A dam Saunders caught the acting bug early, performing in professional plays from the age of 7. In junior high, he was part of a group that used theater to enlighten students about issues like alcoholism, divorce and AIDS—a mantra of social consciousness that he maintains in his work to this day.

After earning his MFA in acting from the Yale School of Drama, Saunders endeavored to create roles for himself as a screenwriter. When that proved too isolating, he turned to producing.

As Saunders puts it, the task required "nearly a decade of learning business models, working with investors, attending film markets and raising financing." The effort paid off with such producing credits as About Alex (2014), Shimmer Lake (2017) and When We First Met for Netflix, and the more recent Darby and the Dead (2022) for Hulu—the latter three under his Footprint Features banner.

When he added directing to the equation, Saunders says he "finally felt at peace." His first feature wearing these multiple hats, Dotty
& Soul (2022), premiered at the San Diego International Film Festival. His latest multihyphenate effort, Be Electric, just finished principal photography in Louisiana.

"I feel very fortunate to have found my purpose," he says, "now all I want to do is use the time I have on this planet to stay in my truth, tell these stories to the best of my ability and hopefully connect and inspire people along the way."

Here’s how Saunders describes a typical weekday:

**Mornings**
I wake up every morning and write for three hours. From 6 a.m. to 9 a.m., I write. My phone is on “do not disturb.” I don’t check emails or receive text messages. Of course, “writing” entails far more than just writing. It’s researching, outlining, writing treatments, watching comparable films, etc. It generally takes me about three months of research from initial idea—which begins with loglines and treatments—that I’m ready to take out. After I had the initial idea, I’ll have a pitch jokes line by line. About a year after I host a second reading. I’ll also host a reading with actors and invite writers I trust to give me detailed, honest notes. The second reading takes another month to complete before I host a second reading. I’ll also usually organize a comedy roundtable to which I invite a bunch of comics to talk about what the movie wants to be. A lot of these plans don’t survive the first day on set, but it’s important for me to be very clear about what I want to do. Then if I decide to pivot from that plan, it’s coming from a place of preparation. I really value this prep time and have found that I work best with other collaborators like my DP, Jay Visit or Jonathan McHugh, who also value the prep time and are willing to get in the trenches with me and do the work long before we are actually shooting.

**Early Afternoons**
Early afternoons are often spent working as a producer. This can mean phone calls or meetings with investors, revising pitch decks, delivering pitches, working with my wonderful longtime lawyer Lisa Callif on contracts, working with my producers on budgets, working with my AD on schedules, working with my DP on shot lists, working with my AD on schedules, working with my DP on shot lists, working with my DP on shot lists, working with my AD on schedules, working with my DP on shot lists.

**Late Mornings**
From 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., I’ll go into directing mode. If I’m in prep on something imminent, this means working with my DP on shot lists, Zooming/rehearsing with actors, talking with my designers, watching more comp films new and old—I’ve found that watching old classics can be even more informative than watching the most recent and/or trendy comps—and just generally fine-tuning in my mind what the movie wants to be.

**Early Afternoons**
This often has to do with making actor offers, learning who is new on the radar that I need to meet, etc. It can mean connecting with studios or producing partners on other projects we have in development. I also like to connect with our sales agents during this window if we are actively selling something at a market or getting ready to showcase something to buyers, which can take the form of packages or sizzles in addition to completed films.

**Late Afternoons**
Late afternoons are generally when I try to connect with industry folks—agents and managers specifically. This often has to do with maximizing every moment, learning who is new on the radar that I need to meet, etc. If we have wrapped or are not in immediate production, this can also mean casting sessions with studios or producing partners on other projects we have in development. We also like to connect with our sales agents during this window if we are actively selling something at a market or getting ready to showcase something to buyers, which can take the form of packages or sizzles in addition to completed films.

**Evenings**
When I’m not on location or on set, I cook dinner for my family every night. I really enjoy these couple hours because cooking is a nice stress reliever, and spending time with my family is a nice reset from my day. We’ll eat, play games, do bath time, etc., and then my kids (who are 3 and 5) will go to bed. Afterward, my wife and I will often watch old movies. I try to choose films by inspiring directors like Elia Kazan or Mike Nichols, to name two of my favorites, and let their work wash over me. Often notions I will encounter in these classic films will inspire me with ideas in my next day’s work. It can’t be total homework though, because my wife will get bored. We try to find entertaining movies we can both enjoy that also may carry monels of inspiration.

**Weekends**
On weekends, I still do the three-hour writing sessions in the mornings, but in the afternoons I’ll incorporate more of my acting work. In addition to my personal prep work on a role, this often includes meeting with my incredible acting coach, Gregory Berger-Sobeck. It’s also like prepping for a role, I’ll do that once a week for six to eight months in advance of shooting. Of course, every day is different in this business, and the unique nature of each project and role creates its own set of demands. I’m so grateful for this life and want to be as efficient as I can to maximize every moment.