



Tom Kelley:

And next up is a short story from Gail Anderson, who spent fifteen years at Rolling Stone Magazine culminating in a role as Senior Art Director there. I'm sure that Gail has some great stories. I mean, think of the parties, you know, Rolling Stone Magazine, but I don't know if she's gonna tell any of those stories from her rock 'n' roll days or not. But after leaving Rolling Stone, she joins SpotCo, a leading entertainment design agency here in New York, and has worked on a wide variety of theater-related projects ever since. If you spent any time in the city in the past several years, which means if you haven't been living under a rock, you've probably -- you've undoubtedly -- seen her work displayed on Broadway theaters as well as billboards, bus shelters and subway stations around town. Gail received an IAG -- AI -- I should know that AIGA, that's what it is, isn't it? AIGA, okay. Let me start over. Gail, yes as many of you know, Gail received an AIGA Medal this year for innovative entertainment design. By the way, she then lost it within like thirty minutes of receiving it and she's just gotten back today, but anyhow never mind that. And the description of her in the award announcement said that she embodies three virtues: Inspiring Art Director, Inspired Designer and Inspirational Teacher. I've just met Gail in person for the first time today and she seems just like the Michael Conforti, you know, archetype -- the eternal union archetype of the hero: she combines great talents and, you know, great awards that she received with an inherent modesty. She, unlike Hercules in the Disney movies, is not seeking out those rewards, but they seem to come to her because of her talent. So please give a warm welcome to Gail Anderson.

[Applause]

Gail Anderson:

Hi.

Audience:

Hi.

Gail Anderson:

I've got stories for you. But it's not so much the Rolling Stone stories, which are old at this point. It's the story of a show that I'm still working on right now and that we started when I was at the conference in Denver, so that's a good couple of months ago. That's almost a year ago, right? It's "9 to 5: The Musical." So now I've been at SpotCo for six years and we work on many, many comps for every show. When I was at Rolling Stone we did two or three, sometimes just one, and this has been really different for me because it's been just lots and lots of comps. This is the exception because this really is a lot of comps and sometimes a big musical, a Broadway musical will do a dozen versions, and it's a dozen different versions, not a dozen variations on an idea. It's a dozen versions and I move stuff around from designer to designer sometimes or we do it in teams, but it's a lot. "9 to 5" is different because it's about 50. And it went on for months and months and, in fact, it's still going on now.

Our producer is a really important guy. It's one guy, which is different. A show is usually a bunch of producers, general managers, there are lot of people who make the decisions on the art, so it's -- you wanna say it's designed by committee sometimes and sometimes it is. But it's lot of people chiming in with their opinion. It's one person on this. And there are

times when you work on a project that you can say, oh that jerk or what an asshole. This is like the loveliest guy ever, right? I have a crush, Drew has a crush on him, right, my boss? So we're fighting over this guy. And he couldn't be nicer and so because he's so nice -- which is a lesson to producers and clients everywhere -- because he's so lovely, we'll do anything for him. Right? So we've done a hundreds of these at this point and the suggestions that he makes are really good. You know, he's got really good ideas and he comes up with stuff that it's like I was gonna do that, but I got lazy or I was gonna do that, but I didn't bother or that's a good idea and we try it and okay. So, he's just really -- he's a good guy. And so the way we work, we do a bunch of comps, we put them up on a big metallic board. We pull stuff down, you don't like this, we start to take stuff down. What do you respond to? -- let's keep those up. What don't you like? -- no we'll take that down, too. We begin to eliminate and we get down to a smaller number, sometimes we get down to one right away. But we narrow down and from that pool we go back and we start to refine.

Again, so different from the way it worked at Rolling Stone, but it -- we sometimes show things that work, sometimes things that didn't quite work, things that were in progress that we stopped. It's a different way of working than what I was used to at Rolling Stone, where we sort of just showed, "This is the thing that I wanna do." Because it brings the client into the process and they don't -- we're not hiding anything from them. And I would never have thought of that, but there was something that Drew, sort of brought to the table. So, we're down to about this many now and I mean that's still a lot and we begin to refine and at this point, something that I've learned in the six years I've been there is that it's not just a poster. It's got to live in a lot of different places, so I can't just make this vertical board. I've got to begin to -- I put it everywhere now. I put it on T-shirts and billboards and streets snipes and subway two-sheets and mugs and anything to help the client make a decision faster, and for them to see it in context, and for us to see it in context. And really for the designers I worked with to see it in context, so that they are not just making a poster and that they are making something that's flexible, that works in color, that works in black and white, something they can animate. It's been sort of interesting, it's been a good exercise for everyone, but now we're just like, oh, put them on a bag, or put on a hat.

Meanwhile, we don't do any merchandising, but we're making this stuff left and right. So and I'm really getting into it, so in the end though we've done our zillions of comps and you know I have to say, my dear, my boyfriend there, who I'm e-mailing back and forth, who even e-mailed me while I was in jury duty. He's like, "what are you doing? How's it going?" You know, he's, you know, he's not happy still. And it's not that he's unhappy because he's so lovely and he would never say he was unhappy, but we're like, I want you to be happy because you're so nice. And at this point, though, everybody's worked on it. We have shifted this project around. I've work on it. I've worked with every designer, you know, we've had people come in. We had a new designer start and he thankfully was able to pull a logo from one of the comps and we piece together the three secretaries and thought, well what if we dangle the boss, you know. Dangle the boss from the phone cord, so we have the stars out in California dangled the boss from the phone cord and decided to work with John Ritter. He illustrated it to turn it into this. So this was the art for the run in L.A and they used part of it at least. This is a little weird because the foot is often, you know from the poster, but good enough, I see a logo I'm happy, you know dollies there in the corner. So, for New York, in the meantime, we start putting it on fake buses and anything just to make sure that this idea is working. And I feel like we're pretty close, you know, that's not the theater it's going into, but

we wanna make sure that it works on a marquee. Just making sure it works in every possible shape. And right now what I've been working on with the designers is we're going back and refining again: add more contrast, we're gonna change her hairstyle or working on the logo a little bit more. So it's still not quite over yet and it will be over by next -- by this upcoming Tuesday because something has to go on the paper. It's so, so whatever you see in the coming Sunday I think will be the final art. But the lesson is, that when somebody treats you nicely, you know, it just makes a world of difference and this guy who we're working with is the president of Showtime. You would think that he's got, you know, a network to run and all this other stuff to do. And all I want out of it in the end is, like, the rest of the season of "Dexter," so I can see what happens. And I just haven't had the nerve to ask him yet, but it's just -- he is so lovely and we're gonna get it right and maybe by the next conference I can show you whatever we ends up with. But, very quickly, John Ritter worked on it with us, but not that John Ritter. Terry Allen worked on it, Jamie Christophe. All these different illustrators worked on those comps. Seymour actually came up to the office and worked with us one afternoon and tried different ideas. Jonas Bergstrand, Laurie Rosenwald, so there's a lot of people working on this over this past year. Lou Beach, Eddie Guy, Phil Marden and who knows who else, but that's my story in five minutes seven minutes. So that's it.

[Applause]

Tom Kelley:

Thanks Gail. Well, okay, I think this first question is more for the audience than for Gail, which is, who besides me think she's holding out on the Rolling Stones stories, right? You know I got a 16-year-old daughter who'll go away, you know she was gone like five hours at the high school dance, you know, homecoming was last weekend. And then I'll say Maya what, you know like, how was the dance? Oh, fine. Anything happened? No, not really. You know meanwhile I watch "Gossip Girl," you know. I don't believe her. Sorry. In fact she watches "Gossip Girl," which irritates me even more. So, Gail you know, Mick Jagger, Tom Cruise, you know somebody I'm sure you have a story, you wanna share one with us?

Gail Anderson:

My only claim to fame there -- well, I got to meet a few cool people over the years there, very cool people. I should say, probably my biggest claim to fame was pointing out the men's room to Tom Cruise when he was there. I had my back to my office and he said, "Excuse me do you know where's the men's room is?" And it's like... [points] and that was it, so....

Tom Kelley:

I'm sure that will be in his memoirs, maybe not with a photo but....

Gail Anderson:

Yeah.

Tom Kelley:

Good. Okay. Well, that's all we're getting.

Gail Anderson:

Yeah.

Tom Kelley:

So...

Gail Anderson:

That's probably about it.

Tom Kelley:

You know, I've seen those photographs, but okay, never mind. So, look. So, your work now, your work at SpotCo, it's all in the world of theater, which has a moderately short half-life some of the time. You know, "9 to 5" seems like one of those that'll run forever, but it's hard to know.

Gail Anderson:

That's the thing. This I mean after years worth to work on this it can be gone in a month. You know if the reviews are bad and nobody wants to see it, that's it you know. So, that's happened. Note to Bob.

Tom Kelley:

And it affects how you feel about the project, right?

Gail Anderson:

At first, you know, you think no. I love it anyway. I love that little failure. But it gets tainted, you know it gets tainted and you buy into it. You begin to love the ones that are successes and you're sort of indifferent to the things that are lovely but still have that sort of stench of failure around them, so.... And I used to blame myself early on.

Tom Kelley:

Oh, the whole show flopped because of you.

Gail Anderson:

The shows failure was the fault of the designer.

Tom Kelley:

Yeah, and nothing to do with the actors and actresses and the music.

Gail Anderson:

No, no because, you know, it's my type so....

Tom Kelley:

There you go. This is the Design and Business conference so it's good that...

Gail Anderson:

But in fact, in fact, it's often the fault -- it goes back around to the advertising. In the meetings, that perhaps it was the way the show was designed or advertised that maybe that was the cause of the failure.

Tom Kelley:

There you go.

Gail Anderson:

And not the show.

Tom Kelley:

And not the show. It's never the show.

Gail Anderson:

No.

Tom Kelley:

Okay. So, although the shows are sometimes short the projects can be long. This sounds like quite a long one. You know...

Gail Anderson:

That was probably the longest ever.

Tom Kelley:

Oh really.

Gail Anderson:

That was absolutely the longest ever.

Tom Kelley:

So, you know we have this issue at IDEO where I work, where, you know, people have a interest in, you know, diversity and moving on to the next topic, you know, just for variety in their lives.

Gail Anderson:

That's true.

Tom Kelley:

How do you manage that? Or how do you deal with that issue on a long project?

Gail Anderson:

On something like this I just had to keep moving it, so that.... Somebody couldn't work on this for more than a few weeks or even a month or so at a time without running out of ideas. And I would keep shifting projects. I do that all the time anyway, so that, you know, two people are working on this for month, but then if it sticks around maybe I shift it to two other

people and so on and so on because we just, that's it, you only have... you know, nobody's got 50 of these in them.

Tom Kelley:

There you go.

Gail Anderson:

But it's hard because you don't want people to start, you know, sort of poking fun of the shows or you know, oh "9 to 5" or oh, "Shrek," but, you know, oh "Shrek" so...

Tom Kelley:

And, so by your definition of favorite what -- do you have favorites in, you know never mind Rolling Stone, but in the SpotCo world, favorite shows, favorite posters?

Gail Anderson:

There are few -- one favorite comes to mind and again probably because the show is so innovative, but "Avenue Q" was a great show. Like again, like I had anything to do with that, but I'll take that applause. That was a great show and a great idea and we got to have some fun with it and this little tiny idea made sense. And we weren't trying to do a big trick with the design, it was just fun and it spun off into good advertising that the other creative director did, Vinny Sainato, so it was good for everyone.

Tom Kelley:

Right.

Gail Anderson:

And they won a Tony.

Tom Kelley:

So we have less than a minute left, but you gave us the Tom Cruise encounter. You wanna tell us about the Oprah encounter?

Gail Anderson:

The Oprah encounter is pretty much the same, where's the ladies room? So, that -- yeah that's what it's come down to. I hold the medal and I like -- yeah, that doesn't seem to matter.

Tom Kelley:

There you go.

Gail Anderson:

That's it.

Tom Kelley:

Good. Thank you very much.

Gail Anderson:

Thanks.

[Applause]

[Music]