Organized Chaos: The Role and Importance of Assistant Directors

Director John Frankenheimer once said, “The importance of the assistant director cannot be overemphasized” (BrainyQuote). In the filmmaking industry there are numerous roles and departments that all eventually come together to create a finished production. In the direction department there is an assistant director position. This particular role is incredibly important and they are vital to any production.

Before understanding why the assistant director position is such an important role, it is important to define what the position is and what the responsibilities are. According to the textbook, the AD is “In charge of all on-set, day-to-day operations. Under the assistant director is a second assistant director who is the liaison between the director and the rest of the crews. Things like time cards, call sheets, tracking the daily progress against the production schedule and maintaining a general sense of order, are his responsibilities” (3). They create filming schedules working closely with the director. They also need to be aware of the budget and cast availability when making that schedule. Additionally, they oversee the hiring of locations, props and other types of equipment. The first AD will ensure that the pre-production process stays on schedule as well. On set they are basically the right-hand person of the director and they need to be organized, be flexible, be able to multi-task, be positive, be leaders, and be team players (Media Match). The production needs to stay on schedule and the First AD ensures that happens. Essentially, “they provide the key link between the Director, cast and crew, whilst also liaising with the production office, and providing regular progress reports about the shoot (Creative Skill Set).

In addition to having an assistant director, there is often another assistant director or second AD. This other assistant director has a variety of responsibilities as well. Their primary function is to ensure that the First AD’s requests are carried out. In addition, the Second AD works a lot with the actors by creating call sheets for the next day, ensuring the actors know when they needs to be on set. They make sure that the actors are also ready to shoot when they are on set. They coordinate transportation requirements and make-up/wardrobe timetables (Creative Skill Set). The Second AD is another person who organizes some of the intricate parts of the production of a film.

When it comes to the creation of a film each individual role is crucial and the assistant director is no different. They are responsible for a great deal of organization, and sticking to the schedule depends on them. Not only are the hours long, but the situation is often highly stressful, so being able to remain organized in that type of scenario is crucial. The ability to trouble-shoot and navigate that type of high-stress situation makes assistant directors not only valuable in their organization skills, but in their disposition as well (Creative Skill Set). As a connection between the director and multiple other stages of production assistant directors manage to keep communication running freely which also keeps production moving smoothly. In general, the assistant directors spend a great deal of time multi-tasking and organizing to make sure that film is able to be done on time within the budgetary constraints. Without them, it would be very difficult for a film, especially a high budget film to go off without a hitch, and get done when it is supposed to.

Overall, the assistant director is an important organizer in the film industry. Without a doubt they are incredibly vital to the success of a production. A film is a large project to take on and there a lot of moving parts that go into its creation. It is important to make sure all of those working parts are on the same page, and everything gets done efficiently on schedule. The Assistant Directors have the responsibility of making that happen. Just as Frankenheimer acknowledged, it is definitely an important role, and the industry definitely needs to realize that.

Works Cited

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