

John O'Shea Memorial Speech delivered by Dave Gibson on Saturday, 22<sup>nd</sup> of November 2003 at the SPADA conference.

## **Ten Threats to the Independent Producer**

Intro

It is a privilege to be asked to give the John O'Shea memorial lecture. I have gone out and bought a new suit in order to give both John and the occasion the honour that is deserved. Those of you who know how I normally dress will appreciate that this is a big step for me.

I have also spent some time writing the speech. - partly because I don't have a speechwriter and partly because I have taken this opportunity seriously.

I also realise that, unlike John O'Shea, I can't talk for an hour with no notes.

Perhaps its symptomatic of my personality but when I sat down to try and work out my topic for this lecture I came up with a number of ideas.

And I started writing several different speeches before I hit upon the grab bag concept of Ten threats to the Independent Producer.

If Mike King's got away with borrowing a whole show format from David Letterman then I figure Letterman won't sue me for borrowing the list concept.

Which of course he may have borrowed from some guy called Moses.

I think the list concept appealed to me because at the moment there seem to be so many issues facing our business.

I know that over the years we have listened to a number of speeches or read articles or books about the nature and speed of change particularly as it relates to the entertainment industry. Often these center around the method of capturing images or of transmitting them.

And yet some things don't change very much at all.

And that's the essential nature of the jobs of the key people who make television programmes and films.

Writers, actors cameramen, directors and producers.

The nature of what I do as a job is not significantly different from what John O'Shea did for around 50 years.

Some of the tools have changed.

But it's still essentially my job to find an idea or work with people who have ideas to create a script or a concept that I can take to the marketplace and raise enough money to make.

Then to gather around a chosen director a good creative and practical team who can realise that idea into something that a significant audience will enjoy or be moved or educated by.

And to try and exploit as much as possible the screening and the financial returns by organising and supervising the marketing or selling of the project.

Now, in most countries in the world the majority of producers are what we loosely call independents and I count myself amongst that group.

On a practical, descriptive, level this really just means that we don't work for a major studio or a TV station or a government film-making body. We generate and finance our own work. Either individually, or as small companies, we are ultimately responsible in a variety of ways!

On a more emotive level I think we have chosen this independence because we believe that this is the best way to work.

But, in spite of this choice it makes sense for us every now and then to have a good look at our chosen profession and try and work out whether its still viable as a way of working and whether its under threat from any quarter and if so, whether our recognition of that threat could affect our behavior.

Why did Don Reynolds, Geoff Steven and recently Tony Holden, give up careers as independents and go and work for networks? Did they know something we didn't? And, on a more serious note, why have others committed suicide or had companies go into receivership?

What are the threats in New Zealand at the moment to your individual careers and our collective notion of the independent producer?

(End intro)

I've created a list of ten threats. Some that are external to us and some where we need to look more at ourselves.

My segues range from the brilliantly subtle where you will hardly know I have moved on to another topic to the as yet unwritten and consequently blunt transition.

#### 1. Risk management.

I think there are a variety of risks that we face as independent producers and that we need to be aware of.

Most of our concentration tends to be on the risks associated with our programmes or films.

Apart from trying not to kill anyone or break the OSH rules or get sued... the main risk that most of think about each day is that our film or TV programme will fail to find an audience.

Our secondary risk is that in making it we will somehow not contain its costs and the project will go over budget.

Surprisingly most of us are pretty good at making shows for budgets and I think its beyond the scope of today's speech which is more political and business oriented to explore the subject of delivering audiences although I recognise ultimately that failure to do so is probably the single biggest threat to us individually and as a group. But, what I would call 'general business risk' is becoming a key threat to us.

Reasonably early on in my career I was producing a one hour children's drama called Nearly No Xmas.

The last week of the shoot was up on Mt. Ruapehu.

We were staying on the Ohakune side and the weather was terrible.

Each morning I would drive up the mountain to where we had a small set perched precariously in the snow, to see whether we could send Father Xmas and around 40 local children dressed in penguin suits out onto the snow.

And each morning I drove back down the mountain holding the drivers door shut with one hand because it was so cold that when I had got out at the top the lock had frozen open and the door couldn't be shut.

And as the weather stayed bad, and we didn't shoot, and the budget problems increased I sent more crew home.

'We don't really need make up' or 'we don't really need continuity'.

And my hair went gray in a week.

Because I genuinely believed that the budget overage on the programme would mean that our company would go broke and I would never work again.

I may have weathered that storm (pardon the pun) but like most producers, who have produced a number and variety of shows, there have been times that that we have got close to the wire in terms of over committing ourselves.

Mostly this has come about because there will be a problem on one rather ambitious project.

It might be that some of the financing is late to turn up or fails to turn up.

It might be that somehow we end up making a \$2 show on a \$1 dollar budget.

Perhaps a network will play hardball on a deal at the last minute and change the rules.

Are these risks avoidable? I suspect not entirely.

Can we manage our risks better? Or can we somehow learn to contain the fallout from our mistakes?

After Kahukura the Film Commission introduced new rules attempting in particular to avoid the crossing of funds from one project to another.

But anyone who runs a business will tell you that companies effectively do that constantly.

TVNZ is now trying to tell companies not to spend money on projects before all the paperwork is complete and signed.

But I'm currently involved in a 26-part children's co-production with Australia. We had to send two writers to Australia two weeks ago and pay for their travel, accommodation, per diems, and fees.

The shoot isn't till March next year. There are 11 financing, funding and bond documents in the deal. Eight of them have been going around in circles for a month or so and three of them still haven't turned up. I've taken a calculated risk that we can support our end of the co-production deal and I've allowed the writers to go to Melbourne.

I've probably taken this sort of risk about 50 times in my career. And I've been bitten badly only a couple of times.

Should we take these risks? If you take these risks and succeed, you are an entrepreneur. If you fail, you may be a bankrupt.

I loved the story of how Peter Jackson, after disagreeing with Miramax over the vision for Lord of the Rings, managed at the 11<sup>th</sup> hour to secure a deal with New Line. How close to the edge was he as they hustled their way around Hollywood with the clock ticking?

Certainly, as we as an industry become involved in bigger and more complex deals and productions (2) we need to have a stronger capital base to allow for a certain margin of error.

We have, as an industry, tended to favour the low overhead, low capital model. If a potential business partner gave us a million dollars for our businesses would we know what to do with the money? Would we be able to create a return for that person from the money?

I mean yes, most of us could spend it. But would it increase our profits? Would it provide a normal rate of return for the investor who gave us the million dollars?

Perhaps the best use of the money would be to buy an asset in another business, such as property, and just use it to protect our main business in the event of the almost inevitable occasional over stretch that I have referred to above.

The fact that our company managed back in 1984 to buy the building that we are housed in, has provided us with a bank credit line that has been enormously helpful in weathering storms. Banks still don't understand intellectual property! This asset has so far protected our ongoing business from the chance that one failure on a show could bring the whole house down.

However, we have now entered a new era where the financial structuring of more ambitious programs and films including the use

of deferrals and delayed payments from some participants requires significant amounts of capital.

The majority of financial institutions in this country will not even lend against a delayed final payment on a contract from a government organisation like NZOA.

Increasingly, if we are to compete and to remain safely solvent I believe most companies will need more capital. Small boutique back room operators may escape this requirement but they will only be able to make small boutique back room projects.

Can we build up or attract this capital.

I suspect the answer depends entirely on whether we can convince people that our businesses are profitable and hold enough rights and income streams, a topic that I will elaborate on later in the speech.

Suffice to say here, that I do not believe our profit margins based on our turnover are sufficient.

Most companies are looking for a profit margin on turnover in excess of 10%.

Given that we are generally permitted a production company overhead charge of only 10% of the below the line part of a budget and that that percentage is not for profit but to pay for overheads... our chance of showing profits in line with the expectations of bankers or venture capitalists is unlikely.

Frankly our profit margins are pathetic.

Can we build up capital in another way?

We bought our building on no deposit on commercial bills at the right time. Shortly thereafter it increased in value giving us effectively the equity by growth in property prices.

It could equally have gone the other way. I suspect the property market today isn't a buyers market about to boom.

What about shares in associated companies or the purchase of equipment.

Because we are effectively prevented from charging what I would consider market overheads or labour rates, I think this is worth considering. Our Online Suite and the capital involved in the suite, contribute more in fees to most jobs than I do!

In a way Silverscreen's emergence as a potential major film production company is an example of this. They may not agree, but my suspicion is that they are effectively using a profitable commercials production house and perhaps a post operation to cross subsidise their film operation. And they may find that the degree and extent of crossing goes on longer than they are expecting.

A pure film company of any size (outside of 3Foot6) is unlikely to survive. A pure TV production company without a soap opera contract or a post production operation is unlikely to survive except by creating a huge volume of work at low margins, and this is not sustainable long term in the market.

### 3. The aggregation of doors.

One of the keys to the success of the independent producer and to our independence is that in our domestic market, which we rely on, there are a number of funding doors.

I remember when I began in the industry in Wellington in the 1970s, I knew every other independent, including crew, in Wellington.

We walked barefoot to work and if we were hungry we licked the tar off the roads... ahh the good old days.

We got virtually no work from what was then TVNZ, who had a major in-house operation. We survived by getting some work from

ads, corporate films and work funded by a few government departments and the Arts Council.

The Education Department was a major funder of some short half-hour dramas, which were directed by Ian Mune, Roger Donaldson and Yvonne Mackay. They also received some money from the Arts Council and from TVNZ. The Education Department and the Arts Council on their own account would never have been able to fund these projects.

I believe this period was a key one for the development of the model we now work under. Essentially, a dollar here and a dollar there adds up to a 3 or 4 dollar budget. And each of those dollars comes from a different door.

Our domestic funding sources of any size are TVNZ, TV3, NZOA, the Film Commission and the Film Fund. And now occasionally some private money.

At the moment, my informed understanding is that there is a significant and strong lobby from TVNZ to have NZOA disestablished and their funding given direct to TVNZ.

I am not privy to the arguments in favour of this bizarre idea but I assume that TVNZ is using the charter to say “look we are now responsible for culture, just give us the money and cut out the middle man”. I understand that a similar argument is being put up by Radio New Zealand.

These rumors, which I understand intensified during the public broadcasting seminar yesterday, may continue for some time as we undergo a government review which looks at the various government funding organisations and mechanisms.

If NZOA funding is not available to TV3 then almost overnight we will see them withdraw from funding drama, documentary and any

programmes costing much more than around \$40,000 dollars per hour.

This is not a good look!

For the audiences of a major free to air network, who will end up looking like another version of Prime.

And for us as independent producers, because in fact two doors will close.

Both NZOA and TV3.

#### 4. In-house production

TVNZ will become the only game in town for local independent television production. I may be cynical but I have no faith in the fact that they would remain a significant funder of the type and range of programmes that we currently are able to make. I think very quickly we would see an increase in in-house production.

There is already a desire by TVNZ to produce the arts magazine show and a drama serial in-house to TVNZ. This may not happen and if it doesn't, then it will no doubt be because TVNZ will claim that this was never their intention.

(PAUSE!)

I believe that the growth of in-house production would be accelerated by the dis-establishment of NZOA, but still qualifies as a separate and ongoing threat to the independent producer.

When I was discussing with Tony Holden the idea that the arts magazine programme would be made in-house by TVNZ and I asked Tony why, his reply surprised me.

Financial!

There's a money problem!

Now I have always believed that the independents are competitive financially!

And I also believed Television New Zealand's statement of intent where it said that one of its three primary objectives for the next twelve months was to focus on their relationship with the creative community!

And that was elaborated on as including...

- Retaining our commitment to sourcing most of our New Zealand programming ( except for News, Current Affairs and Sport) from Independents
- Committing to strengthening our partnership with Independents and adopt protocols which support and embody this commitment.

Mmmm...

To return to the NZOA issue. My understanding is that TVNZ now has a much better relationship with the government and their Minister, Steve Maharey.

And I'm sure that people like Ian Fraser and Dick Griffin are a part of that improved relationship.

What is more difficult to ascertain is where the Ministry of Culture is positioned in this new world.

TVNZ is now receiving \$15million dollars incl. GST as charter money and next year that figure goes up to \$17 million. This money is handed out via the Ministry of Culture and it appears that TVNZ effectively decide (possibly after the event) which programmes receive the money.

On the one hand, this could be an advantage for us in that the capped TVNZ license fee situation can be broken and TVNZ put in more money to a project than previously.

I believe higher end projects are genuinely more possible under this regime.

I recently had conversations with TVNZ about the fact that the potential telemovie domestic funding, from TVNZ and NZOA on a charter type project could be as high as \$1.7 million rather than the older figure of \$1.1 million.

A study of their recent charter report indicates they put at least \$375,000 into the 90' Skin & Bone.

On the other hand, the use of this charter money by TVNZ could, I suspect, become part of their lobby to access the NZOA money directly for this own use.

**“See. Look we already spend some of your money wisely and well! Give us the rest. Abolish NZOA and give the 50million dollars a year to say a new uberagency like say The Ministry of Culture and Heritage. And they will give it to us”**

My main opposition to TVNZ having the money is simply and strongly one of principle. The more doors, the more open the competition in ideas and price.

The less chance of cabals and so forth.

None of this is personal to the current regime at TVNZ.

They are all honourable men as Caesar once said.

But NZOA has been a successful model. Local content hours have risen consistently since its introduction. And it does provide transparency.

It ain't broke so don't throw it out!!

## 5. Standing together

Recently a broadcasting executive said to me that something that really surprised him was how the independents don't stand together. Oh! I said that's because we are independents! And we don't all want to work in the internal production unit at TVNZ!

***Even if there are jobs going there at the moment.***

That in some way we see ourselves as the early filmmakers who traveled from the east coast out to California where the sun shone all day and there was this vast free enterprise capitalist system.

But what we now know about Hollywood is how powerful Jack Valenti is and what a great political and lobbying machine he runs. And we need to find a way, perhaps akin to a family, where we can have our film or programme making independence, yet meet more regularly and discuss in more depth the political issues that affect us. And that we lobby and negotiate as a group.

Because if we don't many of the threats that I talk about today will overwhelm us.

The growth and success of the family is of benefit to all the children. I have often spoken with the mayors of Wellington about what it takes to keep a particular company in Wellington. And my message has always been the same. There is a critical mass in Wellington that we can not fall below.

- If I find on a drama series that I cannot get the writers or the ideas from here.
- If I have to fly more than half the cast down from Auckland and hire too many crew from Australia.
- If I cannot process the film or fix the camera overnight etc etc...

then I will have to consider moving to Auckland. I need Peter Jackson to live and work in Wellington; I need Big House and Tom Scott Productions to make a go of it . I need Gaylene Preston and

Robin Laing to make far more shows that they do. And Vincent Burke not to move his shows to his Auckland office.

And we all need to encourage each other. And help each other at a practical level. Both in Wellington and throughout New Zealand.

If a production company in a city starts screwing over all its locations, then it hurts us all as we endeavor to get locations. If a company leaves unpaid bills around town, it hurts us all when we try and get a deal or credit or whatever.

None of this affects our own independence. It is to some extent the price of citizenship.

We also need to help each other politically and support our industry organisations like SPADA even if we don't agree with everything they do.

Later in this speech I will be talking about the increased interest that the government has in the screen production industry.

And one of the potential problems is that well meaning politicians or government servants will do the wrong thing.

Already we have seen a surprising lack of initial consultation on the foreign devils subsidy and, while I am initially inclined to blame the government officials involved, I do think that we have to make absolutely sure that our representative organisations do represent us and that they are strong and well funded and able to take part in the incredibly wide ranging discussions that are taking place every day in this city.

Please pay your SPADA subscription, pay your production levy, go to the meetings, and support the people who will support you.

United we stand, divided we fall.

## 6 Risk Reward

Earlier I spoke about risk. Risk is of course often coupled with notion of reward.

Reward comes in several flavours for producers.

Peer recognition.

Public recognition

Fees

And profits.

I believe financial reward should, amongst other things, be related to risk.

One of my concerns at the moment is that the risk reward ratio is completely out of whack. At the moment, there are not only many crew earning significantly more than producers but there are increasing numbers of line producers making more than producers. And this trend will continue with the 12 ½ % foreign devils subsidy. Line producers, and many many other people, are now regularly earning more than the producer of a locally financed show.

I have no problem with concept of a very good crew member earning more than a less experienced producer or director. Or an actor who brings an audience being the highest paid person on a job.

But these are not the people who are actually financing the shows and taking the real risks. They are not the people who are mortgaging their houses and making out personal guarantees and signing ridiculous liability documents.

We have no margin that reflects our risk.

Here is an extract from a British article about profits :

*Lambert sees the Act as vindication of the fact that although most indies made tiny profits, this wasn't down to them all being poor businessmen. "Television production has up to now been an incredibly low-margin business," he says. "Although the production mark-up is between 10-15%,*

*the bottom line margin is more realistically 3-5% of turnover. So either all indies are bad businessmen, or the terms of trade were against them.”*

*The fact that TV production fees stand at their current level is nothing more than “historical accident”, he believes. “In most other production sectors it’s over 20% and in the advertising business the fees have been as high as 35%. But when indie TV production began back in the early 80s there was no precedent.” The so-called independent sector has been in fact heavily dependent ever since.*

There you go, ratification from the UK of what we already know.

Our fees are low and our profits are low.

7. And now we discover that our ownership of our intellectual property rights and our distribution rights is also under threat from TVNZ.

It now seems as a matter of course that TVNZ will want distribution rights for programmes it invests in.

It also seems to want income streams and sometimes intellectual property rights associated with formats. This is in spite of the weird situation a couple of weeks ago where both Ian Fraser and Steve Maharey put out press releases on the same day saying how TVNZ really wants to be friends with the independents.

We must fight as hard as humanly possible to avoid giving up rights and income streams on our shows.

Even if on a particular show we don’t think the rights are worth anything, we must resist this move as a matter of principle.

None of us are driving flash enough cars yet. And if the odd person is, then they probably need a new red leather jacket for next season.

I'd now like to turn to one of the more bizarre conversations of recent times.

There use to be a saying about the three great lies. The most popular was "The cheque is in the mail", which in our industry (before the advent of email) was somehow altered slightly to "The script is in the mail".

One of the other sayings was, "I'm from the government, I'm here to help."

Bizarrely, it seems to now be a reality...

8. I'm from the government I'm here to help.

I recently received this letter from the Prime Minister..

*Dear Dave*

*I understand you're talking to the conference delegates at SPADA, and I'm nervous you're going to be critical of us. Marion Hobbs had a beastly time there two years ago, and I think you can be a very ungrateful lot.*

*I know I didn't give you the quota that we promised.*

*But, I have given you a Film Fund.*

*I have given you a screen task force.*

*I have increased the base Film Commission funding by \$10 million a year.*

*I have given foreign producers a 12.5% rebate for coming here to shoot.*

*I have anointed my disciple Paul Voight from Trade and Enterprise and sent him out into the highways and byways and restaurants of Los Angeles to invite the money men and the American producers back here to the temple.*

*I am conducting multiple reviews.*

*I have beefed up the Ministry of Culture.*

*I am incredibly well meaning and I really want to help.*

*Unfortunately I'm also a politician and I'm often busy and I forget sometimes to talk to you before I organise things on your behalf. Partly that's your fault for not realising that's how the system works. And partly that's my official's fault because they talk to each other a lot and don't hang out at the pub enough and talk to you and yours.*

*I hope the people at your conference understand, Dave, that we are busy running the country and we have to delegate. And we delegate to civil servants...*

*If replying, please do not expect an answer but for filing purposes please quote Helen, chapter 4 verses 6 to 18.*

So, is "I'm from the government, I'm here to help" a worry?

I genuinely think the politicians really want to help!

But I do think we need to be very wary of the civil servants.

There are by my rough count now around 40 civil servants in Wellington whose primary job involves the TV and Film industry. They have more direct access to their Ministers than you and I. They are spread across around 5 organisations and they outnumber the SPADA staff 10:1.

So even if we work longer hours, we're outnumbered. So we could get more foreign devil subsidies, NZOA may be subsumed by TVNZ and so on. They are well meaning, but do they understand us and our industry?

Here's a letter from the ministry for getting much more money in from overseas and making lots more really successful business who will all employ more people in all parts of the country who will all pay more tax.

*Dear Mr Gibson,*

*Regarding your letter of 1 November 2003, regarding what I think of local producers.*

*Frankly I have been appalled.*

*In fact right from my first meeting with the task force members I was appalled. The dress sense of most producers is dreadful and I feel this is symptomatic of your general lack of discipline. You can never agree on anything and you all laugh at each others jokes.*

*Some of the language is very bad as well. In fact Mr Gibson yours is particularly bad and as I told my wife I was particularly pleased when you resigned from the Taskforce, half way through. I thought you were unnecessarily rude to that nice man from the tax department.*

*I hope you don't write back to me anymore Mr Gibson but if you do please quote reference PA/DG/60 43 33 78 64.*

I'm from the government, I'm here to help could be re-written as  
I'm a politician, I genuinely want to help.  
I'm a civil servant, I want to help but I'm also interested in structures  
and empires and so forth...

We are generally an articulate and passionate people.

We know our business probably better than we think we do.

We need to articulate our concerns and ideas to the politicians and  
the civil servants. And because of our passion and consequently our  
occasional bad language we need to use translators as well.  
Such as SPADA with Penelope Borland.

I want now in the latter part of my speech to move back to us as  
producers (not politicians).

I want to talk about vision and ownership.

## 9. Keep the vision and the ownership

I've failed on specific shows. Probably only one of these really hurts. I produced a programme Newsflash that failed to get an audience and that somehow failed my own test for a programme that I was proud of. There were parts of the programme that I was proud of but not overall.

The programme started out OK but we followed the networks whims and requests too slavishly and lost our vision for the show. We let them tell us that they'd like it shot in Auckland so they could pop in, which they never did, and they insisted on the employment of a group of people who weren't homogeneous. And most particularly we failed because we lost our vision and our faith. Maybe we let them interfere a lot more than normally because we were not as sure of what we were doing with the show.

Increasingly these days, the networks are looking for more say in how a programme is made.

They want approvals over more people and more elements.

They are more likely to start sentences with the phrase "Well, what I would do is" OR "No, he or she is no good I don't want them on the show."

Is there a balance here that we can find?

Can we find a way to mutually respect what each brings to the table?

Can we find a way to maintain our professional dignity and not become a photographic service for the network?

Can we remain independent?

Are they sometimes treating us badly because we are hopeless and they know stuff that we should?

Or are they just arrogant?

One of the problems is that history is always written by the people in the building. And by the building I mean the TV station building. So

what we have to realise as producers is that there may be another version of the truth on your old shows, those shows that didn't work for example.

So what do we think about each other? And can that knowledge help us. I commissioned a survey – okay I went to Bodega, L'affare and the Koru Club.

We think

They don't get back to us quickly enough.

They don't know as much as they think they do.

Some of the things they say are stupid.

They interfere too much.

They don't schedule, market and publicise our programmes enough

They think

We aren't proactive enough.

We don't know as much as we think we do.

Some of the things we say are stupid.

We expect too much freedom.

We don't understand scheduling, marketing and publicity.

Mmmmm

Is there a pattern here?

I'm not sure. Maybe we need to go to counselling!

Is there a way out of this situation?

I genuinely don't know. Of all the threats and issues that I am talking about today, this is the issue that I find the most perplexing.

I do not want to be a photographic service for a network.

I want a genuine relationship where we respect each other all night and in the morning.

Which is a good, although slightly obscure segue to my next topic ,  
fear of failing.

Actually...

### 10. Fear of creative failing

Risk of a programme failing shouldn't in itself be a reason for an independent producer to fail. We need to allow for a creative or audience failure once in a while. Now no producer should be allowed to fail on a regular basis and its hard to imagine that happening. But we need to have an acceptance of failure. I can look around this room at a number of other producers and I know that you have your own Newsflash stories. And that you have probably learnt more from them then your successes. And that examining our own souls is a useful exercise.

But we need to be allowed to fail in an environment that accepts that only a few programmes or films are wildly successful and that this is the nature of the business. One executive (not a producer), said to me that one of the most extraordinary things that strikes him about this business is how bitchy people are about other peoples work and how much they seem to enjoy their fellow workers failures.

And with that in mind I thought I would give you a brief respite from my own prose and give you some of Clive James' poetry

*The book of my enemy has been remaindered  
and I am pleased.*

*In vast quantities it has been remaindered  
like a van-load of counterfeit that has been seized  
and sits in piles in a police warehouse,  
my enemy's much-prized efforts sits in piles  
in the kind of bookshop where remaindering occurs.*

*Great square stacks of rejected books and, between them, aisles  
one passes down reflecting on life's vanities  
pausing to remember all those thoughtful reviews*

*lavished to no avail upon one's enemy's book  
For behold, here is that book  
among these ranks and banks of duds,  
these ponderous and seemingly irreducible cairns  
of complete stiffs.*

*The book of my enemy has been remaindered  
and I rejoice.  
It has gone with bowed head like a defeated legion  
beneath the yoke.  
What avail him now his awards and prizes,  
the praise expended upon his meticulous technique,  
his individual new voice?  
Knocked into the middle of next week  
his brain child now consorts with the bad buys,  
the sinker, clinkers, dogs and dregs,  
the Edsels of the world of moveable type,  
the bummers that no amount of hype can shift,  
the unbudgeable turkeys.*

*Yea his slim volume with its understated wrapper  
bathes in the glare of the brightly jacketed Hitler's War Machine,  
his unmistakably individual new voice  
shares the same scrap yard with the forlorn skyscraper  
of the Kung Foo cookbook,  
his honesty proclaimed by himself and believed in by others,  
his renowned abhorrence of all posturing and pretence,  
is there with Pertwee's Promenades and Pierrots –  
one hundred years of Seaside Entertainment.  
and (oh, this above all) his sensibility,  
his sensibility in its hair-like filaments,  
his delicate quivering sensibility is now as one  
with Barbara Windsor's Book of Boobs,  
a volume graced by the descriptive rubric,  
"My Boobs will give everyone hours of fun".*

*Soon now a book of mine could be remaindered also,  
though not to the monumental extent*

*in which the chastisement of remaindering has been meted out  
to the Book of My Enemy,  
since in the case of my own book it will be due  
to a miscalculated print run, a marketing error –  
nothing to do with merit.  
But just suppose ye that such an event should hold  
some slight element of sadness, it will be offset  
by the memory of this sweet moment,  
Chill the champagne and polish the crystal goblets!  
The book of my enemy has been remaindered  
And I am glad, glad, glad, glad.”*

So my prayer is...

Can we create a situation where we analysis and dissect and try and criticise and work out why... but to somehow do it in a way that celebrates the fact that the programme or film even got made in the first place, and that we are all on some long escalator of learning.

#### 11. Lets be entrepreneurial ( last topic because good summary)

I believe we have failed to establish an entrepreneurial producer class. Why? Is it not in our natures to go out and organise and hire creative talent, to find the money to allow the talent to make the films or TV shows and then to plan and supervise the marketing screening and sales of these shows? I'd be disappointed if I thought it was some sort of entrepreneurial genetic failing as a nation. Surely we don't lack the sophistication to hack it on the international stage? Or the drive?

Are people becoming producers who perhaps don't understand the job description. About ten years ago I was on panel at the inaugural Western Australian conference. We were discussing the need to work internationally and what that meant. A questioner from the floor had what I call the John Smyth question.

You know the one that starts out seeming like a question but is really a long opinionated speech on the topic.

And this particular gentleman's opinion on the topic was that you couldn't work internationally from Perth because it was so far from the rest of the world.

When I suggested airplanes, he said they were too dear.

When I suggested telephones as a supplement p to the travel required, he complained about the time zones.

And when I suggested he get an alarm clock to wake up occasionally in the middle of the night a number of people came up to afterwards and thanked me for being so brutal.

I doubt he is working today as a producer.

Over the years I have discussed, particularly with the Film Commission, how we could somehow get more entrepreneurial producers. And to their credit they have spent a reasonable amount of time and money on schemes to encourage producers particularly in their emerging years.

Just recently there was a great idea where they advertised for a producer to go to Milan and help run the office there. I think they offered to pay certain costs and the producer got the opportunity to hang out in the Film Commission office while helping them and learning. And I was heartened that they received 17 applicants!

At Cannes in the late 1980's the Film Commission began to fund a number of budding producers to attend. Cannes at Film Festival time can be a pretty scary place and its not unusual to see people freeze up and not do much. This year, however, this one woman producer hustled so many meeting and was so entrepreneurial and aggressive in her work that I felt considerably shamed.

A month or two later I ran into her and was discussing her potential follow up and career.

" Oh I'm not doing the producing thing anymore. I found the Cannes thing really hard."

"But you were so good at it" I said.

“Yes but I hated it. It’s not what I want to do” she replied.  
Now at least she had been out and tried it and she recognised what was involved and how hard it was.  
And for \$5,000 well spent she moved on and the Film Commission could look for another budding producer.

Those of us who have chosen to stay in the role must become more entrepreneurial. We must focus on what is our core job.

Finding and developing projects.

Getting the money.

Hiring the right people

Supervising.

Marketing

Running a business.

You can’t do this job selectively!

Its like a triangle, there are 3 points that you have to have to be a fully rounded producer.

- Organisational
- Creative
- Entrepreneurial

If you only have organisational skills you are a line producer.

If you are only entrepreneurial you are an EP

If you only have creative you are a script exec. Or a concept developer

I have a letter here from Neil Wrightson from NZOA

*What is it with you producers? I’m sick and tired of doing your job for you. Half the time I have to tell you what’s going on at the network. I have to help you fill in you forms, check your applications, negotiate your licence fees with networks. Remind you to ask us for apiece end of the backend. Call yourselves independent! I don’t get paid enough to look after you guys.*

We must have a vision.

A number of years ago I was in a meeting with Gary Brown and Bettina Hollings and Geoff Steven from TV3. I was there with Chris Ellis who had not been in the business that long and we were discussing a comedy show. Gary Brown didn't seem to be responding well to the various ideas we were putting up.

Eventually exasperated Chris Ellis said to him “ Well what exactly do you want Gary?”

At which stage I turned to Chris and said “Shut up Chris, don't encourage him to do our job! ”.

We must have a vision.

A vision of a programme or film.

A vision of how to finance it.

And how to make and market it with integrity.

Sure our vision can be altered but it still needs to be our vision.

**WE** are the storytellers.

And we must be proactive and positive and exciting to be around and give off a vibe that we have the key to the universe.

Or at least to a great film or TV programme.

End

last word count 7200

Filename: DGibson spada speech 2003.doc  
Directory: W:\gr\spada\temp  
Template: C:\Documents and  
Settings\Administrator\Application  
Data\Microsoft\Templates\Normal.dot  
Title: Risk and reward  
Subject:  
Author: Dave Gibson  
Keywords:  
Comments:  
Creation Date: 27/11/2003 13:27  
Change Number: 2  
Last Saved On: 27/11/2003 13:27  
Last Saved By: Mhairead Connor  
Total Editing Time: 0 Minutes  
Last Printed On: 9/03/2004 12:19  
As of Last Complete Printing  
Number of Pages: 27  
Number of Words: 7,015 (approx.)  
Number of Characters: 31,569 (approx.)