

PRODUCTION ASSISTANT

THE OFFICAL GUIDE

*Tips, Tricks and Handy Suggestions
For People Who Want To Make It BIG
While Being Screamed At On Channel One*

INTRODUCTION BY DREWPROPS

WRITTEN BY
AUTHORSHIP IN QUESTION

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In 1995 Line Producer Victoria Westhead distributed this informational memo to her Production Assistants during the production of the independent film "Neon Bible", shot due east of Atlanta, Georgia. Producer Mary Courtney has indicated that this document may easily pre-date Ms. Westhead since Mary recalls having read an identical document *at least* a decade ago, so its origin remains shrouded in mystery. The as-yet-undetermined author of this informational guide has helped shape the next generation of film-makers in ways that have not yet been imagined. But the reason I took the time to carefully re-type this memo in its entirety to share with the world is that I was SO blown away by the intensity of the writer....

This isn't an 8-page memo. It is a MANIFESTO.

It is unflinching. It is didactic. It is ridiculously overbearing and anyone who has been in film for any length of time will roar with laughter as they flip through these pages.

And yet it cracks the nut wide open.

Every new PA should be handed this document to read. It captures the essence of our industry in a snapshot, delving through a mad topography of knowledge that newcomers so often lack. The author tackles such diverse topics as discretion, thoroughness, industry, initiative and responsibility. The author defines on-set walkie-talkie terminology and provides a list of necessary supplies that a PA should have on their person at all times.

It chastens the reader like a relentless Drill Instructor, urging them to "Try to keep busy" and "COMMUNICATE!" and "Be Punctual!". While this memo may at first blush seem completely mad in its never-ending list of edicts, it is in reality a compassionate attempt to prepare the innocent for the firestorm of personal confrontation and physical duress they will experience when the cameras start rolling.

And that is perhaps the funniest thing about this document. Those who read it through the battle-experienced blinders of years of film-production can think of the countless times they've violated the guidelines presented herein. Every aspect of film mentioned in this guide is a reminder of a funny story for film veterans, something that the author likely never considered.

The very concept of encapsulating a navigation chart through the dangerous waters of movie-making in 8 pages is simultaneously insane and commendable.

Read the guide and decide for yourself.

Yours in Film,
DREWPROPS
Editor In Chief

Our thanks go out to Production Coordinator Steve Cainas for providing us a copy of the PA Guide so we could convert it into electronic form and share it with the world. Our thanks to Victoria Westhead for delivering this document to our doorstep and to Mary Courtney for helping us investigate the origin of the information....Our thanks go out to this document's original author.... we're your biggest fans and hope that you receive the fame you deserve for writing it. If you know more about the origins of this document or if you find any errors in this document, please alert our transcripts team at ->

transcripts@drewprops.com

Guide to being the best PA/Intern you can be...

- The one thing that everyone knows about the film business is that movies don't get made without good PA's and interns.
- Just because your work responsibilities may seem "entry level" doesn't mean the things you do are not important.
- Making sure a phone call goes to the right person, that the address and zip code on a package are correct, and checking with the coordinator or assistant coordinator before giving out any information are ways to help the production run smoothly.
- Please don't be afraid to ask us questions, or double check.
- Take the initiative to look for telephone numbers on contact sheets instead of asking someone who might be busy. Try to think things through on your own and then ask for help if you need it and ask for confirmation that your way of handling something is correct.
- Ask the person giving you the task to be clear about how they want it done. Ask as many questions as you can while they are explaining the job to you. Try not to assume too much. Ask them to be as clear as possible.

And then...FOLLOW THROUGH with your assignment. Let the person know where you stand and/or that the job is done, cause as far as they're concerned, it's not done till you tell them or show them it is.

- Tension can often run very high around a production since so much is at stake. Don't take it personally if someone doesn't have patience for a mistake you might have innocently made or because you're new and just don't know. It's not your fault and everyone knows that, but there will be times you can end up being the brunt of someone else's stress, that's part of the job. Let it roll off your back if you can and if you stick it out in this business, some day you'll know what it feels like...

BIG TIP:

- Try to keep busy. There is always something to be done, and if you can't find something to do, ask those who assign tasks. When you're idle it may appear that you're not doing your job.

In addition, do not distract those around you who may be engaged in a task. Take your cues from your supervisors. Don't start up lengthy conversations during a busy work day.

PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY:

Around the production office and/or shooting set you will be privy to and (inadvertently overhear) many conversations that are of an extremely sensitive nature. You must always assume that anything you hear concerning budgets, personnel, production problems, etc. is information you must not repeat. Certainly, if you hear something that concerns you personally, you can speak with your immediate supervisor. You should especially take care not to talk to people outside the production about things you hear around the set or office. Betraying the confidence of a production is certainly something that you can get fired for. Please protect the production as well as your job by being a responsible, discrete PA. Being labeled the source of gossip is not a great thing for your career and in some cases can get you fired.

What is a P.A.?

- You are the "protective buffer", the eyes and ears, the circulatory system of the crew. The only one who comes in contact with everyone involved.
- Your attitude affects everyone, be courteous, kind, and considerate.

P.A. Supplies:

pouch	pad of paper	pen/pencil/sharpie
watch	work gloves	knife
driver's license	matches	clothespin
crew list	contact list	call sheet
maglight	belt (for walkie)	chewing gum
quarters (for phone calls)		

- Know who you work for.
- NEVER leave an assignment without checking with the person who gave it to you.
- Follow through. Let your supervisor know when a task is completed.
- COMMUNICATE! Check back/check in/always confirm/ask questions when in doubt/don't allow yourself to be forgotten/let the supervisor know you're available for new task.
- Use common sense.
- Be responsible. Let 2nd AD or Unit/Location Manager know of any conflicts in your schedule ASAP.
- Be Punctual! Being late is one thing that any member of the crew can be fired for. You're lucky if you get a second chance.
- Don't second guess. ASK!!!
- Check with AD or Unit/Location Manager before leaving at the end of a shoot day. Make sure there is nothing else you can do to help. Cleaning a dirty set or location at wrap is every PA's responsibility.
- Remember: just about everyone on set did your job too.

A.D. DEPARTMENT:

(Set protocol)

- The AD's are your connection with what is going on on set. The 1ST AD stays by the camera and basically instructs the entire crew based on what is happening at Camera. They instruct the 2ND AD. They are your connection with the Camera Team and therefore the MOVIE.j If you are aware of what's going on you will be a better PA.
- Don't speak to Director or Talent unless they speak first. Most people will not be rude and ignore you if you try to strike up a conversation, but be aware that the director and the actors, while standing on set are not available for chatting. They are concentrating on their extremely hard jobs. If they talk to you, you should certainly respond, but you should not be the one to lead or extend the conversation. But still it does help to let them know you support them, believe in them, and genuinely care about the project.
- Absolutely no conversation on set or around Talent.
- Repeat AD's "calls and cuts"
- Keep walkies down on set.
- If you don't have a headset, keep walkies close to your ear.
- Don't just stand by waiting to be told what to do, ask the 2nd AD or 2nd 2nd AD how you can help.

ON SET TERMINOLOGY

- Rehearsal: it is time for rehearsal – be quiet
- Stand-by: we are moments away from rehearsing/shooting/wild sound
- Lock-it-up: stop anyone & everyone from walking onto set and talking
- Rolling: camera is running and we've begun to shoot film
- Cut: camera is off now
- Back-to-one: actors/dolly are requested to return to their original positions
- Checking the gate: we are looking into the camera to make sure nothing went wrong technically on the last take
- New deal, camera moves: we are moving to a new shot
- Flying in: this should be your reply whenever somebody has requested something and you're getting it
- Eighty-sixed: canceled
- "What's your twenty?": where are you?
- Ten-one-hundred: radio-speak for going to the bathroom
- Police the area: make sure there is no garbage, etc.

NOTE: "Lock it up": stop anyone from walking onto set. Look away from the set, so you can see potential problems before they happen

REMEMBER:

- Be courteous, concise, informative
- Anticipate problems
- Chase down noise problems promptly

WALKIE TALKIES:

- Walkies are primarily for LISTENING; You will get instructions from the AD's over the walkies. Please communicate off walkies as much as possible.
- Channel is ONLY for set communication; You should respond to every AD request with affirmative or negative responses. If you need to discuss something beyond this degree, ask the AD to go to Channel 2. Any discussions between other departments should take place on other channels. Close every conversation on any other Channel with "Back to One." This is a reminder to yourself and the other person you are speaking with to return to the primary channel. Don't miss an important AD call because you forgot to switch back to One.
- Distribution: give fully charged walkies to AD's the instant they arrive on set
- Recharging: distribute new batteries after lunch
- If you are within hearing distance of an AD's walkie on set, keep your volume off. You should be able to hear 1st AD speak at all times.

- Production Reports – report any injuries, accidents, or aberrations to the 2nd AD or Unit/Location Manager ASAP

- Call Sheets – make sure that all cast & crew receive one per the 2nd AD's instructions. Make sure maps and directions are highlighted and attached to each call sheet. In the event that a vehicle list is necessary, make sure you know what vehicle you and others will be in.

WHAT IS PRODUCTION?

- Anticipation of problems & problem solving
- The communication of the greatest amount of information as quickly as possible, in the clearest and most concise way.
- Creating a comfortable environment.
- Serving the needs of the rest of the cast & crew

UNIT DEPARTMENT**Runs:**

- Write it all down in advance in your pocket notebook.
- If you cannot find what you were sent to get, CALL IN. Don't make these decisions on your own. Leave it up to the person who assigned the task.
- Check in with production office after all stops. Only the person supervising you can determine your agenda. Priorities change at the last minute and you can only know that by keeping in touch.
- PM or POC must approve all "on the road" changes.
- Use Resale Certificates when applicable.
- Make sure you get a receipt for EVERYTHING!
- If returning to set from office, be sure to bring all messages.
- Don't assume anything; ask if it is not clear.
- All purchases must be approved in advance.

VEHICLES:

- Safety first
- No alcohol or drugs in car/on set/in office/anywhere!!!
- If the production is using permits – make sure there is a permit that can be read, taped to your window.
- Make sure there are signs in back saying a permit is up front.
- Know what a permit truly means.
- You are responsible for all tickets not covered by the permit.
- Make sure that the gas tank of any production car you are driving is at least 1/2 full. Check the oil and water. Never return car with an empty tank to the set or office.
- Keep vehicle clean; make sure it has a garbage bag.
- Alert Production Office/Unit Manager/Location Manager of any & all accidents or vehicle damage immediately.

CLEAN UP:

- Leave the location neater than we found it.
- Fasten garbage bags near set, craft service.
- Don't use gaffers tape on peelable paint area.
- Fasten garbage bags so bottom rests on the ground.
- Always be "policing" the area. Every PA is responsible for keeping the set clean

CRAFT SERVICE:

- Discourage waste.
- Don't be shy about asking crew if you can get them something.
- Keep the craft table neat and attractive.
- Prepare food to be consumed easily & quickly, i.e. cut fruit into slices.
- Never by styrofoam.
- Separate cans & bottles for recycling.

SECURITY DETAIL:

- Equipment must be watched at all times. If no one is doing it, do it yourself and report your position to the Unit/Location Mgr.
- Someone must be stationed with equipment at lunch. PA thus assigned should get lunch prior.
- Keep equipment stored concisely, yet accessible.

MISCELLANEOUS

- Always fold tape back when applied for easy removal.
- Most papers for distribution should be three-hole punched and stapled prior to being handed out.

LOCATIONS

- Get signs up ASAP indicating: bathrooms, craft service, m/u & wardrobe, staging areas, holding areas, telephones, set restrictions, etc.
- Anticipate possible damage spots & take preventative action.
- Report any location damage to Location Manager.
- Has parking been provided?
- Anticipate potential noise problems.

LOCATIONS (cont'd)

- Make sure location is easy to find from road.
- Use cones and signs to indicate location & parking.

OTHER DEPARTMENTS:

- You work for Production first.
- On some non-union shows it is okay to ask "thirds" how you can help their department:
 - camera
 - electric
 - grip
 - wardrobe
 - hair & makeup
 - art dept.: design set dressing, & props
 - sound
 - post production: editing
 - publicity
 - accounting

PETTY CASH:

- Read your accounting memo.
- All expenses must be approved in advance.
- Get receipts for everything.
- Make your own receipts for phone calls & subways.
- You are accountable for all petty cash you receive.
- Turn in Petty Cash reports regularly.
- Tape receipts down to paper so they are easy to read.
- Number all receipts and total on a cover sheet or form.
- Write what receipt was for on back of receipt as soon as you get it. If you can't identify it, some accountants won't reimburse it.
- Keep track of how much money you got/gave from who and when.
- On gas receipts, write what vehicle it was for on back of receipt. Always submit both parts of gas receipt together.

ON SET:

- Always be active: there always is work to be done.
- Anticipate problems.
- Let supervisor know of any problems; don't take it upon yourself to save the day.
- Be polite to tourists, but don't waste your time with them. Inform them as briefly as possible. Don't encourage them to hang around.
- Atmosphere: "hurry up and wait"
- You are the production's insurance policy. It may sometimes seem as you are doing nothing, but the logistical complexity of film making requires that nothing goes wrong. Production Assistants can make or break the order.
- Don't socialize when there is work to be done.
- Be wary of over-inquisitive types. It is a world of thieves, psychos, and general malcontents (and remember, most of them had your job once, too).

SAG REPRESENTATIVES: spot them and notify AD team.

IN THE OFFICEPHONES AND MESSAGES:

- First priority in the office is answering the phone. Don't let it ring more than twice – (don't be afraid to politely ask someone to hold to answer a ringing line.)
- Since everyone is busy there are two things to aim for: to make sure everyone gets the calls they are waiting for and to take proper messages when necessary. People will let you know if they are waiting for or avoiding a call. KEEP YOUR EARS OPEN AND BE DISCRETE.

ANSWERING THE PHONE:

- Ask who the caller wants to speak with.
- Ask what they are calling in reference to or if the person they are trying to reach knows what they are calling in reference to.
- Intercom the person the call is for and ask them if they are available to speak with the caller.
- If they don't know who the caller is, you can either direct the call to the APOC or POC or take a message.
- Please keep a professional demeanor on the phone. Even if someone is being rude to you, don't be rude to anyone calling. If you are having difficulty handing any calls, put the person on hold and let the POC deal with the caller. There is no excuse for a bad attitude or rudeness on the phone.
- People will generally appreciate your effort to be clear about their call, so don't be intimidated, ask questions. Get names right.
- Each message you take should have the following information:
 - Correct time
 - Date
 - Name of caller (Have them spell it if you need to.)
 - Phone number, (Ask when they will be at the number they give you and if there are any other numbers at which they can be them right back, make sure you write down the number the caller can be reached at right away. Always get a return number.)
 - What the call is in reference to, if possible.
- Initial any messages you take so that if the person getting the message has a question, they can ask you to clarify.
- Do not give our information about the production. Pass any inquisitive calls onto the coordinator or assistant coordinator. The location, time of filming, etc. is all confidential info. – Only give out call times to crew/cast if you are specifically instructed by the AD's to do so. Always follow through and tell the AD who you've confirmed with and who is still unconfirmed.
- Do not give out information that is hearsay or you're not 100% sure of. And get permission to give out the call time to anyone who is not part of the production. Pass difficult calls along immediately, don't try to solve problems that could be more complicated than they appear.

TELEPHONE (cont'd)

- Do not give out confidential information.
- Note: personal calls should not be made during work. If you have to make a call, have someone cover the phones while you go to a phone in another department that is free to place your call. Give yourself a 5 minutes maximum unless it's an emergency. Let us know if you are having persistent personal problems to deal with so that we can adjust the number of people answering the telephones.
- Do not give out the address of the location.
- Give people their messages when they call in. Whenever you give messages over the phone, cross through the message with a pen. Make sure everyone gets their messages when they come in.
- Help keep the office quiet. Don't speak loudly when you're standing near someone's desk who is working hard.

ASSORTED CLERICAL RESPONSIBILITIES:

- Check the "TO MAIL" box. If there are letters and envelopes that need to be mailed, ask the POC and APOC if you should take them to the Post Office. Make sure that you don't mail letters marked "By Hand." Try to empty the box before 5PM.
- Check the FAX machine. Copy and distribute all incoming faxes. Check with APOC to see what distribution needs to be done.
- Replenish the wall envelopes with appropriate forms (i.e. contact lists, crew lists, check requests, etc.) Always copy forms from the original, which you can get from the APOC.
- Check the departmental envelopes. If someone hasn't picked up their "stuff" in a while, remind them or have it sent to wherever they work.
- Ask office POC to check the script supply. If it's low, more should be made.
- Make sure the staplers are full. Also make sure hole-punches are empty and not doomed to spill on the floor.

KEEPING THE OFFICE NEAT:

- Help keep the kitchen clean. It gets messy quickly but is easy to clean. Just wipe up spills and restock the paper towels and cups.
- Keep an eye on the coffee. There should always be a fresh pot.
- Make sure there is always milk and coffee in the fridge.
- Change the water in cooler when empty. Make sure there are plenty of water cups near the fridge.
- Keep area around the copier neat. When needed, go through the scrap paper box and get ready for recycling.
- Sorting paper to be recycled.
 - Single-sided paper all facing the same way
 - According to color and single or double-sided.
 - Remove all staples, paper clips, etc.

REVISION HISTORY

January 14, 2006

Re-ordered the revision history so that most-recent revisions are listed first. Spelling correction on the introduction page.

April 9, 2002

Rewrote the introduction page to incorporate new information regarding the originating source of the document. UPM Mary Courtney tells us of the origins of Production Coordinators and in the process discusses having seen this document in 1989.

April 8, 2002

Completed transcribing document into PDF format, posted to www.drewprops.com