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A Quick Guide To Film/Television Productions



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Foreword

This is a quick manual to all who are interested in film/television productions. It gives an overview of what to expect before embarking into the creative industry.

I dedicate this manual to everyone in the creative industry. We've all been there. We understand each other's pains and frustrations, and it's time for some serious change.

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Chapter 1: You Think You're A Producer/Director/Writer/Editor/Actor? Think Again!

It's exciting when you think about embarking into the world of entertainment, isn't it?

The glitz, the glamour, the fortune.

It's all very exciting and lucrative stuff when you think about it.

So you set out into the world, making your first trip towards all that fame and fortune that everyone desires. You thought that since you've participated in many school plays as an actor/director/writer, or you did a few house-party shows, you thought you could be the next Al Pacino or Meryl Streep. The best of the best. The crème de la crème.

You thought you could simply go up to a producer or a director and state that you are the next Spielberg or the next De Niro. You thought you are currently the next Spielberg or De Niro just because you dabbled in an obscure 10-minute short film in college that got you a few awards in a few equally obscure film festivals.

The truth is, with such a ridiculously selfish outlook, you'll be lucky if Spielberg or DeNiro didn't make long-lasting footprints on your egotistical butt.

Here's the thing. Everyone think they can act, sing, direct, paint, produce and dance. In the head, that is.

We all think we can express emotions or do a better job than the artistes themselves, which is great and all because it's good to think positive. But first you need to understand what you're about to get yourself into before jumping in blindly.

Everyone on this planet who has never been a part of the film/television industry think they can do a better job than the professionals themselves who have slogged all their lives to bring you laughter, tears and thrills.

Why do I say that? It's simple. What the audience see on the screens are the final products of days, weeks, months and years of work from a group of dedicated individuals. And since what people see are the finished products, people think it's super easy to do. Seriously, I've had someone who declared to me that 5 minutes of

being on camera takes only 5 minutes to do. If you actually thought that before reading this, you sure as hell don't belong in this line of work.

It doesn't mean that only the elite could be a part of this industry. Anyone could be a part of it with proper training, education, being humble, hardworking and open to ideas. Just don't come off the bat saying that you're the next film star simply because you managed to use a video camera to film your dog taking a piss in the dawn light and that the video received one million hits on YouTube. We're not impressed.

Chapter 2: If You Value Your Life, Do Not Irritate Your Writer/Director/Producer/Editor

In this chapter, we deal with two perspectives of how this can happen. One, how we as writers/directors/producers and editors get annoyed by our subordinates and two, how clients/sales staff/top management can get under our skins, therefore affecting the quality of the production.

Firstly to all you inexperienced subordinates.

If you're starting out in this industry as a small fry, like how I started, then you'd probably be holding the position of an intern, donut/tea/coffee girl/boy, a runner, a production assistant, tape assistant or a coordinator.

Congratulations! You've got your foot through the door. We hope it gets you into the room eventually because that door can cause some serious injury if it slams suddenly with your foot still jammed in it. Victims of such tragic circumstances usually never get back into the industry or have to be enrolled into some witness protection programme with full plastic surgery before they will ever be let in again.

Here's why.

As someone who's straggling at the bottom of the food chain, you have failed to observe the holy trinity listed as below.

Holy Trinity #1:

You failed to worship your seniors on the production and instead believed that you're a maverick of some sort who doesn't need to follow the tasks, instructions or assignments given to you by your producer or director. Worse still, if you show massive attitude and ego to your superiors, be assured that your name will be blacklisted and that you'd better be prepared to formulate your quick exit out of the industry once the production is done and dusted.

Holy Trinity #2:

You've no sense of deadlines. Need I explain more? Showing total disregard for deadlines shows you up as an unmotivated bastard with no sense of urgency of what will happen to a production's timeline because of your sloppy work ethics.

Holy Trinity #3:

You're constantly late for shoots or meetings. This shows you up as a moronic-bastard with no respect for other members of the production team. Heard the term 'being fashionably late'? This doesn't apply here in any way, shape or form. You're actually committing major career suicide moves. Get a watch or a rooster to wake you up on time in the mornings!

And now, clients/sales staff/top management people.

If you're a client with unrealistic expectations that does not match your budget or if you're a sales staff or top management who had promised your client the sun, the earth and the moon for a budget that can buy only two rolls of toilet paper, then expect your production team to come up with something of equal quality. Just because we can do things fast, it doesn't mean we want to. We'll get to that in the next chapter.

So you hate your director or producer because he/she let loose a good-for-nothing tirade directed at you in front of the whole crew, cast and office staff. He/she had you on the edge for weeks and made you whiplash the entire post-production team to deliver a project by Wednesday with maximum overtime and minimal sleep, only to postpone the deadline to a week later at the last minute.

You know what? It's ok to hate. In fact, it's normal. Tempers do fly on set and in the office. Circumstances change and so do deadlines. Creative people have their quirks and unrealistic expectations. We've seen it all; the assholes, the insane, the maniacs, the slave drivers.

And this is why we all live for drinking and smoking sessions where we huddled around like pack rats to commiserate our misery and rant about anything and everything under the sun.

But watch your tongue. In this industry, we love to gossip and ears are abound. Word gets around faster than a speeding bullet and sometimes karma will bite you in your ass, hard. Think twice if you find it funny to joke about stabbing your producer for revenge because shit like that will reach their ears. Producers/Directors/ Writers/ Editors can be your BFFs and can help turn you into the next biggest thing on film/television, or they could be your worst enemy manifested from your worst nightmare. You have been forewarned.

Chapter 3: Deadlines. Deadlines. Deadlines.

There're two types of deadlines in the creative world; ridiculous deadlines and really ridiculous deadlines. How do you differentiate between them?

A ridiculous deadline is when you tell the creative a date which is quite close to the date when you need your product to be showcased. And when the creative struggles and pushes everyone in his/her team to meet you initial said deadline, you decided to push the deadline back a few more weeks or months.

A really ridiculous deadline is when you tell the creative person on Monday that you need a completed creative product by the very next day.

Understand this. A film/video production doesn't ever, nor has it ever been produced overnight. This is not a word document on Microsoft office not is it an excel sheet or a power point presentation.

There are various stages involved from pre-production, production and post-production and each of them involve laborious, time-consuming work, even in today's 'quick-smart' digital age. So please, some appreciation for the craft. Thank you!

Another thing, creatives do not store ready-made film/video content up their asses to fit a client's every production requirement. Sure, there is generic footage that can be used across some productions, like city shots for example but even then, they cost money and we'll talk more about this in the next chapter.

As for "flexible deadlines", that term in itself is an oxymoron. Look up the meaning of those words first before using it frivolously.

If you practice either one of these habits, I suggest you re-read Chapter 2 before moving forward.

Chapter 4: Tight Pants, Asses, Budget and Resources

One of the main challenges when it comes to any kind of broadcast production is budget. With the world economy on a slow and steady decline, and technology is increasingly cheaper, faster and user friendly, you would think that you could produce a feature film or TV series with very little money. You thought wrong!

If you're trying to make a TV series or a film, even it's a short film, the price to make them are just as high as usual, if not higher. Do not expect to pull off a TV series like *Heroes* with a budget of \$20,000. Unless your idea of making a sci-fi series involves figurines made out of matchsticks and being burned by a lighter, stop dreaming that you can make a blockbuster series or movie with a measly budget.

Besides that, a lot of clients think that making a video using past footage or pre-shot is cheap. Far from it!

In this business, pre-shot video/film clips are known as stock footage. Guess what? These little visual treats come with a whole jumble-load of terms and conditions. Ever heard of copyright and loading fees, people? (Well, you probably didn't, which is why you're now reading this manual.)

Copyright and loading fees can take a huge bite out of your budget depending on the specs of the footage. People who provide stock footage make shit-loads of money and not one of them is going to give you a freebie. Especially when they've got a house in Malibu to upkeep and golf memberships to pay for but surprisingly, budgets never ever account for such costs unless it's a huge client with a huge ad agency.

Chapter 5: Mantra Practice “Miracles R Not Us”

Just as the title suggest, production personnel are not miracle workers. If you're a lousy writer even after you've gone through courses in screenwriting and the like, no amount of help from producers or production personnel alike could provide a miracle for your random stupidity. If you can't write good stuff, you simply can't write good stuff so don't even bother trying. Same goes to all other production people. If your idea of acting is to look constantly constipated or stoned, which is called the Kristen Stewart look, you're better off working at the reception counter. You'll get more sympathy there. As for would-be directors; those snot-nosed 17 year olds who think they're the next Christopher Nolan just because they can get their hands on a Red Camera; just because you've got the most high-tech camera equipment, doesn't mean you know how to direct. Here's a tip. If you're the type who sets their focus or settings on auto or using the presets, give it up because you know nothing.

There have been misconceptions about the power of the Producer. Yes, producers can make or break a production but that doesn't mean that the producer could wrangle up anything with a snap of their fingers. They're neither magicians nor are they super-humans with super powers. They're just people who have some connections. There's only so much they can do given the time and budget that they're working with. They cannot produce things or save productions at the last minute because they don't store miracles up their asses. They will do what they can for the benefit of the production but they can't perform miracles. A note to all producers out there; yes you work hard, yes you are the glue to the entire production team but no, you can't pull miracles out of your asses as and when they demand it so stop trying to do so before you pop a blood vessel and kill yourself.

Chapter 6: The Crystal Ball & Myth of Producers as Mind Readers

Let's get one thing straight here. When starting a production, the team of writers, directors and producers require a creative brief or a concept proposal.

While we all agree that creativity is all about being able to manifest an idea or thought into reality, it doesn't mean we're mind readers and can read exactly what it is a client, network, studio or executive producer wants out of a production.

While scripted productions are a little easier only because there's a concept/script/storyboard/set design mapped out, productions of the unscripted kind like reality/magazine/lifestyle shows or the making of a television commercial or corporate video, that's where the trouble begin. That's because the client/executive producer/network executives don't really know what they want to put out there.

In the case of corporate/business clients, the only thing they seem to place emphasis on is their logo and motto. Yes, those are obviously going to be in there. We're not stupid you know. We know what marketing strategies are which is why we are in this business of disseminating information.

What we need is your campaign direction for the year. What messages are you aiming for when it comes to your target audience? Which countries do you want this production to reach? How long is the campaign? How creative do you want it to be? Tell us, so we can help you.

Of course, in the real world, this rarely happens. So to all future producers out there reading this; be prepared to take up a course in fortune telling 101.

Chapter 7: Moronic Bosses & Clients; Do Not Become One.

You know you're a moron when you're asking the producer to be creative by using a template. You know you're a moron when you start using jargons that you cooked up yourself and pass it along to the creative like as though you know better than them. And you know you're a moron when you pretend to understand what film/television production is when clearly you don't, despite being explained to using layman words.

Below are some other examples of moronic behavior/mindsets.

Moronic Boss #1

So you made a killing in the financial markets or came to some inheritance from Grandpa. What to do with all that spare cash? Start a production house and realize your childhood dreams of making movies and creating the next Star Wars franchise.

Guess what? Just because you own a production house, it doesn't mean you know shit about making anything. So what if you know how to crunch the numbers; or know the difference between an action thriller and a porno; or who to rub shoulders with at the next cocktail networking party? When push comes to shove, the film/production business isn't about you, you and you. It's about what the audience wants and not just being a blind slave chasing the latest trends or making 'sexy' shows. You need to be able to connect with the audience and this is not an exact science that you can pin it to a formula, even with all the market research and focus groups.

And if you're smart, you should hire the right people and listen to them as they may have a few better ideas than you. I don't know how many times producers like me have had to revise edits or scripts or do re-shoots just because bosses like these have totally antiquated ideas or off-beat comments about a show or film. Your job as a boss is to sell the client creative ideas. If you're incapable of that, I suggest you continue to invest money in the stocks for better returns. Trust me, it'll save you a chemotherapy session or two.

Moronic Boss #2

Just because you can do every job in a production, it doesn't mean you should unless you're running the one-man show, then by all means. Employees are hired for a reason; to perform a function. And hopefully you've hired the right people who can do their job well. If so, congratulations and let us do our job!

We're all adults and unless proven otherwise, we should be trusted to do our work properly. Breathing down our necks and mirco-managing will not help us to be more efficient and productive in our work. You hired us, so look at the big picture that will keep the production and company afloat!

Or worse, you have no production experience but want to have a hand in everything and subsequently screwing things up with your idiocy and total lack of experience. Go back to your office/cubicle and stay there.

Moronic Boss #3

This part is dedicated to those companies/bosses who don't pay on time, who owns fly-by-the night operations that disappear without paying their employees but is later resurrected under a different name. Also for those who exploit their interns by making them pull in full-time work without any payment.

This includes those who implement cost-cutting measures by:

- a) Shunning the experienced professionals in favour of hiring interns and low-level employees to run the entire company;
- b) Paying people on holiday visas to freelance cheaply on the sly;
- c) Outsourcing the work to post houses in third world economies and running them like sweatshops to meet grueling and impossible deadlines.

Taking ideas from production houses and shop them to clients as your own? Heard of the term 'copyright law'?

We're watching you. We'll get you and we'll expose you. Then there'll be no rock on earth from which you can hide under.

Moronic Boss #4

This next category of bosses is what I call 'the buck passer'. This is the dude or dudette who climbed up the ranks of corporate la-la land through no talent whatsoever except through lip service and serious ass wiping. This person knows little or next to nothing about production so when a major project comes along, he dumps the entire responsibility on his/her team and tells them to 'own the project'. All that is fine and dandy but don't expect us to 'own the project', i.e. do the dirty work, if you want to be credited as the executive producer for doing diddly squat.

Expect this boss to never be answerable for his/her team and to lay blame on the producers should the shit hit the fans. He /She would also be the last person the team members can rely upon for solutions during crunch times or dire situations that could threaten the integrity or workflow of the production in question. In other words, he/she is pretty much a spanner in the works, a third wheel, a hump in the driveway, a roadblock, etc.

Call it what you will but this category of bosses only knows how to receive their monthly salaries by being ostriches with their heads in the ground. Really not cool.

Moronic Client #1

We creatives are in the business because we generally like what we do. And like everybody else, we have bills and rents to pay, houses that need mortgaging, a family to raise, and a retirement which we need to save for. And yet for some bizarre reason, money is a surprisingly sensitive problem in our industry. Unless you are born with a silver spoon in your mouth and lucky to be in the top income league, for the rest of us, there seems to be a general reluctance to pay us according to our true worth. Sorry if the word 'money' sounds crude next to creativity and passion. But hey, we need to eat and making a living too. All too often we hear the same request "We have a tight budget; can you do for pro-bono/discount/barter trade/free?"

If I step into a restaurant, I'm expected to pay in full after the meal. You don't haggle with the waiters about the price. Or ask them if you can dine for free because tonight is your anniversary and you really want to celebrate this special event with a wonderful candlelight dinner. Money is a tad tight at the moment but you have a gigantic network of well-heeled friends whom you can tap on and spread the word of

how fantastic the restaurant is. It really is a great opportunity to get their name out there.

Be ready to receive a boot print on your ass from the waiter.

If you don't see the value of paying for our services because your child/nephew/grandmother/pet can act/direct/design/take photos, then by all means ask them to do a professional job for you. Good luck!

Moronic Client #2

So you know the meaning of the terms 'zooming in', 'air brush', 'depth of field'. Congratulations! You know how to read and spell. Just because you learn some industry jargon, you don't have to show off to us or tell us how we should do our jobs. Then again, why are you hiring us if you already know how to do our jobs? Could it be that you're just typically lazy to do it yourself? Then that would make you Moronic Boss #4. Could it be that you think you know way too much and therefore you want to test others to see if they know as much as you, if not more? Then that would mean you either skipped Chapter 1 or you have dyslexia because you can't seem to understand it before reaching this chapter.

Moronic Client #3

If you thought that the creative industry is expensive, let me tell you something else. All you clients are cheapskates! You want something nice, something good, something that's created personally for you. You engage us to do it but you don't want to pay the time and effort that goes into creating that product. Instead, you tell us that you've found places where you can buy a template that you can use for all the stuff you want and you don't have to pay anything more than \$20. My reply to that? Fine. Then go do it yourself. Why waste our time telling you that it takes brains and creative effort to come up with something original when all you want to ever do is spit in our faces by saying you can get a bloody template that can do the job for you. It's a template! Therefore it's not original. You want to be one of the millions who use the same template for your stuff, so be it. There's no need to come to us. Oh, and if you get stuck trying to figure out how to use the template, don't bother calling. We've got better things to do with our time.

Chapter 8: Interns And Wannabes; Why We Don't Give A Crap!

The television and film industries were once platforms for the artistic and the commercial to tango together in the name of entertainment. Like all art forms, it brought various people of varying talent, skills and passion to create content that would make audiences laugh/cry/inspire/be angry or even shock. Sad to say those days are gone.

In today's world of instant gratification, young punks forget that this is a craft and to hone a craft, it takes a couple of years of learning. Not just in your classrooms, you morons, but in the school of life. You can't be good at anything if you don't bring unique life experiences to the table. In fact, if you've been mollycoddled all your life while thinking that you're already Peter Jackson in the making, I'm firing you from the set.

Peter Jackson made movies on a Super8 when he was a teen and he even slogged at a printing press. But he always learned and absorbed everything he saw, heard, felt and touched. (Note: If you don't know what a Super8 is, why are you still reading this manual?)

While we understand that there's prodigies that come rocking the world of entertainment every once in awhile, like Fabio 'I can't believe it's not butter', these prodigies and auteurs are few and far in between. Kind of like finding a pair of XXXL Top Shop skinny jeans.

As an intern and wannabe, leave your unbridled egos at home with your mummy and daddy and let the real work begin. You're not entitled to be a producer during your first year on the job. Just like you've never been qualified to receive a lifetime supply of fries from McDonald's.

We seniors in the industry take our jobs seriously because it's our calling and we've paid our dues for it. If you're not willing to wash our grandma's dirty laundry or fetch us donuts and temp for at least a year or two, please don't bother to get into this industry.

Just in case you think we're just fuming at the ears and babbling nonsense, let's take a look at a few case studies.

The Wannabes

Case Study #1: The 'No-Show'

The No. 1 cardinal sin you can commit to guarantee a grinding halt to your career. Once you have committed to attend a meeting/audition/interview/filming session, you must arrive at the stipulated time by hook or by crook because time is precious and we don't suffer fools who waste our time.

You had better be held at gunpoint or your appendix is about to explode if you're a no-show to a filming session. For your general information, filming sessions cost shitloads of money to run. We're not buying your story of calling the assistant director at 4:30 in the morning telling him that you're sorry you can't turn up for the shoot because you're now in hospital for food poisoning. That's just lame as we know that you're too drunk to turn up at the 7am call time after a night of hard partying. We weren't born yesterday.

If you ever did dare to pull off a no-show and refuse to answer frantic calls from the production team or your manager, that's a sure bet that you'll never hear from the producer ever again. Even Hollywood stars don't get away with such behavior. What makes you so bloody special that we'll be compelled to treat you differently for your irresponsible actions?

Case Study #2: The Over-Enthusiastic

After James Cameron finished his Terminator script, he shopped it around before finding a production house that's willing to take a risk on a largely inexperienced feature film director. The rest as they say is history. Like every other industry, we all have to take the initiative to knock on doors and get our names out there in the industry, especially in the early stages of our careers.

But there's a thin line between persistence and harassment. It's one thing to actively approach people for projects or jobs. Bombarding the HR with emails or constantly annoying the producer to give you a job is a big no-no. Blindly firing resumes on

Facebook/LinkedIn/forum pages to advertise your wares won't get you that far either. Learn to sell yourself properly.

Do yourself a favour and protect yourselves. Do not send any unsolicited scripts or pitches because a reputable company would not touch them; or you may just run into a moronic boss #3.

The Interns

Case Study #1: "I Want My Mummy/Daddy"

If you're old enough to vote or drink, you're surely old enough to be responsible and take charge of your own career, including your own internship.

If you need your mummy or daddy to call us and complain that you're being overworked or doing menial stuff, then you're not ready to enter this industry or any other industry for that matter. If you're dumb enough to get yourself fired from an internship, we've better things to do with our time than to hear out parents or teachers begging us to give the kids their internships back. Grow up!

Case Study #2: "I Like Wearing Mini Skirts"

We get it. You're young and you look cute in a short skirt with matching skimpy top and high heels. Some of us want legs like yours while others enjoy looking at your legs. But there's the tricky issue of health and safety especially when you're on set with equipment and cables. We don't want you to sprain your pretty feet when you're running around and subsequently incur more paperwork and cost than we care to handle.

While the dress code for the TV/film production industry is more causal than a bank's, there's still a dress code in existence. And if you want to be taken seriously and advance in your career, you still have to dress the part when meeting clients or going for interviews. Save the clubbing wear for the actual clubbing.

Chapter 9: Death To The Salesmen & Ad Agencies

If the terrorists who were responsible for 9/11 really wanted to make a change, they should've targeted all the useless sales teams in media and ad agencies around the world. They really add nothing to the equation except painful long nights in the edit suites, which could end up being a total waste of one's time for very little money, and all for the mighty dollar that ends up in their commission baskets.

I've a wife, 2 kids and a donkey to upkeep. Do you really think I want to waste time on a project where there isn't a creative brief or a team of effective creative professionals on board to make my life a little easier?

The missing creative brief – something so many ad agencies charge their clients for but somehow is conveniently never passed on to their production teams, leaving many producers with questions and uncertainties about the direction of a project. Not to mention major alcoholic problems as well.

It's also very surprising that networks or production sales teams who get these ad agencies as their clients, never ask for this document; the bible to any production.

Hence the production team is expected to do either one of the following:

- a) Come up with a creative brief themselves. Then hope and pray the clients will approve it
- b) Work with a creative brief from a clever ad agency guy that is so far off from the client's campaign direction that you'd think Darth Vader actually wrote it.
- c) Work with no creative brief and hope and pray that the end product is satisfactory to all parties involved

Not only do producers have to deal with the stress of an insurmountable deadline, but also deal with the stress of walking a tight rope; one they know they will fall off from because there was no creative brief to begin with.

Meanwhile the wife, kids and donkey that require high maintenance are being neglected.

Speaking of high maintenance, media salespeople are a weird bunch altogether. My experience in America was completely flipped around when I experienced first-hand how these people work and it can be summed up in two simple words: ass-wiping.

These people literally sell air-times on shows to clients as a 40-minute infomercial. What has happened to TV? Isn't content king, not an ad?

Ad sales people here are also fearful of selling a dynamic, edgy concept to their clients who are already doing edgy ad campaigns around the rest of the world. Here, the more literal your ad is with loads of 'logo-screen presence', the better your chances of getting a client to buy into it.

If I wanted screen-presence, I want to see Hugh Jackman or Kate Winslet burning it up on television. Not a bloody logo!

Let me tell you this. Clients are also fearful of edgy, abstract concepts because hey, no one wants to look stupid should the campaign bomb in their face. These clients forget that in today's world, edgy and stupidity works. These are the messages that are going viral because they break the rules.

Just ask 'Fifty Shade of Humdrum' author EL James. Who's laughing all the way to the bank now? Certainly not me or my donkey, dammit!

Chapter 10: The Closing Note.

This manual is not to discourage people from being a part of the creative industry, it's to dispel any misconceptions, myths, expectations people have towards the process and the individuals working in this line. People in film and television are hard workers who are sometimes underappreciated, both inside and outside of the industry. Despite how simple it looks on television and in the cinemas, it's not easy doing what we do. Long hours, high tempers, high stresses. We do have fun sometimes, if we're lucky to work with the right people and that's a rarity. As they say, if you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen. We stayed because we're sadistic. But if you're thinking of getting a little burned, don't say we didn't warn you.

THE END!!