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Chapter 5 Paper and Quiz

The AD Army

Holy friggin’ crap! This reminds me of a light bulb joke! How many directors DOES it take to finish a project?! Well, let’s start with the fact that there is often not just one AD, but a whole Sentai team of Power Rangers needed to complete the task! I’d like to know how many AD’s are required on average. Something that has a lot of actors like 300 would require an entire team, but I’d like to see a run of the mill show and what it requires.

Well, let's start with "above the line". It's all the non-negotiable budget things, including the Writer, Director, Producer, and Actors. These are usually taken care of in pre-production and deeply negotiated. The below the line cost are the variables to a production which may go in and out depending on scenes used. If an entire scene is cut, then one doesn't have to pay the set people and such. Quite frankly, I find it absolute BS that the AD's are not also above the line after researching the weight on their shoulders. The actors and the upper line get their cut ahead of time while the rest of the team below the line may or may not be guaranteed what they are offered because scenes may change and stuff. They may get paid more or less depending on what is required.

I am still a little confused about the concept of the call sheet. It appears to be just a giant roll call sheet for who is on set, but man… I do see that as important. Either the first or second AD gets to work with this depending on how big the cast is. They make calls such as “Quiet on the set” and such when a shot is being taken. I had to look at what some of the terms meant when I looked at Wikipedia.

I read on IMDB that the AD is also the one who keeps track of the filming to production schedule time. I think I’m beginning to understand where the need for an army of these comes from in movies like 300 and Braveheart. I don’t even want to know how many it took for the last Lord of the Rings movie. Holy crud… five armies? They seem to be cartographers of the movie, mapping out who goes where and what scenes they can film. The director is the captain, and while the AD crew can be seen as a first mate, they act more like a navigator.

If I had to compare things to the body analogy, the above the line group may be the heart and brains, but the AD crew is the spine and nervous system which delegate orders to the rest of the body. They are the biggest members of the below line as possible. As disks to the spine, if one of them is out of alignment, the body doesn’t work too well. The communication of the wishes of the director are paramount and often require an extensive network to get across for the sake of the project. I heard that Game of Thrones films in three countries at the same time, and I have no idea how they have multiple directors for that. My guess is that they would use assistant directors as a go-between in order to get complicated crap like that finished.

In all honestly, they might be considered a middle-tier of critical necessity for the body of a movie. Sure, you can crack someone’s spine, and it will cripple a body, but the person still has a chance of living all together… just nowhere near in the capacity of a fully functional being. These guys are the stabilizers of order in the chaos that is the project. They are lay lines that cover the entire movie, but are not directly seen in the finished project. Often times, these heroes remain unsung in the main credits, only to be forgotten in the long list of the after-credits, and don’t really have a paycheck worth their true salt in the matter. None the less, they take the hits between communication of upper and lower lines. We salute you, AD Sentai team! If I become a director instead of a writer, I will make certain your dues are very much worth paying!

2) Define in as much detail as possible what “below the line” means.

\*Sigh\* ... I've been wrestling with how I feel about this, but I can't argue with how the business model works. While above the line is the non-negotiables (the heart if you will) of a production, the "below the line" are the hands and limbs. The sad part is that limbs can get cut if deemed unnecessary for the budget. There are no guarantees for the low liners. If a scene gets deleted, those people are cut without pay or mercy if that's all the work they did for the scene. I've heard how complicated this can get in the legal arena and such and quite frankly it hurts my head to look it all up. The above liners are the writers, producers, actors, directors, and any position which is considered vital to the project and have pre-negotiated contracts and wages. Everyone else is subject to the chopping block.

... I understand the need to keep budget, but so much talent can get nothing for their work in the blink of an eye. I'm not sure I could ever be a big-time director. I could cut, but damnit, they deserve to have something for their work even if we don't use it. It's experience. Can't someone give reference and contact even if they can't be paid in monetary means? Yeah, it still sucks, but I refuse to leave nothing for them if we don't use their work. I know it's a dog-eat-dog world, but a dog can still be loyal if left even a little scraps. This is the information age. Information and connection have value.

3) What are the must-have qualities of a PA? Why are they so important on a film set?

Hahahaha! You mean "morale support". From getting those blue bowls of M&M's for divas, to supplying coffee to the director to have him make it through the day, the PA is the set's "happy pill". Some people might call them a gopher, but man, they hold the ship together when a filming day particularly sucks. Without a high morale in the crew, a shoot isn't going to be at their highest quality. Cranky actors = piss poor acting.

They need a knack for knowing what MIGHT be needed, they also need a discipline to do what they are told and to keep their word. Punctuality is a must as well as adaptability. I could go down the list as outlined in the textbook... but that would be lame. Professionalism and communication skills are paramount, but... hey, if someone is getting stressed out about themselves, a sense of humor and a little bit of coaching skills would be great. While I see bravery as a must because some people have to have the guts to tell it like it is, I don't see why asking for clarification is considered bravery. Owning up to mistakes and such are also key. Humility and respect are also important beyond words. Nothing ticks off people by thinking yourself better than they.