



Learning from the Masters

AN INTERVIEW WITH SCREENWRITERS LOWELL GANZ & BABALOO MANDEL

QUIZ & SUGGESTED EXERCISES

*(RECOMMENDED FOR HIGH SCHOOL & COLLEGE STUDENTS)*

*“We’re always trying to have everything [a character says] come out of a very specific, personal place. Specific, honest and emotional. Every once in a while, you hit all three at the same time. Those are the best moments.”*

*Lowell Ganz*

## EXCERPTS FROM LOWELL GANZ AND BABALOO MANDEL'S INTERVIEW:

**MIKE DE LUCA:** *What are the benefits of writing in a partnership?*

**BABALOO MANDEL:** There's good energy, there's good spontaneity. There's just riffs. Because we write out loud. We've written it before we put it on paper.

**LOWELL GANZ:** The main asset is [Mandel] is very good....There's also the psychic benefits. You go to a lot of meetings, and sometimes they're peculiar... There's something about having someone who was there with you. You can say, "Was it me?"

**MANDEL:** "Was it me?"

**GANZ:** I find that immensely comforting. To not be alone.

**DE LUCA:** *Do you test out different dialogue when you're writing a scene?*

**GANZ:** We always do. [We work out] the exact geometry of a joke. We will say it, and then say it with different syllables in it, and keep saying it, then write it and put it away...

**MANDEL:** That's the handwritten process. We give it to our assistant and the next day these fresh pages come back—

**GANZ:** It comes back typed, so it's like new.

**MANDEL:** It's like pixies wrote them.

**GANZ:** You read it out loud, you hear the sound the jokes make. Then you hire actors and it makes a different sound. Not because they're monkeying with it. It's just, the joke has a different DNA when it's not being said by two guys from the Bronx. And we'll rework the jokes, because we're still trying to hear the pitch of it. We want it to ring.

## QUIZ:

As you watch the interview, see if you can answer the following questions.

1. Where did Lowell Ganz and Babaloo Mandel first meet?
2. What do they mean when they say they “write out loud?”
3. What does it mean to “never leave a meeting confused?”
4. What does Ganz say made working on “Happy Days” a pleasant experience?
5. Which of their scripts is their favorite, and why?
6. Do they enjoy reading other people’s screenplays?
7. Do they do a lot of research for their scripts?
8. Why do they prefer to work on someone else’s idea?
9. What real-life event forced them to rewrite the end of “Fever Pitch?”
10. Why should writers “bring their lives in to work” with them?
11. Why do Ganz and Mandel call themselves “kings of the first act?”
12. Who do they cite as their biggest influences?
13. Why do most writing teams break up, according to Ganz?
14. Why do Ganz and Mandel keep their names off of films they are hired to rewrite?
15. What do they say is their most gratifying experience as writers?

### Bonus question:

16. What is Mandel’s real name, and where does “Babaloo” come from?

## SUGGESTED EXERCISES:

1. Mike De Luca suggests that Ganz and Mandel invented the “fish out of water” element often seen in Hollywood comedies. What does this phrase mean? Why does Ganz say that “Splash” is actually not an example of this type of story?
2. Lowell Ganz says Jack Klugman taught him an important lesson when he asked “What do I want?” when reading an “Odd Couple” scene. What did Klugman mean? How could asking this question help to shape your own attitude towards writing characters and scenes?
3. As an exercise, team up with another person. Write a two-person dialogue scene together, sitting in a room and talking it out. What’s the experience like? How would you compare it to writing on your own?
4. An old pipe conjures up a childhood memory for Ganz, and an anecdote for Mandel. How about you? Using the same item, can you come up with the broad outlines of a story? Remembering the lesson of “bringing your live to work,” try to incorporate one or two specific elements from your own experience into your story.

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