# Recognizing Burnout — The Importance of Mental Health for Filmmakers: A Q&A with Jon Bregal

Skateboarder turned accidental filmmaker—that was the start of an unexpected career for [Jon Bregal](https://jonathanbregel.com/). In high school, Jon broke his arm while skateboarding and found he could no longer keep up with his friends’ progression. So, he became sort of the “de facto filmer” and started making and selling skateboarding videos. Jon’s photography teacher recognized his passion and talent, and although it was never his dream, Jon found himself in film school, and the rest is history.

Following graduation, Bregal moved to New York City where he shot the news, all the while continuing to freelance and shoot passion projects with fellow filmmakers. But much to his dismay, the hours were long, and the burnout rate was real. “I felt that there was a lack of respect in the industry, and I wanted to change things and do things my own way,” said Jon.

Unhappy with the work they were producing as freelancers, Jon, and a friend of his came together as sort of the “genesis” for his production company, Variable. “One of the main reasons I was inspired to start Variable was to continue in the spirit of the community that we built on set, but with a more purposeful focus,” said Bregal.

Fast-forward to today, and after a three-year hiatus from the studio, Jon has morphed the production company into a community where filmmakers come together to prioritize wellness and career growth. We spoke with Jon to learn more about the backstory and the inspiration for the switch to pioneering a community that focuses on the importance of mental health.

## **MB: Why did Variable stop being a production company and what is the connection between the production company now as a mental health community?**

I had been burning the candle at both ends for a long time, and so had my business partner—we were operating at 150% for way too long. Ultimately, I burned out a few times along the way, and that launched me into a big depression. Every time I would shoot a film or go to shoot a commercial, I was basically operating on fumes. And it would take me back further away from me every time.

“Every film job is a roller coaster of emotions and physical instability. It requires a ton of traveling and a ton of reactivity. With every job, you have the potential to burn out and, in every job, people do burn out. There’s a kind of high you feel when you’re on set and then you must come back to your everyday, normal life. It can personally take me anywhere from two days to three weeks to feel like my mental health is back to normal after a job,” said Jon.

After a couple of years, I left the business and lost my confidence. I lost my sense of identity because for so long, I knew myself only as a filmmaker. I realized that I had a lot of work to do on myself and so much so, that I no longer felt that making films was a priority. I needed to figure out who I really was and rebuild myself from what felt like scratch. Soon after, the doors of the company closed and I moved to China to spend time with my girlfriend, who is now my wife.

The time away made me realize that relationships are the most important part of my life, and without them, there is no purpose for anything else. I continued to work, but while talking to others on film sets, I realized I wasn’t alone in my feelings and struggles. And that is precisely what sparked me to reignite Variable as a wellness community. We still had a solid following, so I decided to rebrand the production company around mental health awareness.

## **What is the biggest takeaway you’ve gained from your own personal mental health journey while working in the industry?**

I think we romanticize the entire crazy process—and that's one of the greatest problems. We're not willing to be real with what we felt while in those experiences.

One of the biggest things I’ve learned is to tune into my heart more—some people might call that their gut, and to just really understand the truth and value of my feelings and experiences. For the longest time, I didn’t do that because I was always looking at others and sizing myself up against what they were doing. There's this idea of “imposter syndrome” in the industry and it’s something that pops up all the time in the community. It was exhausting and painful and a stressful way to live.

“Every day I need to remind myself of my own worth, and it's not something I think will ever go away. The more we can practice things like meditation and self-care, the more we can live in a state of positivity.”

## **If you could provide one piece of advice for fellow filmmakers struggling with mental health, what would it be?**

When I was moving at a thousand miles an hour while working on sets, it was hard to put myself in other people’s shoes—now I realize that I wasn’t alone in my feelings.

I’ve learned that it’s all about having the courage to share your experiences with others because chances are other people in the room are feeling the same way, especially in the filmmaking space. As filmmakers, we’re constantly sizing ourselves up on Instagram and watching all the cool frames and films everyone else posts. It all comes down to self-love, self-compassion, and recognizing your worth.

## **What can filmmakers expect upon joining the community? When are you opening the doors?**

Variable is a community of filmmakers of all experience levels who care deeply about living well while pursuing their creative goals. Online meetings are regularly moderated for members to connect, share, and encourage one another. Members also gain access to a private social network, original content, and interactive events with trustworthy industry professionals.

The community is built around weekly calls featuring topics related to mental health, emotional health, and spirituality. We’ll provide practical tools and give participants the chance to share their experiences. It’s kind of like AA in a sense but for filmmakers. I’ve been to a handful of AA meetings and found a lot of value in not being judged while sharing your story.

Our goal is to confront life and work challenges with truth, kindness, and companionship. The Variable community is a place to learn, connect, heal, and grow. It is your place to make deep, lasting connections with filmmakers who are interested in the bigger picture of life outside of work alone.

As a member of the community, you will gain access to the following:

* Regularly scheduled live & interactive discussions surrounding the intersection of filmmaking and wellness
* Live Q&As with trustworthy industry professionals about the intersection of filmmaking and wellness
* Make meaningful connections with like-minded filmmakers
* Gain access to original content

We’re officially opening the doors to the community on June 21, but up until that point, we’ll continue to offer limited releases of 50 slots at a time. The slots are selling for $100 a year, and we already have a long waitlist.

“When people can come into a space and feel heard and safe to share their experiences, I think that’s the first step to transformation.”

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To learn more visit: <https://wearevariable.com/story>

Take a five-minute tour of the community: [vimeo.com/variable/communitytour](http://vimeo.com/variable/communitytour)

Join Variable’s 12.9k followers on Instagram: [instagram.com/wearevariable/](http://instagram.com/wearevariable/)