

## Acceptance Speech: MIP TV Lifetime Achievement Award Peter Orton. Cannes, April 13 2005

It is a wonderful honour to receive this lifetime achievement award from my peers I cannot tell you how surprised I was when I was first told. In fact, I thought for a moment that I might be on a hidden camera reality show. It means a great deal to me, it also makes me feel secure in the knowledge that should I need to look for a job in the future I know it will look very good in my resume, and standing here today, I take some personal satisfaction knowing that it would render all the teachers from my childhood speechless.

### **There are some people I would like to thank .**

Especially my lovely wife of 32 years Sue, who has put up with an awful lot.

Also here this evening is Mike Luckwell who has been a friend, colleague and an investor in HIT for the past 14 years, Mike it is great to have you here this evening.

In addition, may I just pick one person who has bought shows from us and has been a personal friend over these years and that is Theresa Plummer- Andrews – Thank you Theresa.

As I thought about this presentation, I wasn't sure exactly what I wanted to say beyond thank you. There is so much to tell I'm not sure where to start, I don't want to talk so much about what I've done over the past thirty years, rather about what I have learnt.

So I would like to share with you the best lessons I have learnt along the way. They are the lessons I wish I had known about when I first arrived here, which is a long time ago, a time when a taxi ride from Nice airport didn't blow your whole travel budget for the year, and a one hour lunch was considered fast food, restaurant reservations were never needed, and the Martinez Bar was empty by two o'clock in the morning.

I recently calculated that over the past thirty years I have spent over a year of my life at TV markets in Cannes. At a conservative estimate two hours each day was spent in the Majestic Bar at each of the festivals. Or to put it another way if I had it all at once I would have spent 30 days and nights continuously. Which may explain the odd headache or two on some occasions in the South of France.

What has changed since I first came into this industry?

Obviously, technology has advanced beyond anyone's predictions, delivery systems have multiplied and will continue to do so for a long time, the global village has gone from concept to reality, but paradoxically as I look back at the basics of this business, nothing has really changed.

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Today I am as passionate about our industry as I was that first day I first came to Cannes, clutching a roll of 16mm film, which I always had trouble threading into the projector, and believing that I would never have a future in this business if I couldn't even work the projector.

**If I were starting out all over again I would now follow FOUR GOLDEN RULES** – learned over the last thirty years and tested over time. In fact, they work in life; they helped me through my illness, and now are helping again with my newfound passion for horseracing.

But first, I would like to tell you a story which had a great deal of resonance for me. In fact it is not so much a story as an old joke about a very holy priest who is caught in a terrible flood, the water had risen so high, that he was sitting on the roof of the chapel. Suddenly a man in a rowing boat came along and said to him, “Get in the boat and I will take you to safety” the priest looked at him and gave a knowing smile,

“No thanks! you don’t understand. You see I believe in God, my faith is not to be doubted after all I have done for God, I know that God is going to save me, absolutely no doubt about it, so you are wasting your time. I have served God faithfully for 40 years, and I know that he is going to save me, so you can go away”

The rain continued for two days, by this time the priest was hanging onto the very top of the church spire, when a rescue helicopter reached him. by now, he was cold and exhausted. A rescue-man was lowered on a winch and he, too, pleaded with the priest to accept the offer of rescue. The priest didn’t waver he looked the rescue-man in the eye and told him “ My faith in the God will save me, I have no doubt that all the good work I have done will be rewarded in this my greatest hour of need, God will save me, so I’ll stay here”.

The helicopter duly left and the priest exhausted by cold released his grip, slipped slowly into the water and drowned. Dead.

The priest went straight to heaven cold wet and miserable and in a foul mood. No sooner had he arrived than he saw God, WHO immediately saw him and said “Fr Bob What a surprise”.

“You’re surprised? For 40 years I served you loyally I didn’t even take a holiday in all that time, and...you just let me drown”.

God looked at him with infinite compassion and said “You drowned? I can’t believe it - I am sure I sent you boat and a helicopter”.

The story is all about recognising opportunity, and that is why I don’t think the business has really changed in its basic premise over the last thirty years.

It is still about recognising opportunity, and I believe that there is more opportunity around today than ever before.

So, here are my four golden rules that I wish I had known when I started out in this business

### **The First Rule - There is no substitute for talent.**

I have met many talented people in my life and just once, I met a real genius. His name was Jim Henson, he was the most original thinking and talented man I have ever met and he taught me to think about future possibilities. The influence he had in shaping my approach to understanding and nurturing talent has stayed with me since our first time together.

He took an undervalued and overlooked medium that was puppetry, and single handed re-invented it. In a sense in the same way that Starbucks re-invented the whole experience, we now associate with drinking coffee. So too did Jim Henson, he re-invented the whole viewing experience. He saw the possibilities and grabbed the dream.

Talent is not the sole domain of the creative soul; indeed some people have a talent for production, for selling, for design, for writing music, and for training racehorses.

If I have a talent, I believe it is my ability to recognise talent and creating for them the best possible environment to flourish.

I also learned never to mistake enthusiasm for talent, but there is an easy way to tell them apart, you see you can fake enthusiasm but you can't fake talent.

### **The Second Rule-The idea is only the starting point, you need passion and commitment to bring it to the market**

The chair you are sitting on, the knife and fork you eat with, and the pen you write with, in fact everything outside of nature that we interact with - first began life in someone's brain as an idea.

Ideas are the lifeblood of this industry. We recognise originality when we see it, it jumps up and smacks us between the eyes, those rare and experience changing ideas, which, come along once every ten years, and they are quickly imitated but never bettered.

Where those moments of inspiration come from no one knows. But those inspirational ideas have the ability to re-invent a whole genre, and even invent a new one - just like The Muppets did all those years ago.

A great idea however, is not enough. How many series never got off the ground? How many brilliant ideas did the rounds before they sank without trace?

I believe the idea is the starting point then you need to take it to market with a passion and a commitment to making it come to life. I wouldn't want to guess how many miles I have walked along the market corridors in the past thirty years, but I know that if you are willing to keep walking you will find the deal.

### **The Third Rule - Learn from you failures**

We are here today to celebrate success, which is very, very flattering indeed. But my third rule is not about success; in fact, it is about failure. I learnt more about business, and life at large, through my failures. Success teaches us very little, it is in failure that the lessons reveal themselves.

When I set up HIT I didn't have a back catalogue, in fact I had thirteen episodes of Postman Pat and 26 of Alvin and the Chipmunks. At that point, the single most important thing I had to do was to sell this series, to as many broadcasters as possible. I needed to sell, if I didn't - then HIT would be a MISS, and my dreams would disappear in a puff of smoke.

However, trying to sell this series was not easy. Not because they were not good, but because I was trying to sell. The harder I tried the more resistance I got.

It is a cruel paradox in life that sometimes it feels as though, no matter how hard we try, we do not achieve our goal. It remains beyond our reach.

It was hard for me to accept no one was buying. Then it struck me, I don't like it when people try to sell to me, be it on the phone, in a store or at a trade show. But I do like to buy; I just don't like to be sold.

I learnt the lesson that one needs to understand why people buy, and not to polish up my sales skills. So failure is OK provided you learn the lesson, apply it and move on.

### **The Fourth and Final Rule- Never give up.**

There is an old Chinese proverb. "Fall over seven times, get up eight"

It is too easy to feel overwhelmed by rejection, after repeated meetings where people either don't want your programme, don't like your programme, or offer you such a bad deal that it makes no commercial sense to proceed.

Just like the old priest on the story I mentioned earlier, I always looked at every meeting as a fresh opportunity, I always believed that every 'no' was getting me closer to 'yes'. In life, too we should never give up on our dreams because you never

know when the next opportunity will appear.

I read in a business journal that a socio-economic research study discovered that an immigrant from the Third World to a First World nation is four times more likely to become a self-made millionaire than someone born in the same country. The big question that arose then was why?

Are they four times luckier? Well mathematical models of random probability clearly indicate that they are not. Also, the research indicated that they were not four times cleverer or for that, matter four times harder working.

What they discovered that the immigrants were four times more likely to spot an opportunity and then act on it.

They saw the possibility..... And that is first and foremost what I love about this business; it is a business of endless possibilities, and some of the most creative minds on the planet.

In the future when I manage to slow down, and spend more time playing golf, following my horses around the country or sitting in my garden planning my next adventure. I have no doubt that I will look back on this day and this honour as my most wonderful memory of Cannes

Today I assure you, that you will not find a happier man in France, this truly is a wonderful honour, and I thank you all very much indeed!