

5 Lessons From the 'Noah' Screenwriter

I had the opportunity last week to chat with Ari Handel, the screenwriter of the upcoming Paramount motion picture *Noah*.

Ari is both a producer and writer, known for *The Fountain* (2006), *Black Swan* (2010) and *The Wrestler* (2008). He was actually trained as a neuroscientist and earned his Ph.D. in that field. Then he made the decision to move into the entertainment business with his old friend Darren Aronofsky.

When it comes to *Noah*, we've heard the hype and the controversy, and I wanted to get straight to the writing. Here's what's important to Ari when it comes to writing:

1. With every project, he always sets either a daily word target or time limit. Once he hits either one, he rewards himself and stops. Without targets, we often become lost in the work. We get stranded in the ditch of never-ending work and never experience the victory of a job well done. Rewarding yourself for hitting a predetermined target is a very popular technique for serious writers. Ernest Hemingway became famous locally for mixing martinis after a hard day of writing. But how you reward yourself is up to you.

2. When he stops, he always leaves something to be done. That way when he picks up the next day, he's not stuck. He has an easy to start place to begin work. Writer's block often happens when a clean break leaves a writer without a hook to start again. When Ari leaves something undone at the end of one day, it gives him an easy place to start the next.

3. Although he's not a "morning person" normally, he becomes one when it comes to writing. Ari likes the early morning with no interruptions, no kids and no distractions. On my blog, I've mentioned the recent book *Daily Rituals* that tracks the

schedules of 161 artists, writers, painters, inventors and other original thinkers. The vast majority were morning people. Recent research indicates morning people make more money and have more fulfilled lives. While that's certainly not true of everyone, it's something to consider. I can get far more accomplished in two hours in the morning than I could in four hours later in the day.

4. Ari feels that research is vitally important to the writer. For *Noah*, not only did Ari work on the project for years, but he consulted early Christian and Jewish sources as well as both old and recent scholarship. The more solid the research, the more seriously you take the subject. Plus, he feels that even with imaginative work, you need to create a solid, believable world around the idea. Then you can build.

5. Ari will often come back to the writing later at night after the kids have gone to bed. Well, that just proves he's a family man. In fact, that was all we had time for because he had to leave to get to his daughter's birthday party.

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