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OPINION | COMMENTARY

The Blessing of Rejection

That job wasn't for you. So dig deep, work hard, and find a better one.

By Masada Siegel

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I burst out laughing when I read the rejection letter. I'd sent a TV news station a cover letter, a video of my reporting work, and a photo of myself with Gerald Ford. The letter began: "Dear Mr. Siegel."

I hadn't been mistaken for male since I was 5. That time, I was in the

park and a woman instructed my elder sister: "Tell the little boy to stop picking the leaves." I've avoided short haircuts ever since.

In this case, it was obvious no one at the station had bothered to look at my application. This was liberating. It reminded me rejection isn't personal.

Getting into college also came with a lot of noes. I vividly remember opening three rejection letters in one day. It was crushing. But my dad's response was to open a bottle of champagne. Always the optimist, he told me: "You *will* get into college, and we need to celebrate today." A few days later, when an acceptance arrived from the University of Southern California, it couldn't have been any sweeter.

Years later I was working for a tiny TV station, and I had big ideas. But they clashed with my boss's worldview, and he showed me the door. That hurt, but it also motivated me to reach for what I really wanted: to work in broadcast news in New York.

I moved from Arizona with no job, no contacts and no money. I slept on a friend's couch in Hoboken, N.J., for a few months while working temporary jobs and trying to find a way into the networks. It wasn't easy, but soon I freelanced as a field producer for two networks covering the presidential election and subsequently worked for CNN, Fox News Channel and CBS News over the next decade.

When something doesn't work out, my dad always asks, "What's next?" That's his word of wisdom: "Next." His positivity has shaped my own thinking.

Recently a friend lost his job. My response was "Congratulations."

He was astonished: "Did you just congratulate me?"

"Absolutely," I replied. "You've been treated terribly. They don't appreciate you. This is the push you need to get you to where you want to be instead of stagnating in a situation that makes you miserable."

That's how I've come to see rejection: As a push forward, not back. It is a motivator. And when you finally achieve your goals, you might find yourself more grateful and understanding for having been on the other side.

At USC they like to tell a story about Steven Spielberg. He was denied admission three times. But he didn't give up. He just kept getting better. No matter how many rejections you receive, you only need one yes. Hopefully it comes addressed to the appropriate honorific.

Ms. Siegel is a freelance journalist who covers international affairs, business and travel.

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