

**GURU
GUIDE**
with
Vidusha and Anton

in conversation with
Art Bell

6

**MAKING A
KILLER 'PITCH'**

A QUICK INTRODUCTION TO THE GURU GUIDE

The 'guru guide' is an attempt to cull out decades of hard-earned expertise to be distilled into succinct, simple and practical advice.

It is NOT meant to be an exhaustive exploration of a topic: rather, pointed areas of focus which can only be discerned by a practitioner. It is not meant to be a generic set of advice: it is advice from battle-hardened professionals who have had a lifetime of experience and proven track records.

The Guru Guide has a pre determined format:

- ✓ It aims to understand a topic/ area of focus
- ✓ It aims to give tools to help you navigate the area
- ✓ It also gives contexts and examples: so that you can customize it to suit YOU

Exploratory, intimate and insightful, the Guru Guide aims to bring to you a wealth of expertise which can only be possible through veterans whose varied and in-depth experiences offer unparalleled insights.

The brevity and simplicity is by choice, and design. Focused on Executives and Managers who want to get quick tips and techniques, who are eager to improve their craft

and trade : the Guru Guide aims to offer 'little nuggets' of advice and importantly, simple tools, which will enable practitioners to up their game and benefit from expertise which may be hard to find in a hurry.

INTRODUCING



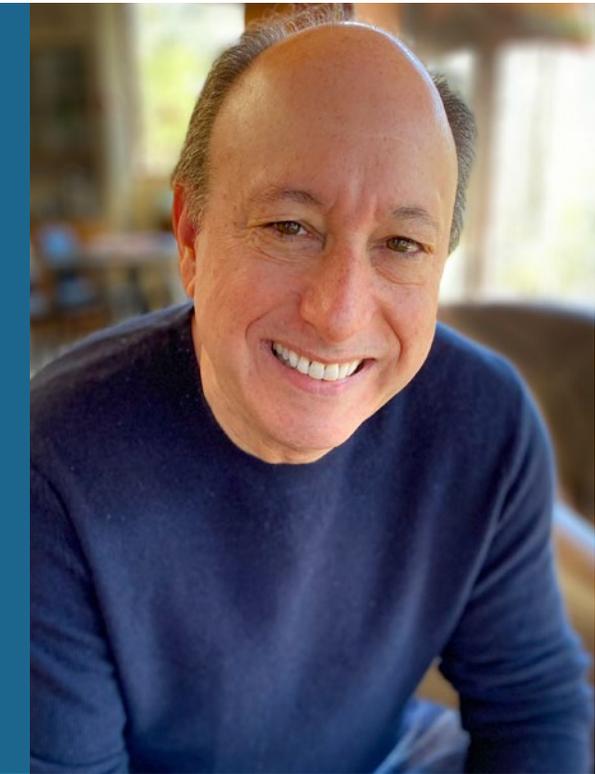
**VIDUSHA
NATHAVITHARANA**

Vidusha is currently the Destiny Architect at High5 Consultancy and Luminary Learning and the organization's founder. His areas of expertise are with strategy facilitation, HR strategy development and Leadership Training. He has conducted assignments in 15 countries regionally and consulted for the World Bank, the UN as well as some of the top corporates in Sri Lanka and the Region. He is also a member of the board of directors for Chrysalis, a social enterprise working to empower women and youth by fostering inclusive growth in Sri Lanka and elsewhere.



**ANTON
THAYALAN**

Anton is a multi-faceted professional who has had over two decades of hands-on experience in process improvement, change management and strategic management, and currently works as the Chief Evangelist of Luminary Learning and the Transformation Therapist of High5 Consultancy. As the former AVP at HSBC DPL Anton won accolades for his superlative work there: and won the prestigious HSBC Group Service – Global Talent Management Member two years in a row. Anton currently works as a consultant focusing on efficiency and productivity improvement and process optimization for local and regional clients.



INTRODUCING ART BELL

We are both avid followers of Comedy Central : and of all things stand up comedy. It is our 'little break' from the 'old routine' and our time to share a laugh. We would constantly share hilarious stand up comedians, and invariably, end up sharing a screen and guffawing until we had stitches in parts of our body we never knew existed!

So, imagine our absolute jubilation when Art accepted our invitation to come on the show. What we were NOT expecting was the rather crazy story he had to share about how he started out : how the 'crazy idea' came into his mind - and how he managed to get it off the ground : and of course, after all that, how he got fired...

Art's ability to introspect, and also, see adversity and challenges as an opportunity to grow and become stepping stones for a better future is something we truly acknowledged and admired.... Starting out as a writer, Art's book 'Constant Comedy', has become a runaway success : and Art is now exploring new avenues of opportunity as an author...

An amazingly rooted and positive person, Art has easily become one of those people we will truly draw inspiration from : and also, always call our friend...

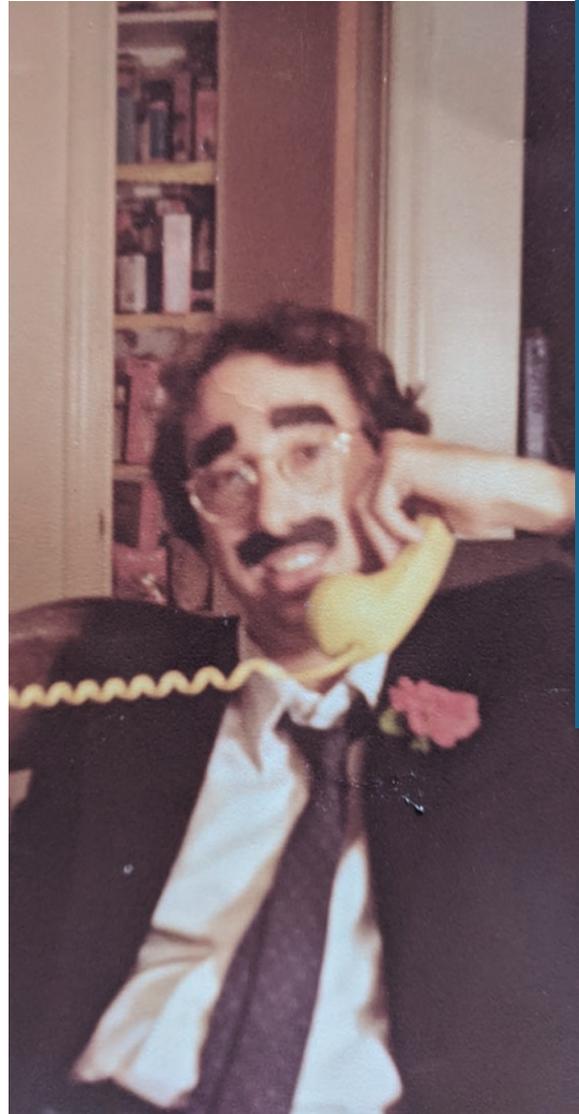
HOW DID THE IDEA FOR COMEDY CENTRAL COME ABOUT ?



I was a comedy nerd as a kid and loved all things comedy. I listened to comedy albums, watched comedians on television, and read books by and about comedians. When I went to business school, with the hope of getting a job in the television business after I graduated, I wrote and acted in a satirical musical comedy revue put on by students and realized, again, how much I enjoyed comedy, including comedy writing. Wouldn't it be cool if there was a whole channel devoted to all things comedy? I assumed someone would start one; but by the time I graduated, despite the handful of new channels (an all-sports network, an all music network...), there was no comedy network in sight. I was convinced it was just a matter of time before one appeared.

YOU DIDN'T REALLY GET THAT ENTHUSIASM FROM YOUR SENIORS DID YOU ?

The first real pitch I made was to the executive vice president of programming at HBO where I was working as a business analyst. I had not met her since she was several levels higher than I in the organization, but I bravely made an appointment. I sat down in her office and told her that I thought HBO should start a 24-hour comedy network. She told me it was a stupid idea: nobody would watch, comedians wouldn't want to appear on it, and HBO wouldn't risk their reputation. I left her office, momentarily defeated but not deterred. Months later I had a chance encounter with HBO's chairman and, without preparation or presentation materials, made my pitch. I spoke with passion and with an intimate knowledge of how and why a comedy network would be successful since I'd been thinking about it for years. The chairman said: "Okay, put together a presentation for top management and we'll decide if HBO should launch an all-comedy network."



Dressed as Groucho Marx, one of his comedy heroes

AND THEN, AFTER YOU GUYS HAD GOT THE CHANNEL GOING, YOU WERE TOLD TO 'MERGE' WITH THE 'ENEMY' ?

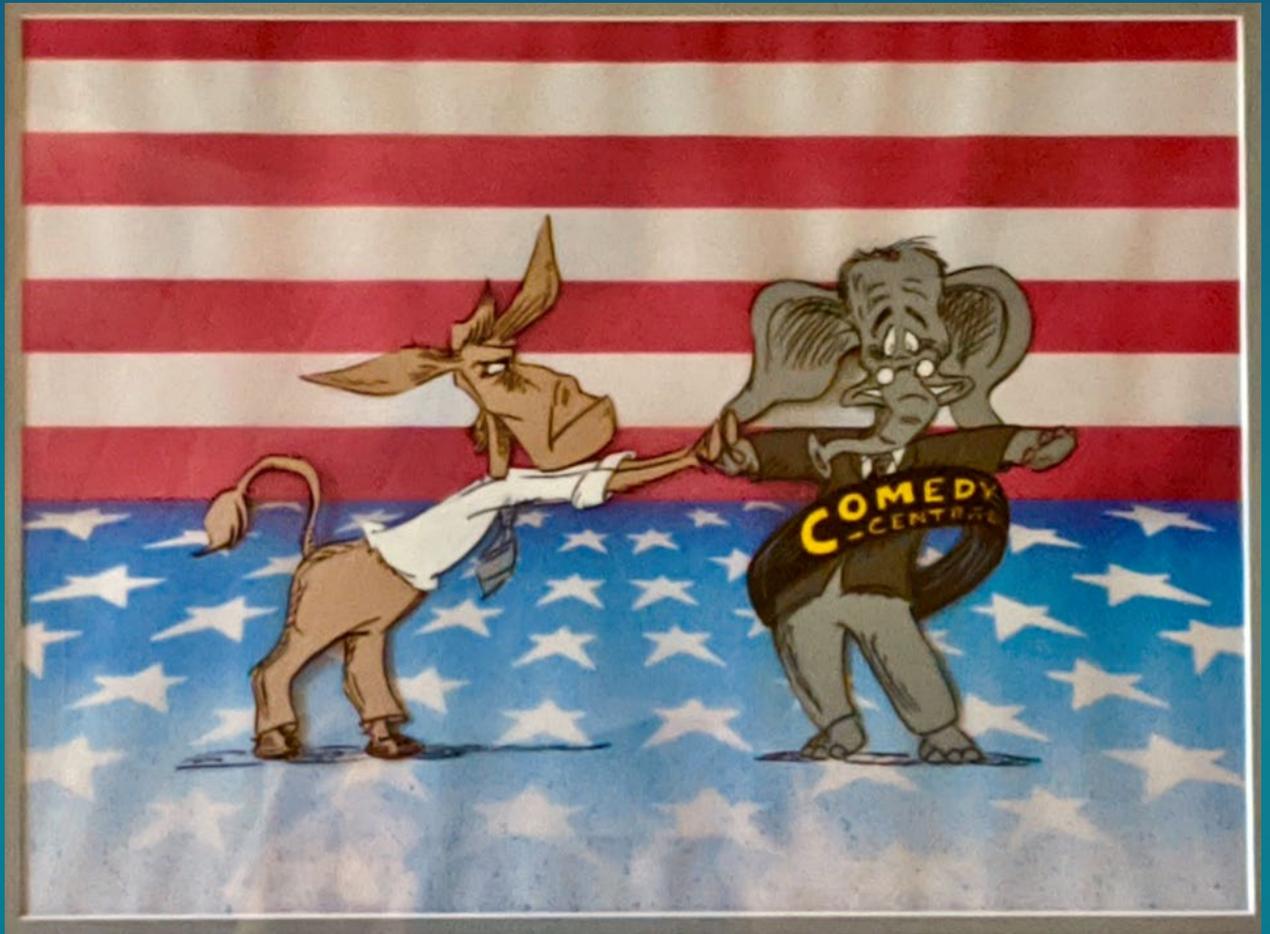
Six months after HBO launched The Comedy Channel, MTV Networks launched a competitor, HA! The Comedy Network. The two channels were different in programming and tone. There was an epic battle between the two for distribution, advertisers and audience. The press called it "the comedy wars" and like all wars, it was personal. I fought hard and a year after our launch, I was sure we were winning: our programming was better, and our audience was bigger based on Nielsen ratings. But the comedy war was sapping resources on both sides, and the head of the largest cable operator (who held 20% of the cable subscribers nationally) publicly called for an end to the war because only one channel would succeed in the end. The chairman of HBO called the chairman of Viacom and they agreed to merge. The lawyers quickly sealed the deal, and only then were those of us in the trenches told that the war was ending. Nobody won, but at least there would be a comedy network in the world.

AND THEN YOU GOT FIRED?

I was head of programming and marketing and reported to the president who had been chosen for the job because he was a financial manager. The board decided they needed someone else who was more of a creative executive. They fired my boss, and the new president wasted no time in bringing in his own people and firing the existing creative team.



At Wharton rehearsing for the Wharton Follies, the musical comedy revue, I wrote and was in.



This is an original cel for an animated on-air promo we ran for our political coverage in 1995. That coverage was the pre-cursor to the Daily Show.

CONCEPT 1 : BE OK ABOUT EVERYONE BEING A NAYSAYER

See : it is quite common and actually quite normal for 'others' not to be as excited or convinced about the idea you are jumping up and down passionately about.

See : it's YOUR idea : and its natural for you to feel it is a BRILLIANT one. You are convinced : but that doesn't mean that everyone around you - and specially those who really MATTER to get the idea off the ground and make it into being a viable product/ project, will see it the same way...

IF you are really convinced about your idea, you need to be comfortable about it being shot to pieces by others. You must actually EXPECT it : because that is the NORM not the EXCEPTION...

However, how you RESPOND to the naysayers - now THAT is the key.... It is up to you to either get despondent and get demotivated : or to use the views and criticisms you are barraged with to make your 'pitch' that much better : and answer all the questions that are thrown at you...

If you are smart : you will rely on the naysayers to perfect your pitch...

TOOL 1 : 4 TYPES OF NAYSAYERS



» Honest Critiques are those who genuinely see loop holes in your proposition : but are not out to gun you down. They are honestly telling you what to improve on.

» Cautious Supporters are looking to tweak your idea so that it can appeal to the 'powers that be' and make it more 'palatable' to others so that your idea can be given flight.

» Pot Shots are there to outright sink your ideas to the bottomless pit from which they can never resurface.

» Snakes in the Grass are those who 'falsely' praise your idea - even though they see shortcomings, with the hope of getting it off the ground and possibly claiming credit for some of it or all of it.

WORKING THROUGH THE 4 TYPES OF NAYSAYERS

YOU NEED TO HANDLE THE 4 DIFFERENT TYPES OF
NAYSAYERS DIFFERENTLY



- » Work with the Honest Critiques to understand how they see your idea going belly up and ask them for genuine support to 'better dress up' your pitch - and also, how to fundamentally make it stronger and 'foolproof'.



- » Take what the Pot Shots say deadly seriously - and work on every single criticism they throw and find alternatives to them. Find solutions. Find rock solid solutions. This is your opportunity to get free consultations on exactly how your idea can fail.



- » Work with the cautious supporters to see what elements to augment - and what to actually 'drop' to make the idea more palatable to others. Also, this will give you good insights on what elements to highlight during the pitch and what to 'strategically avoid'.



- » Snakes in the Grass : use them to get the popular support you may need : but, look at what they are 'praising' and relook at those to see if there are hidden weaknesses in them which may allow your snakes in the grass to hijack you once the project is up and running. Talk through them with the honest critiques.

CONCEPT 2 : MAKE ALLIANCES AND PROMOTERS



Art Bell with two co-workers from Comedy Central.

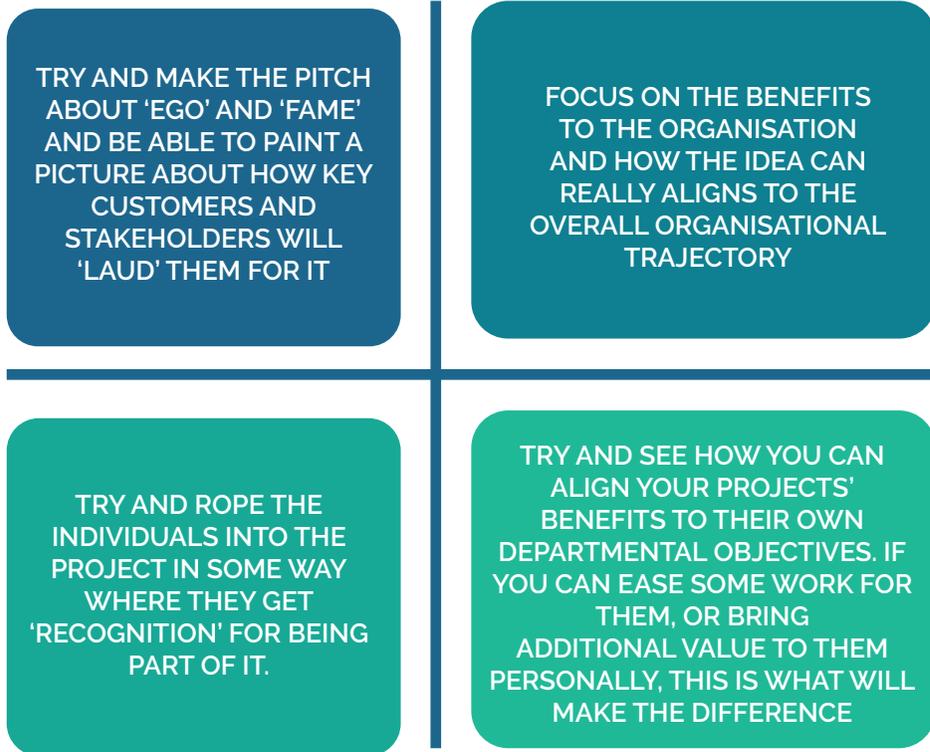
The reality is that you will need to have supporters and promoters to help get your idea through the door - and the resources it needs to see it to fruition. Ultimately, unless you are seriously well connected, you will need to 'canvass' support for your idea, not only with those who 'like' you, but also with those who quite honestly detest you...

Remember : politics is very real within the organisation. Unless you know how to wade through it and garner considerable favour, chances are that your idea will just be binned no matter how good it may be...

Alliances may not necessarily be those who support you : ensuring they remain neutral and do not throw pot shots at the idea at crucial moments is success enough. The key is to ensure the key 'powers that be' are either supporting you or are neutral. The others who 'matter less' are 'less of an issue' though pacifying them too is in your best interest : specially when the project is off the ground. But, for the purpose of ensuring the 'pitch' is seen through : focus on the key power players...

TOOL 2 : 4 STRATEGIES TO GARNER SUPPORT

Organisational Focused



Emotional

Logical

Selfishly Motivated

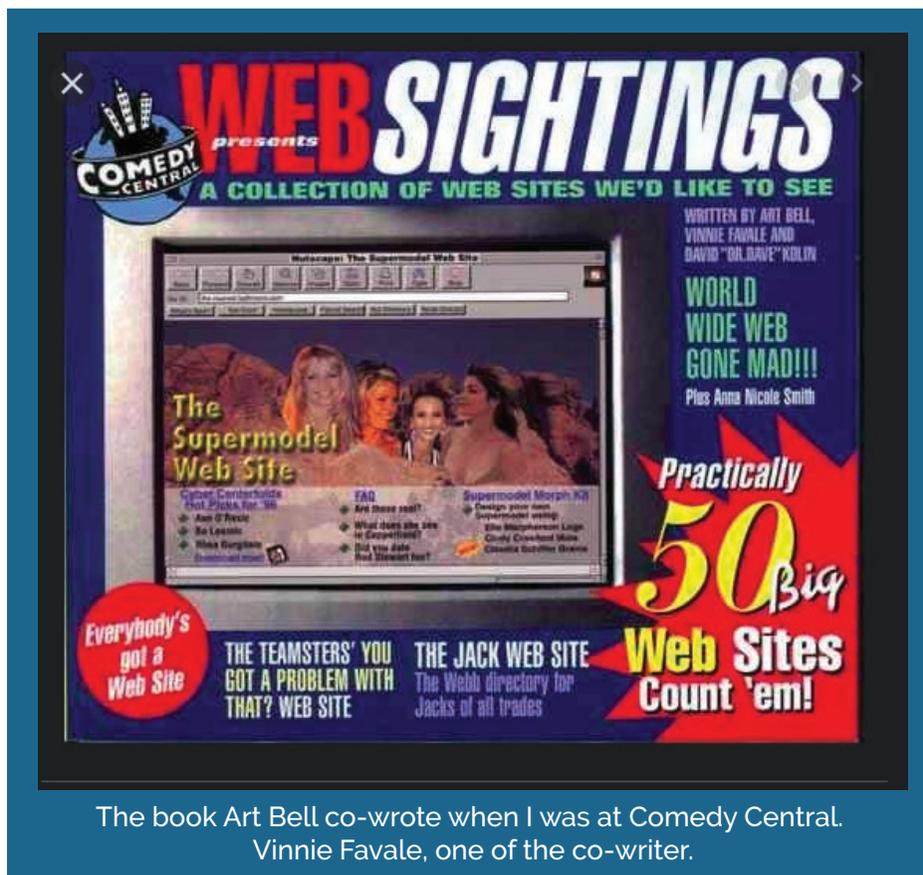
DIFFERENT PEOPLE ARE DIFFERENTLY MOTIVATED. MOST OF THE TIME YOU WILL NEED TO ADOPT ALL THESE STRATEGIES TO GET THE SUPPORT YOU NEED FOR YOUR PITCH BECAUSE YOU WILL FIND ALL FOUR CATEGORIES OF PEOPLE WITHIN THE ORGANISATION. THE KEY IS TO MAKE EVERYONE 'FEEL GOOD' ABOUT THE PROJECT, AND ALSO, GET THEM TO UNDERSTAND, UNDENIABLY, THAT THE IDEA HAS BENEFITS FOR EVERYONE - FOR THE ORGANISATION, FOR THE CUSTOMERS, FOR OTHER STAKEHOLDERS : AND OF COURSE, THOSE WHO GET INVOLVED IN IT. THE WIDER YOUR NET IS CAST TO GARNER SUPPORT, THE BETTER IT IS.

CONCEPT 3 : COVER ALL ANGLES

The key to a good pitch is ultimately to be well prepared : and in the case of a pitch, it is to cover all angles.... Remember the Naysayers - that is a good starting point : so that you cover risks and possible pitfalls - but, as much as you look at the negatives, you must bolster the positives and make them attractive enough to win the required resources for your idea to be given a go.

Try and see if you can look at the project idea holistically and see if you can cover any concern that can come up. It is better to be prepared for any question rather than having to tell your decision makers 'let me come back to you on that'.

The more thought through your idea is, and the wider you have broad based your approach, the better it is for you. You can narrow this down when you get into project implementation stage : but to make sure the 'pitch' is won, make sure you have thought through every possibly angle they can look at it from.



The book Art Bell co-wrote when I was at Comedy Central. Vinnie Favale, one of the co-writer.

TOOL 3 : REBUTTAL PREPARATION

A GREAT TOOL YOU CAN LEARN FROM DEBATING IS THE 'REBUTTAL PREPARATION' DEBATERS DO. THE IDEA IS THIS : TO LOOK AT EVERY CONCEIVABLE QUESTION THAT CAN BE POSED FOR YOU : AND PREPARE A REBUTTAL FOR IT. A GOOD REBUTTAL HAS 5 KEY INGREDIENTS :

- A** It is grounded on facts : and you have them to fire salvos with.
- B** There are plenty of examples to site : and the examples are multidisciplinary and from around the world - not from a narrow scope.
- C** The rebuttal is rooted in 'unquestionable morality' : in that - it is not based on questionable ethics but on universally accepted values.
- D** It makes the person who asked the question seem a little 'stupid', and making the others chuckle - embarrassing the opponent - which generally gets them to stop that line of questioning.
- E** There is no real easy recovery : and if you are to counter with a rebuttal of their own, it requires serious time and effort, and also, research - which a debate does not allow.

A WORD OF CAUTION HERE. A 'PITCH' IS NOT A DEBATE : AND YOU ARE NOT THERE TO PROVE YOUR POINT AND 'OBLITERATE' YOUR 'OPPONENTS.' THOSE WHOM YOU ARE PITCHING FOR ARE PART OF YOUR OWN ORGANISATION : AND ITS KEY DECISION MAKERS - MAKING THEM LOOK 'STUPID' CAN BE A HUGE STRATEGIC MISTAKE : SO, ENSURE YOU ARE ALWAYS RESPECTFUL AND DO NOT SOUND LIKE A 'SMART ALEC' : IN WHICH CASE YOU WILL 'WIN THE ARGUMENT' AND 'LOSE THE PITCH'. HOWEVER, PREPARE AS IF YOU ARE PREPARING FOR A DEBATE : BUT, WHEN YOU PITCH, DO SO WITH REVERENCE AND CONSIDERATION RATHER THAN TAKING A COMBATIVE APPROACH.

4 KEY ANGLES TO MANDATORILY COVER



1. FINANCIAL ANGLE

MAKE SURE YOU ARE ROCK SOLID ABOUT YOUR NUMBERS. YOU NEED TO HAVE A SOLID BUSINESS PLAN AND A ROCK SOLID PLAN TO 'MAKE MONEY!' YOUR IDEA IS WORTH NOUGHT IF THE COMPANY DOES NOT BENEFIT FINANCIALLY.



2. CUSTOMER ANGLE

ULTIMATELY, YOU MUST BE ABLE TO SOLVE A 'NEED' FOR YOUR CUSTOMER OR MARKET - PREFERABLY ONE THAT IS CURRENTLY NOT BEING ADDRESSED BY YOUR COMPETITORS. THE BIGGER THE NEED YOU ARE TRYING TO FILL, GENERALLY, BIGGER THE BUY IN.



3. COMPETITOR ANGLE

DON'T THINK THAT YOU ARE COMPETING IN A STATIC STATE : AND BE CONSCIOUS THAT YOUR COMPETITORS WILL REACT TO WHATEVER YOU ARE DOING... SO, HOW THEY WILL REACT : AND WHAT YOU CAN DO ABOUT IT - ARE FACTORS YOU NEED TO THINK THROUGH.



4. TECHNOLOGY AND PROCESS ANGLE

WHATEVER YOU ARE TRYING TO PITCH MUST BE ABLE TO BE DONE WITHIN THE TECHNOLOGY AVAILABLE CURRENTLY, AND ALSO, FROM A PROCESS PERSPECTIVE, EASY TO EXECUTE. THE BIGGER THE COMPLICATIONS AND COMPLEXITIES, THE SLIMMER THE CHANCES OF YOUR IDEA BEING ACCEPTED.

SOME FINAL THOUGHTS...

Tip 1:

Talk to everyone about your idea. And I do mean everyone—your friends, your business associates, your significant other. This will help you articulate the idea; and you're going to need precise language for that. You will also hear from people you trust about the potential strengths and weaknesses of your idea from several perspectives. If it's a consumer targeted idea, your friends will tell you if it sounds like something they would like and want enough to pay for. Your business associates will bring up potential issues, like cost, raw materials sourcing and potential revenue. Each of these conversations will help you hone your pitch, so when you get your chance, you will be more than ready. You will accurately describe the idea; you can speak to the marketplace and potential competition; and, you will have anticipated objections that will be raised by your superiors, investors and other decisionmakers. I'm often asked: "Won't talking about it allow someone to steal the idea?" Maybe, but you can own the idea by being specific about execution. The idea of an all-comedy network is simple, but when you get into the nitty-gritty of how to make it happen (type of programming, costs, audience, launch plan) it becomes a unique idea that only you know everything about.

Tip 2:

Passion and vision are not an option... they're a requirement. I started out with a passion for comedy and that helped me become passionate about building a comedy network. But the passion doesn't necessarily precede the idea. Sometimes an idea is based on an insight based on consumer research, or identifying an opportunity in the marketplace that's gone unnoticed. If you can't get excited about your idea, how do you expect to get others excited? You have to adopt your idea so it becomes your baby and you have to be committed to seeing it through no matter what: Willing to do anything, risk everything, stake their reputation on its success. We've seen people like that portrayed in movies. They have fire in their bellies and fire in their eyes. Nobody questions whether they're passionate—everyone can see it radiating from the person; and remember, you are that passionate person. Don't fake it; don't phone it in, don't delegate it. Get excited about your project and stay excited. Think about it all the time. Dedicate yourself to making it work.

Vision is an overused term and I've seen business students roll their eyes when I bring it up. But here's what I think of vision: It's your portrayal of a future where your idea is a huge success and has somehow changed the world.

Maybe it's two years from now, maybe it's ten, but you have to be able to describe in detail your product's growth, maturity and impact. In my case, I spoke of how The Comedy Channel would become the center of the comedy universe, how it would attract innovative programming that would otherwise go unseen, how it would be a place for the best comedy writers and comedians to "hang out." It's this kind of concrete prediction that makes people understand the potential of an idea.

Your idea might be accepted, championed, and funded but with constraints or changes imposed by your company or investors. Stay the course, work with what you have, identify and solve problems in the planning stage and adjust your concept when necessary.

Tip 3:

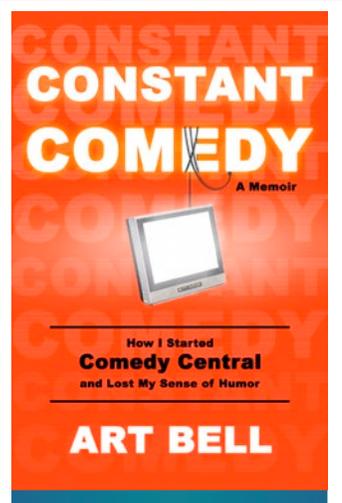
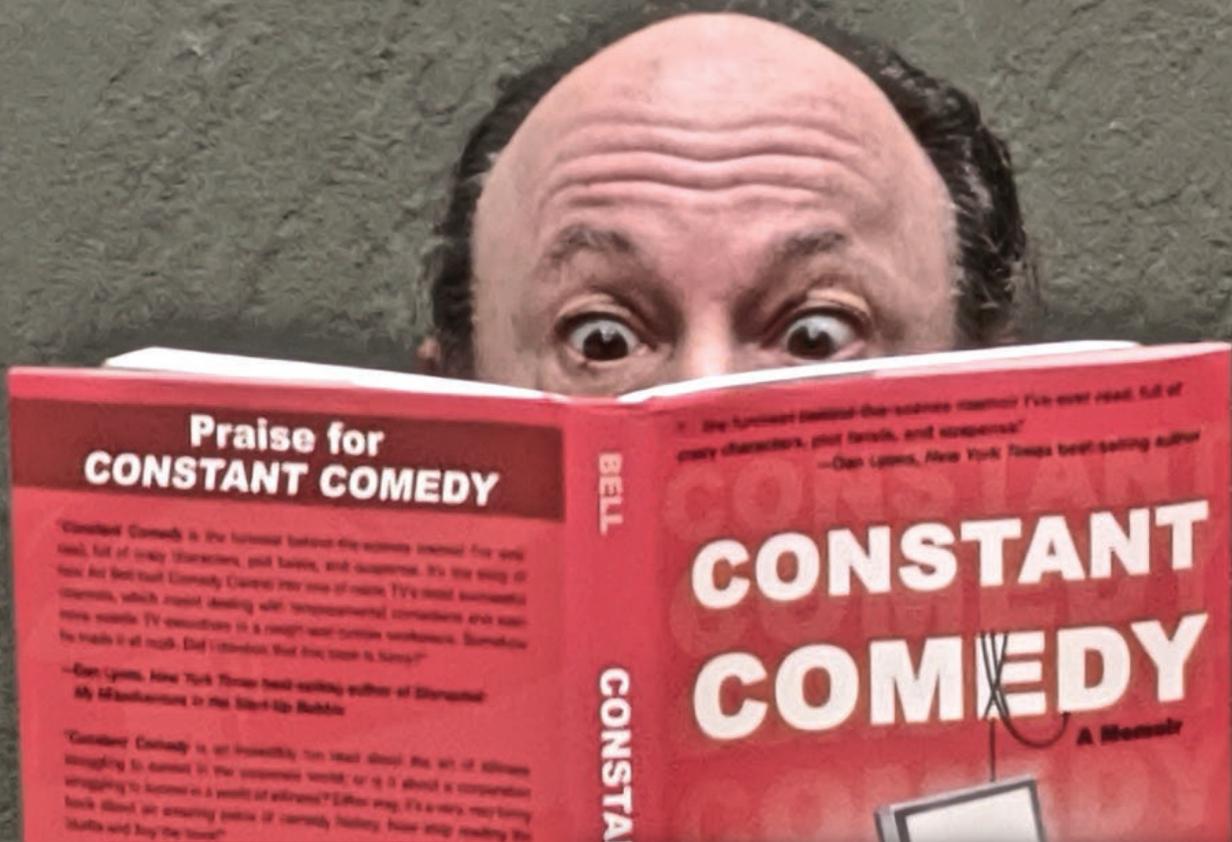
Be prepared to compromise.

You may come to the table with a firm idea of how to execute your idea, but understand that you may start out underfunded and understaffed. It's rare to get everything you want or feel you need to make the idea successful right from the start. You'll need to demonstrate proof of concept and ultimate business viability. Some of what you envisioned may not work, or may not be available, so you're either going to have to compromise or find workarounds. You need to realize that compromise may be necessary to get things going. This doesn't mean you should compromise your vision, but you should understand that there may be more than one road to the promised land.

ONE FINAL THOUGHT:

Be prepared to fail. Putting yourself and your reputation on the line is part of the process of selling in the idea. Passion and vision don't guarantee success. Things can go wrong. The foundations of your idea can shift beneath your feet due to circumstances beyond your control. If your idea dies, move on to your next one secure in the knowledge that you have exercised all the muscles necessary to pitch an idea; and have faith in yourself that someday soon you will have another idea and be able to move that across the finish line.





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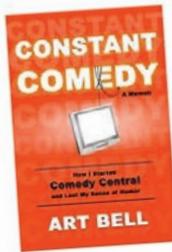
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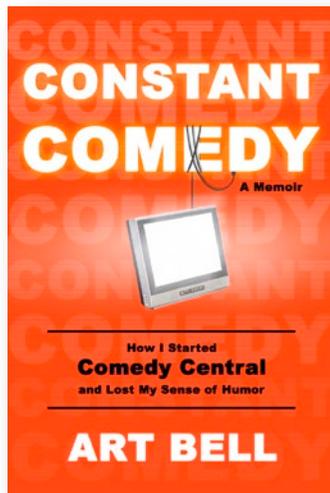
[Constant Comedy: How I Started Comedy Central and Lost My Sense of Humor by Art Bell](#)

Finalist
Autobiography & Memoirs
The 2020 Best Book Awards

In 1988, a young, mid-level employee named Art Bell pitched a novel concept—a television channel focused 100% on just one thing: comedy—to the chairman of HBO. The station that would soon become Comedy Central, with celebrated programs like South Park, Chapelle's Show, The Daily Show, and The Colbert Report, was born.

Constant Comedy takes readers behind the scenes into the comedy startup on its way to becoming one of the most successful and creative purveyors of popular culture in the United States. From disastrous pitch meetings with comedians to the discovery of talents like Bill Maher and Jon Stewart, this intimate biography peers behind the curtain and reveals what it's really like to work, struggle, and ultimately succeed at the cutting edge of show business.

An "award winning finalist" in two categories of the Best Book Awards (American Book Fest), including Best Memoir and Best Narrative Non-Fiction. Here's a link to the memoir award page: <http://www.americanbookfest.com/autobiography.html>



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