Video creativity and innovation start with collaboration.

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Way back in 1918, research from Harvard University, the Carnegie Foundation, and Stanford Research Center found that among nearly 40,000 engineers, roughly <u>85% said soft skills were most important</u> for job success, with only 15% saying technical skills and knowledge were most important.

Now, a century later, even more research has repeatedly confirmed that as long as you have the technical skills required for a job, being hired or promoted is based largely on soft skills like collaboration, communication, dependability, and problem-solving—those things that make you easy to work with. According to 89% of recruiters, <u>when a hire doesn't work out, it's usually because soft skills are lacking</u>, and employers in 2021 overwhelmingly named <u>soft skills as the qualities they want most in employees</u>.

The same patterns apply in today's video production environment, where <u>technical certifications are table stakes for video professionals</u>. At a certain point in your career, what really sets you apart is soft skills—especially the ability to work well with others.

"I interview a lot of very accomplished creatives, and the ones who are the most successful to a person are those who are very hard-working, very collaborative, and know how to listen as well as give information," says Lisa McNamara, a senior content writer for Frame.io and longtime film industry veteran.

No matter what your role is in the video production process, the right soft skills can help you succeed. In this eBook, we'll dig into some tips for collaborating effectively with creative teams, clients, and internal stakeholders. We'll also explore some personal habits that can make you a better collaborator, resulting in not only enjoyable working relationships, but also higher-quality work, new skills, and future career opportunities.

Collaborating with clients.

Working with clients, whether they're external collaborators or internal stakeholders, requires you to develop professional relationships, but at the end of the day, clients are people, too. If they find working with you to be smooth and enjoyable on a personal level, you'll build trust—the key to repeat business and referrals.

Learn to be a problem-solver. When you surface challenges to clients, offer possible solutions as well. Don't burden them with the responsibility for coming up with all the answers. The more problems you can solve, the easier the client's life becomes—and the more likely they are to want to work with you in the future.

Listen for what people are really saying. Client notes can sometimes seem off-base or uninformed, and if you're in the wrong headspace, it's easy to get defensive. But often there's a kernel of truth behind the comment, even if the client didn't know exactly how to articulate it. Look for what award-winning editor Zack Arnold, ACE, calls "the note behind the note" by asking why the client said what they did.

For example, if a client suggests removing a scene because it's too slow, but you know the scene needs to stay, look deeper to understand why they feel the scene is slow. It's possible they're confused something missing from the cut that makes it feel slow to them, and you can solve that issue tting the scene.
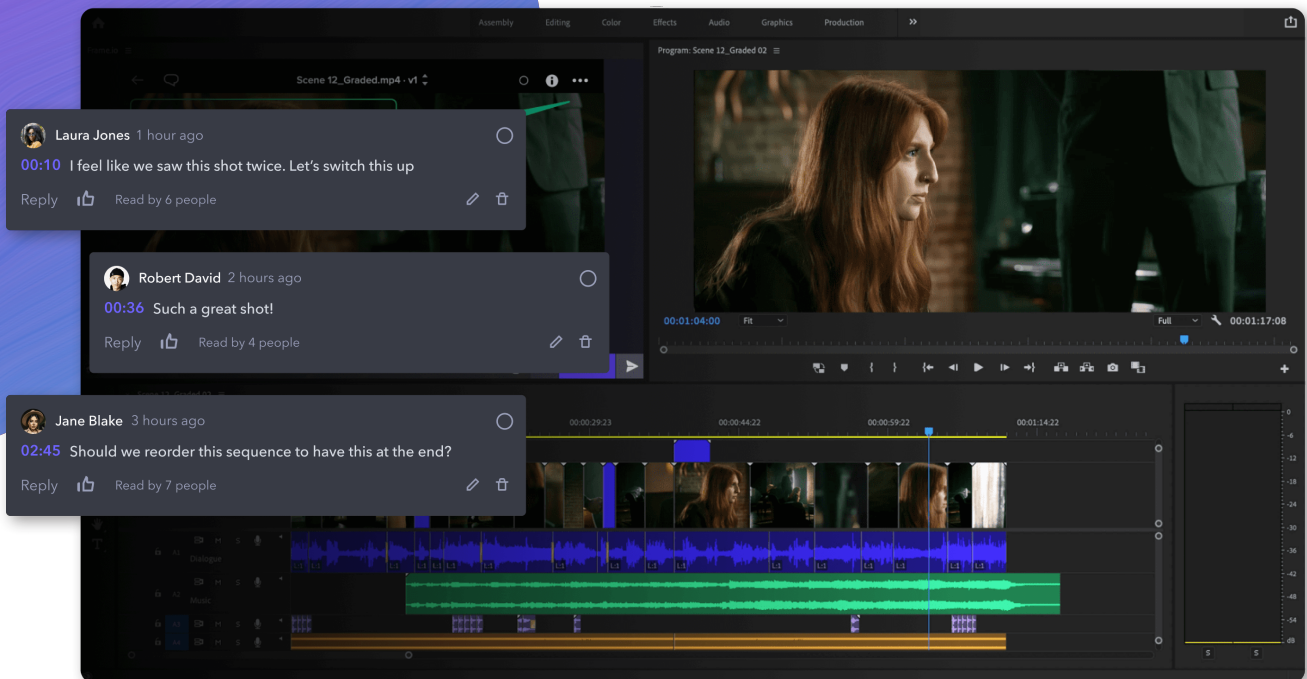
Set expectations up front for timing, costs, review cycles, and workflows. Even before you seal the deal, walking through the details of budgets and timelines can ensure surprises don't pop up later in the process. Agree on how many rounds of revision will be included at each development stage per the budget, what impact on timeline and budget that additional rounds of updates might have, how long clients have to provide feedback during review cycles, and who all the key stakeholders and approvers are—including people further up the chain of command who might think they only need to weigh in at the end.

Maintain frequent communication at every stage of the process. Getting client approval is more than a single step. Ideally, it's a continual process that involves early approvals for treatments, budgets, and dailies followed by editorial, color, sound, beauty, out QA approvals later in the process.

Take the time to ask new clients how they like to communicate trial and error to figure out each client's style.

"Some customers I had only liked things in really short bullet points in and get out, just give them the headlines. I've had other clients wh and detailed documents, and if that's what they needed, I would do th "That's where the soft skills come in handy."

Collaborating with internal team members.

The global shift toward remote and hybrid work in recent years has highlighted the importance of collaborative team workflows. Even for teams that were already working remotely, the jolt to industry norms has had ripple effects on how people work together by introducing new ideas, tools, and expectations.
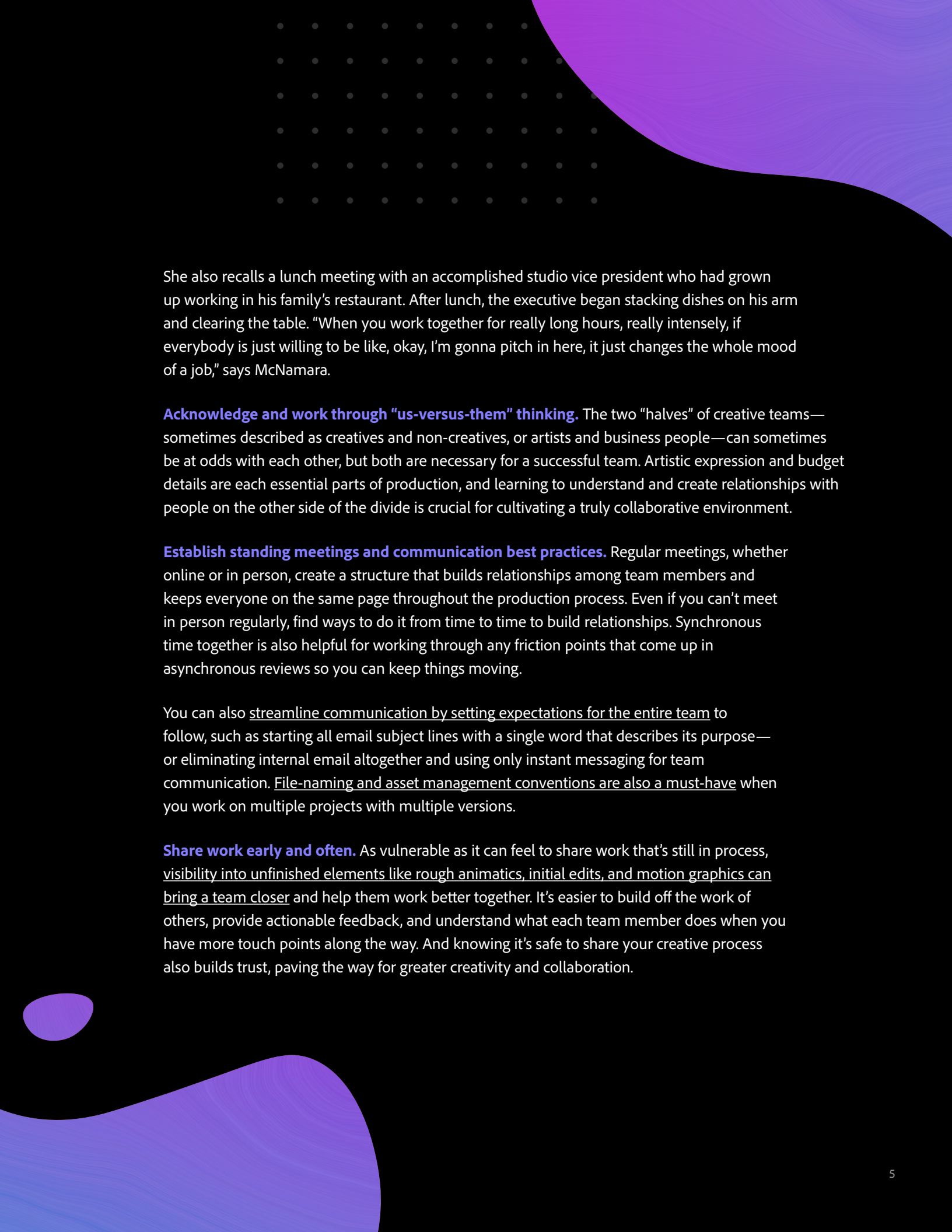
When fewer people work together in person, there are fewer informal communication channels. If you're not intentional about communication, things can fall through the cracks more easily— and if you're not intentional about relationships, they can stall.

If you work on an internal team, it's a good time to review how you work with others. Try these strategies for coming together as a team, whether you're working on set together or spread across the globe.

Respect others and stay humble. Whether someone is an executive or an assistant, each person has an important role that keeps things running smoothly. McNamara remembers working with an intern in the late 80s and crossing paths with him again on a project 35 years later—when he was the president of Paramount Pictures.

"Always treat everybody at every level with respect because they deserve it, because they're human beings, too—and because it's a small industry, and you don't know when you're going to run into people again," says McNamara.

She also recalls a lunch meeting with an accomplished studio vice president who had grown up working in his family's restaurant. After lunch, the executive began stacking dishes on his arm and clearing the table. "When you work together for really long hours, really intensely, if everybody is just willing to be like, okay, I'm gonna pitch in here, it just changes the whole mood of a job," says McNamara.

Acknowledge and work through "us-versus-them" thinking. The two "halves" of creative teams— sometimes described as creatives and non-creatives, or artists and business people—can sometimes be at odds with each other, but both are necessary for a successful team. Artistic expression and budget details are each essential parts of production, and learning to understand and create relationships with people on the other side of the divide is crucial for cultivating a truly collaborative environment.

Establish standing meetings and communication best practices. Regular meetings, whether online or in person, create a structure that builds relationships among team members and keeps everyone on the same page throughout the production process. Even if you can't meet in person regularly, find ways to do it from time to time to build relationships. Synchronous time together is also helpful for working through any friction points that come up in asynchronous reviews so you can keep things moving.

You can also streamline communication by setting expectations for the entire team to follow, such as starting all email subject lines with a single word that describes its purpose— or eliminating internal email altogether and using only instant messaging for team communication. File-naming and asset management conventions are also a must-have when you work on multiple projects with multiple versions.

Share work early and often. As vulnerable as it can feel to share work that's still in process, visibility into unfinished elements like rough animatics, initial edits, and motion graphics can bring a team closer and help them work better together. It's easier to build off the work of others, provide actionable feedback, and understand what each team member does when you have more touch points along the way. And knowing it's safe to share your creative process also builds trust, paving the way for greater creativity and collaboration.

Do unto others.

Jordan Peele, director of the critically acclaimed films *Get Out*, *Us*, and *Nope*, has built a reputation as a filmmaking genius. <u>A key component of this genius is his careful choice of collaborators</u>. On every production, he creates a "super team" of brilliant, innovative, and dedicated creatives to bring the best version of his vision to life, according to Peele's longtime editor, Nicholas Monsour. And he's quick to give everyone due credit and respect, which fosters a healthy environment of collaboration.

Whether it's cast members showing up at the set on their days off just to be there for the experience, or the inclusion of family and friends in the process of shaping the film, it's clear that Peele treats everyone who participates in his films with absolute respect.

"There is a level of calmness and civility that you don't normally encounter with such ambitious filmmaking," Monsour says. "There's a lot of pressure involved and a lot of stress coming from every angle, and somehow he manages it in a way that remains creative and fun."

It's also why they work as hard as they do, knowing that Peele's success is a reflection of their efforts. "When he's on the hunt for something, I'll go and do my own deep dive and have ten versions to show him the next time he walks into the room. Occasionally they make it all the way through the process, but also what I like is just being part of how we get to the final thing. Sometimes he has to see ten things that don't quite work to land on the one that does."

"With every project he continues to find new ways to challenge himself, and therefore us, so he continues to surprise me," Monsour says. "Even though I've watched him do it, it's still a bit of a magic trick, the way he's able to arrive at films that are 100 percent Jordan Peele films while engaging and respecting the creative input of the people he works with. It's just something I'll always be learning from, and hope I can bring that to any interactions I have with people I'm working with on projects."

Managing and inspiring a creative team.

Creative work requires more than just clocking hours at a keyboard. It involves artists investing energy and heart into their work—something executive producer Rueben Evans calls "soulwork." Managing creative teams calls for nurturing the human spirit in ways that foster creativity, vulnerability, and courage.

Use the following soft-skill approaches to inspire your team to higher levels of creativity.

Focus on your team members' strengths. Professional fulfillment comes from excelling at the things you're best at, not from working endlessly to mitigate your weaknesses. As a leader, be strategic about building out a creative team where each person can exercise their gifts—not just their technical skills, but also their personality and work style. Knowing who is good at strategy and who is good at execution, or who likes to work with others and who likes to do deep individual work, can help you find the right roles for each person and create a happier, more effective team.

Learn how and when to give feedback. Constructive feedback is specific, useful, and can be clearly applied. Avoid vague or critical comments like "I hate it" or "It just doesn't work." Instead, try to understand why someone did what they did and offer comments in a spirit of collaboration and support. Feedback is also most helpful when it's most actionable, so don't wait until a final cut to ask questions or share concerns.

Because of the emotional energy creatives put into their work, they can find it difficult to separate criticism of their work from criticism of them as a person. But when they know you value them as a person and a professional, they're more open to suggestions and critiques and more likely to invest even more time into getting the project right.

Facilitate personal and professional development. Even if you're managing people who have specialized skills and experience that you don't, you can still support their individual growth through courses, conferences, or side projects. Any skills they gain will be reflected in their work on your team, and knowing their manager cares about their personal growth as an artist builds the kind of trust that inspires people to do their best work.

Celebrate small wins. When team members put their souls into their work, a little recognition can go a long way toward replenishing their creative reservoirs. Thank and reward people publicly, and find ways for team members to recognize each other for not just big accomplishments, but also smaller achievements like a clever edit or an innovative shot.

At the same time, resist the urge to assign blame for failures. If you celebrate wins, but people feel afraid of failure, you'll only ever get small wins, rarely big ones. Blameless post-mortems are a productive method to address problems in a collaborative way that sparks solutions instead of dampening creativity.

Using soft skills to become a better collaborator.

Collaboration isn't only about the ability to work well with others. Good collaborators also have personal habits and processes that support their ability to work together and deliver on time.

Here are a few soft skills that can help you become a team player others are eager to work with.

Be willing to learn from others and teach what you know. Asking for help is a way to learn from other professionals and build strong relationships that enable even more creativity. Inviting colleagues to collaborate on a project is a creative challenge and relationship-building opportunity for them, too, making it a win-win.

Conversely, sharing your knowledge with others not only builds creative connections, it also deepens your own knowledge and skill. When you explain a concept or guide someone through a process, you're forced to understand it more thoroughly—and seeing the light go on for someone else can also be rewarding. Along with one-on-one mentoring, consider contributing to the profession through creating tutorials or courses and becoming known as someone others can approach with questions.

Master time management skills. Everyone's work style is different, but whatever yours is, you can benefit from being intentional about setting work hours and limiting distractions. Restricting your social media and email use to specific parts of the day and blocking out certain hours to work can help you protect your creative time, facilitate deep work, and complete assignments on time. Try setting hourly or daily goals for deep work and productivity, and have a plan to engage with any distractions once you're done working.

Set healthy work-life boundaries. You can't pour energy into a team if your own well is dry. Basic self-care practices like regular physical movement, prioritizing sleep, and taking control of your diet help you stay fresh and engaged. Maintaining a personal life outside of work is important for your mental health and balance. Be clear and firm about when you are and aren't available for work, and when you do show up, be fully present. And don't feel guilty for setting boundaries—avoiding burnout makes you a more valuable team member and a more pleasant person to be around.

Use case

An award-worthy career.

No one starts at the top. Editor Dana E. Glauberman knows better than almost anyone what it takes to work your way up and succeed in the film industry—including soft skills like collaboration.

In addition to work on seven films with director Jason Reitman (including *Thank You for Smoking*, *Juno*, and *Up in the Air*), Glauberman has most recently been recognized by the American Cinema Editors for her work on *The Mandalorian*.

"There's so much to learn through the filmmaking process, and I feel that it's important to start at the bottom and climb your way up the ladder," she says. "I've been in this business for many, many years and I still learn new things on every project that I work on. You can't expect to start at the top—you just have to put in the time to learn."

Another key to success in the film industry is establishing enduring relationships with creative partners. With three career-long mentors and a seven-picture (and counting) collaboration with the same director, Glauberman is an expert. "A successful director-editor relationship has to be one of complete trust and honesty," she says.

Over the course of her career, Glauberman has also learned to trust her instincts. That doesn't mean she thinks her opinions matter more than others. She's fiercely committed to being absolutely honest with her director, but she's also mindful of staying humble, a big part of being a great collaborator.

"I get so motivated and inspired when I'm surrounded by creative people. I love being with my crew—I'll call them into my room, have them look at scenes, and we'll talk about what's working and not working. Sometimes they come up with ideas I haven't thought of."

"I'm all about collaborating, and being able to work with talented filmmakers—and seeing a project through from the script to the finished product—really gives me a sense of accomplishment."

The enduring power of soft skills.

Hard skills evolve with new technologies, but soft skills and the ability to collaborate on a team will remain valuable, no matter what your video production process looks like. In the end, soft skills boil down to being kind, considerate, and respectful of others and yourself—skills that will take you further not only in your profession, but in every aspect of your life.

"There are some people who like to protect their work or protect their jobs, or to make it seem like only they can do it. Those people are not the ones who succeed at the very top. The ones who really succeed are the ones who collaborate and are generous with their knowledge—who have been mentored by somebody and will mentor somebody in exchange. Those are the things people who are very, very well regarded in the profession always do."

Lisa McNamara, Senior Content Writer, Frame.io

Video collaboration—designed for business.

Frame.io is a scalable video collaboration platform that can **cut video turnaround times by 31% and improve client satisfaction by 36%.** Accelerate your production workflows by sending media right from your camera to stakeholders anywhere with Camera to Cloud.

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