in the room, you can really tell if they're going to be able to bring it to the table. That was a skill that I had to hone. I had it there when I did *The Squid and the Whale*, but I was still young. I was still a girl at a time where I didn't trust my own decisions. By the time I did *Super*, I was starting to trust my own decisions. When I did *The Diary of a Teenage Girl*, I realized that I should just trust myself and go with the movies that I like.

What do you think helped you to trust more in yourself and follow your gut and your experience?

I think, inherently, it's growing up and aging. There's that, but also, as women, we always used to try to over-prepare and always want to listen to the voice of the man who is producing with us. Whether it was a partner that I had or whoever. It's like, "Oh well, they must know more than me because I've been taught in society that they do."

It really took *The Diary of a Teenage Girl* for me to remember and realize that I don't need a man, and that I can make my own decisions, and that they can be good decisions. I think that's about something like hitting your late thirties and then into your forties where you come into your own as a person, as a woman anyway. Over the last three years or four years, in particular, I felt not so alone as more and more women are helping and supporting each other. I know that not everyone was like that, it wasn't a normal thing, and I think it's getting more normal now. We're now able to team up, which I like because that's more of the kind of person I've always been.

In this business it's so important to build relationships and have a community and, again, being able to build a team, as you said. Did you have a mentor that helped you navigate the industry?

No, I had the opposite. I had pushback from anyone I asked for help. That's why I made a promise to myself that I would always encourage and help as many women as I could, and I would always share my contacts, and my relationships, and my agents, and my managers because I found the people that hoarded them or were afraid to lose them weren't the kind of people I want to be.

Why do you think people did not help you? Is this like a sense of competition, or that there are not so many opportunities?

Yes, it is, but I think that we've evolved, maybe even as a society. We're moving, not to get all woo-woo, but we're moving into a different age now. I think it was a survivalist mentality, and if you're an actor, which I was for the beginning, there's only one job for the 40 actors that are in the room. No one wants to add their friends to their agents' list of competitions. I don't have that problem. I refer people to my agents all the time. I know that I'm unique, and I know that everyone else is unique, but not everyone knows that about themselves.

It seems that you had to find your own voice that makes you unique, but also you had to work within the industry guidelines.

Yeah. For example, Shonda Rhimes had a huge influence on my life. Before her work, actors, especially women, had to fit into a mold, a specific mold of a type. We were not allowed to be ourselves. We were not allowed to be individuals bringing our own personality to the characters. We had to fit into whatever these small-minded mindsets of what women were allowed to be were.

Then, Shonda came in and she just broke through, and allowed actors and actresses particularly, of all races and sizes and ages to come in and have meaningful dramatic roles with character arcs. She, in my opinion, completely changed the way I think actors can realize their own uniqueness as an asset as opposed to, "Oh, I got to get skinnier, or I got to stay younger, or I got to be blonder, or I got to be taller," or whatever.

You created a website called the CherryPicks, which highlights film reviews and original stories from female-

identifying and non-binary writers. This project started before Me Too, Time's Up, and the Harvey Weinstein stories broke. This conversation about the importance of representation in front and behind the camera was already happening.

Yes, those conversations were happening, but you were not able to really get much movement on it because, at the end of the day, the consumer who buys the tickets is the one who drives the market. If the consumer is listening to critics, then whatever the critics say they should spend their money on is what the studios are going to make. If the critics are overwhelmingly Caucasian males, then you can bet we're going to be seeing a lot more films like Ford v Ferrari. That said, I love *Ford v Ferrari*, don't get me wrong. But we're going to be seeing a lot more of films like *Top Gun* and not too many films like The Farewell. I just had this realization that in order for real change to happen, then the consumers have to buy it. In order for them to buy it, then they have to be told that it's worth their money and that we have to open up those gatekeepers, which are the critics, and have more women and more people of color, and particularly more women of color being critics.

I noticed the guidelines at the time to be a critic and add up to the score of Rotten Tomatoes were very narrow. Most of the time, women or people of color, and particularly women of color, were not able to get those jobs at *The New York Times* or *The LA Times* and stuff like that. Also, the number of years they were required to have been writing for, some published in a professional paper, and they hadn't opened up to blogs yet or more online publications. They hadn't adapted themselves yet. So, I decided to start the CherryPicks to open up those guidelines for women and women of color and start adding in more online stuff.

In these past few weeks, as a producer, where I've had a couple of productions that I was working on shutdown so we've been able to have these great Instagram live interviews on our CherryPicks account. We're having actors or actresses giving us their favorite quarantine movies. It's really growing at a pace that's a bit overwhelming, but it's a lot of fun, I have to say, working with a bunch of ladies and writing content and working with female writers and women of color, to write stories about the entertainment business. It's really quite fun.

What do you think are some obstacles that get in the way of creativity or being creative?

Oh, that's easy. Fear. I think we have natural instincts of being afraid of rejection. I recommend that it's okay. See the fear, allow it to happen, but do not let it stop you because you have to be willing to fail and you have to be willing to suck and you have to be willing to take chances. In order to survive the obstacles and grow as a creative person, you have to be able to be okay that nothing is perfect because nothing is ever as good as it can be. Just let it go and make it. Everyone has an idea, but it's the people who execute the ideas that grow and get the rewards.

Have you ever abandoned a project? Is it okay to walk away from a situation or a project you're not comfortable with?

Of course, but just don't do it because you're too afraid. I've found that the projects that I've walked away from are related to the other personalities involved. Life is too short to work with people who are disrespectful or narcissistic.

Now that everybody's staying and working from home, have you been able to set some boundaries?

I can't. It's impossible for me. I'm working, because being a mom is work as well, and being a wife is also work, so I'm always working, but I am enjoying the time I'm spending with my family. Just the fact that I get to sit here with one of my cats and see my kids going up and down. I have to say, me being at home since I normally travel so much, has just been lovely.

Miranda Bailey Recommends:

I got this new exercise thing called The Chirp, which is this little tiny like circle that you can roll your back out on. I found that, since I'm hunched over on my computer a lot, my back has been sore, and so I've been rolling it out on this thing called the Chirp and it's very helpful.

I'm rewatching *Mad Men* from the beginning, and I have to say it's definitely different from the new Me Too movement point of view.

Signing up for the [CherryPicks newsletter](#) because every Friday we send out a newsletter with what to see and what to skip that's streaming, and also our live IG events that we're having with lots of great TV stars right now.

Name

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Vocation

Producer, director, actor and distributor

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courtesy of Miranda Bailey