



LIONS PRESENTS

Thinking Exponentially: The Expert Guide

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In his LIONS Live film Warner Bros. Studios' Former Head of Creative Development & VP Marketing, Jason Bevan explored what we can we learn from the world's best movie-makers and their iconic films to transform our creative thinking.

Use this summary as an ongoing tool to help you reflect on the advice given, and review the best-in-practice examples to help you apply this guidance in practice. Find additional notes on further reading at the end of this summary that will help you improve your knowledge and technique in this area.

You can watch Jason's film in full [here](#).

Why is it important to “think exponentially”?

The pandemic itself is an exponential change and renaissance point. It demands an equivalent chassis-breaking response in our thinking. Lacking creative triggers of human contact and personal freedom has badly curtailed our ability to think exponentially. We can lean on film as a powerful and relevant source of inspiration in this time. Don't just be entertained by a great film. Turn it into innovation rocketfuel....it is a gift from some of the most creative brains and exponential thinkers on the planet, to project us into places we could not have gone without them.

Why should we learn from film-makers?

Big commercial sequels and franchise films are often accused of being **incremental** and tied to existing train tracks of thought. But, some of the best film-makers; Kubrick, Lucas, Nolan, Del Toro filled their films with fearless, high risk, **exponential** thought.

Most film-makers are not in a voodoo world of creative surrealism. Their work responds to similar briefs as ours: commercial success, driven by audience insight, convincing massive corporate companies to buy in, budgets, leadership, overcoming practical constraints and embracing technology. We can take great inspiration from these brilliant exponential thinkers.

Top Tips from the movies on thinking exponentially

TOP TIPS FROM THE MOVIES ON THINKING EXPONENTIALLY

1

LEARN YOUR SUBJECTS, BUT NOT IT'S CONVENTIONS

Disney was very puritan and traditional in its values for its animations; it targeted its animation films at the core family audience. It produced robust profits and had a good thing going. PIXAR came along and poured elements of dynamite into Disney's creative output. PIXAR took Disney's strength for animation, storytelling and emotion, good characters and a strong music score and added its own new layer of much more broadly accessible fun.

It added fun undertones of innuendo and adult humour to film scripts. Think of Buzz lightyear when he sees Bo-Peep for the first time and his wings pop out uncontrollably behind him. It was clever, fun and innocently naughty.

In so-doing PIXA blew open Disney's animation audiences to huge acclaim and multiplied its revenues by many times. Finally non-families had a reason to go to an animation. Adult couples and core 15-34 moviegoers went to see animations without kids for the first time. The convention was obliterated to huge creative and commercial success. PIXAR became a multi-billion dollar company.

2

HAVE PURE SELF-BELIEF AND COURAGE

Sometimes it's much more than bravery. Film-makers genuinely believe they can impact global culture and they're often set out to do so. Walt Disney's thinking pushed the boundaries of cinema to create a theme park. Years later the Disney corporate continued his thinking...in reverse. Many decades after his death Disney turned one of its theme park rides into a global film franchise sensation with Pirates of the Caribbean.

3

IGNORE YOUR PREDECESSORS' LIMITATIONS

When you know it's right, push harder and push into new areas to overcome limitations that have held others back, as filmmakers do. Kubrick didn't just go to NASA to get a new lens for dark ambiance shots; he also asked the steadicam inventor Garrett Brown to re-engineer his system to shoot the Shining snow-maze scene right at ground level. Christopher Nolan mounted an entire IMAX camera (almost twice the size and weight of a conventional 35mm camera) on the exterior of a spitfire aircraft in-flight, pointing at the cockpit, to get the right shot of Tom Hardy as a pilot in his film Dunkirk.

TOP TIPS FROM THE MOVIES ON THINKING EXPONENTIALLY

4

EMBRACE THE POWER OF IMMERSION

We all know plunging ourselves into new environments helps our thinking. But don't just change your scene; like film-makers, make it relevant to your thinking to live the real, as well as imagined, world of your thoughts.

By comparing the quality of coverage from media that produced content from film sets vs those that produced it elsewhere, Warner Brothers saw hard evidence of the power of sets to spur energy and improve creative performance. The former was almost always substantially longer, more passionate and achieved better levels of engagement.

5

FUN MAKES MAGIC

We've all been told by psychologists that happiness is as powerful for fuelling creativity as intimidation is for killing it. The eight Harry Potter films created magic on camera. Firstly by the genuine family-style ambiance generated by the people on set, and secondly in the truly magical environments the cast performed in. Set dressing went into details that the camera would never identify, but the cast would. The Hogwarts cutlery had the school crest on every item, the floor of the great hall was real York stone and the Owl's cereal boxes on the long tables had magical ingredients, crosswords and instructions on the reverse.

When you're an extra sitting through 20 filming takes, that makes a difference to believing your environment. All these touches were there to make the cast and crew feel part of the wizarding world. Another example: Baz Luhrmann on the Great Gatsby had a much bigger hair styling department than usual. Everyone on set could have their hair Gatsby'd every day!

TOP TIPS FROM THE MOVIES ON THINKING EXPONENTIALLY

FURTHER READING

Jason Bevan shares his films to watch for creative inspiration:

The Joker (2019)

This is a very bold, gutsy move for Warner Brothers and Todd Phillips, especially when you bear in mind the highly controversial portrayal of mental health and it's connection to extreme violence. This was in total opposition to the huge, popular celebrity movement in the news agenda at the time of release. There was a global movement to de-stigmatise mental health and move away from the negative, unhinged behaviour with which it had been traditionally associated. This was a substantial risk for a relatively conservative studio like Warner Brothers.

What's more, take a look at the film's marketing campaign with the use of bold, powerful simplicity, and iconic disturbing artwork; it followed a clear strategy to make the film an instant classic. The film launched at culturally credible film festivals, avoiding traditional premieres and other stunts marketing techniques.

The marketing campaign for the 2017 film "IT" carries similar traits: we saw another use of bold powerful film-marketing through simplicity. They created iconography from a red balloon and boy in a yellow raincoat.

2001: A Space Odyssey (1968) and The Shining (1980)

Both films are revered as legitimate titans of the creative world on multiple levels. But they achieve further timelessness with the knowledge that the vast majority of the scenes in each film were created in real life with minimal use of visual effects.

The Hangover (2009)

This is another genius and totally different film from Todd Phillips. The film came out of nowhere and genuinely shocked Warner Brothers with its success. I remember our first meetings with LA teams after initial screenings. The cast were, apart from Bradley Cooper, unknown. The studio questioned Todd's request for more money during production and asked him to take a more well-known actor in his principal cast so that they had a better chance of recouping their investment. So passionate was Todd in his choice of cast that he took a massive cut in his director's fee to help finance the increase so that he didn't have to change his cast. He did that in return for a share of the profits once the box office hit the level required by Warner Brothers to justify the extra money. It's been reported that Todd netted \$70M from the hangover trilogy.