

Learning From Rejection

by Carol McCormick

Rejection is one of the occupational hazards of being an entrepreneurial storyteller. Even after decades of experience, it can sting—especially when you’re going through a dry spell and staring at an empty work calendar.

The trick is to turn **“They didn’t choose me”** into **“What can this teach me about where, how, and for whom I’m a great fit?”**

As the Arabs say, “Where you stumble, there you find gold.”

“No” Is Information, Not Identity

When you receive a “NO,” **try to find out why**. Was another storyteller hired? Separating the rejection from the reason can make all the difference. Maybe:

- They had already booked someone.
- Their budget was cut.
- They chose a local performer.
- They wanted a different program theme.
- Their director or programming staff changed.
- They have a longstanding relationship with another storyteller.
- Your fee was outside their budget.
- Your proposal didn't communicate your particular magic quickly enough.

Only a small percentage of those reasons have anything to do with your storytelling ability. That's important, because we storytellers can easily translate:

“We went with someone else” into **“They didn't like me.”** Those are emphatically not the same.

Turn Rejection Into Research

After a rejection, ask yourself:

- What was outside my control? (Let it go.)
- What might I improve? (Find the lesson.)
- What can I do differently next time? (Turn the lesson into an action.)
- Was this job actually a good match for my skills and values?
- Might I simply not be ready for this particular work yet—material-wise, psychologically, or in terms of experience?

In other words, if a potential client says, “We aren't booking this program,” instead of thinking, “*My program isn't good enough*”, ask, “*Did I contact them early enough? Did my subject line grab attention? Did I make the program's benefits obvious? Did I make booking with me easy?*”

Those questions turn a rejection into **marketing data**.

Don't Burn the Bridge just because you didn't get across it this time.

Use the power of the follow-up.

A “no” today can become a “yes” six months from now. Organizations have changing budgets, changing staff, changing themes, changing directors, and changing programming needs. A gracious response can keep the door open: “Thanks for letting me know. I completely understand. I'd love to be considered if another opportunity comes up.” Then put them on your future-contact list.

Keep a “Yes File” as an antidote to rejection

When three “no's” arrive in one week, read your Yes File. It reminds you that your career is not measured by your most recent email. This file contains:

- Wonderful audience comments
- Thank-you notes
- Testimonials
- Positive, encouraging emails
- Photos of happy audiences
- Repeat bookings
- Referrals
- Stories about a listener who was deeply affected by your program
- Compliments from other professional storytellers
- Invitations to return

These are reminders that your work matters—even when the phone isn't ringing.

Find Your People

You don't need to be the right storyteller for EVERY audience. You need to find the audiences who say: “Oh! THIS is exactly what we've been looking for.” That's a very different business model.

A rejection can help you become more specific about your niche and mission: literacy programs, character-building stories, adult storytelling, transformational storytelling, social justice programs, ecological stories, historical storytelling—or whatever combination makes your work uniquely yours.

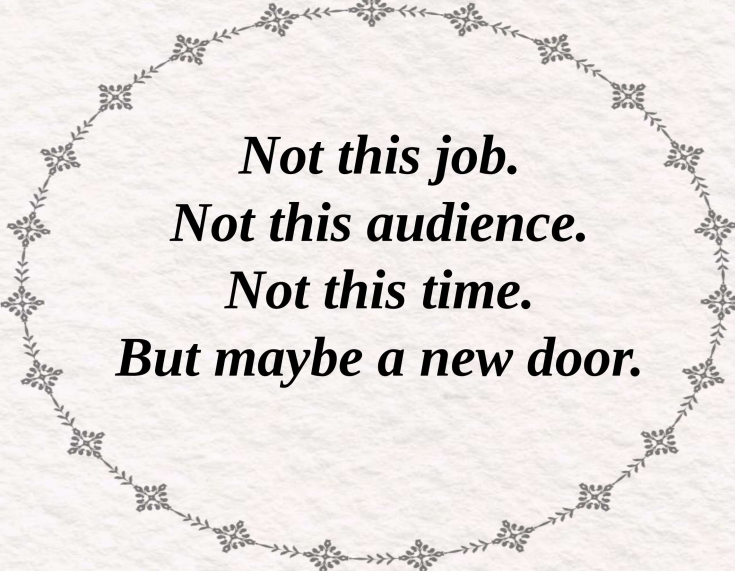
Strive to become more recognizable to the people who need what you do, instead of trying to become more appealing to everyone.

A rejection from one potential job can send you toward another booking, another audience, another story, another connection—and sometimes toward a gig that turns out to be far more satisfying than the one you originally pursued.

As Confucius reminds us: “Our greatest glory is not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall.”

So, when the next rejection arrives, take a breath. Look for the lesson. Add another piece of evidence to your Yes File. Make one small adjustment. Then keep going.

You might want to keep this mantra handy:



***Not this job.
Not this audience.
Not this time.
But maybe a new door.***



While teaching in an impoverished school district, Carol McCormick discovered that storytelling helped students of all abilities learn. As a corporate trainer and interfaith minister, she uses storytelling to introduce change, instill values, build connections between people, inspire action, and keep listeners engaged. She shares a wide variety of storytelling programs and workshops. Carol is the author of *A BRIDGE FOR GRANDMA*, a picture book to help lessen the fear of death. www.carolmccormick.net