

What They Don't Tell You in Film School

The FatChix Guide to DIY Film Production

PART ONE:

Producing Your Own Work/ The Real Learning Begins

Congratulations! Welcome to the team! We're thrilled to have you! You're probably reading this because you're interested in producing. Maybe you're an experienced filmmaker, but you haven't had the best luck getting hired. Or maybe you have no idea what goes into film production, but you're willing and eager AF.

Guess what?

EITHER IS OK! Whether you've PA'd on a friend's crappy comedy sketch or directed a commercial for a huge corporate client - this guide is for you. So, go somewhere cozy and maybe grab a Diet Coke™ (personal preference) because here we go.

OH WAIT! ONE THING! I'm legally obligated to tell you that there is explicit language if you continue reading. My vocabulary is 30% cursing... so buckle up. Things are about to get 'Parental Advisory-y'.

First things first:

YOU ARE GREAT AT WHAT YOU DO. Even if you haven't quite figured out your niche on set - the fact that you care enough about filmmaking to read this shows initiative and you should be proud of that fact. I sure as hell am.

Also there is no space for self-doubt on set. NONE. So lock it up and go look at yourself in the mirror. **RIGHT NOW.** Yeah I know I said find somewhere cozy, but that's the job! You're going to be running around most of the day and I'm dead serious about there not being space for self-doubt on set. Leave the drama for the thespians.

Are you at the mirror? Ok. Now say, "*I'M A FUCKING GENIUS.*" Say it three times or don't bother continuing... Done?

Ok. Good work. Let's continue, you fucking genius, you.

Assuming you are producing your own film with a modest budget and don't know where to begin, let me break down the basics of who and what you'll need to get this baby on it's legs.

1. **Director** - *the Mother of fucking Dragons and master of story telling. They supervise the actors, the camera crew, and everyone else. They have the ultimate say in the final cut of the film. This person is the north star on set.*
2. **AD (Asst. Director)** - *Ninja in charge of the filming production schedule, arranging logistics, preparing daily call sheets, checking in with the cast and crew and maintaining order on set. Note: This person MUST be a BOSS BITCH. Not BOSSY. Not A BITCH. They are a BOSS A\$\$ BITCH. Do what they say and no one gets hurt, ya feel me?*
3. **DP (Director of Photography)** - *Gandalf with a camera. This person works with the director and the light crew to help bring the script to life on film. They are responsible for making artistic and technical decisions related to the desired image on screen and are usually carrying a lot of heavy camera shit, so try not to be in their way.*
4. **AC (Asst. Camera)** - *The camera persons BFFL. They are often in charge of pulling focus (a.k.a. racking focus) to follow either the action on set or different actors that the director wishes to focus on within a single shot. They manage and maintain the camera equipment and accessories, AND they get to mark scenes and snap the SLATE, which is basically the funnest thing ever.*
5. **ACTORS** - *People doing stuff on camera for money. (And they SHOULD ABSOLUTELY be getting PAID to perform their craft.)*
6. **GRIP/GAFFER** - *Sometimes this is one person who's a fucking beast and can do it all. Sometimes it's a few boss homies who are basically electricians that decided house calls were lame AF and wanted to be in the movie business. Either way, they design the entire lighting plan for the production. They work directly with the DP and Director to capture the mood of each scene. You'll usually see them on a ladder or playing with wires. They are geniuses wearing protective gloves. Do not disturb them unless you know what the fuck you're doing. Cool? K.*
7. **Production Sound Mixer**- *a.k.a. Stereo Jesus™. This person is in charge of recording all audio on set. They generally have their own gear— at least I've never met a sound mixer without gear... Damn, that's being prepared. They make sure everything sounds crisp and clean and beautiful and are the first ones to know if someones cell phone goes off during a take so DON'T EVEN THINK ABOUT HAVING THAT THING ON. Everyone will come for you.*
8. **DIT (Digital Imaging Technician)** - *Basically this badass is there to dump all the footage from whatever memory card the camera is using on to a computer or hard drive. They keep the work flow flowin'. Nothing is more annoying than having to wait 30-45 minutes to upload footage before you can shoot the next scene or take. This person is in charge of backing that shit uppppppp. Side Note: Have you*

ever heard of DTF? Oh yeah, you perv? Well it means DOWN TO FORMAT on set. (At least that's what I learned recently and I liked it so much I'm going to keep saying it.)

9. **HMU (Hair and Makeup)** - *DaVinci with mascara and a hair straightener. They transform actors into the characters they're playing. Yes, we can all do our own makeup or style our hair our own way, but that does not mean it's right for the character. The talent should NOT be doing their character's makeup or styling. It's not the director's job or the grip's job. It's not even the PA's job. It's this magical unicorn's job. Hire them and pay their kit fee because that shit is mad expensive.*
10. **PA - (Production Assistant)** - *This person is GAWD. Some say it's a thankless job, but having a good PA on set is like winning the fuckin' lotto. You don't just hire the AD's girlfriend Stacey because she didn't have anything going on that day- you hire someone who's hungry for experience. Someone who's just out of school or has shot a few no-budget things on their own. Shit will ALWAYS GO WRONG during production and none of the people listed above can leave set to take care of said disaster, so thank you, PA. Everyone listed above is part of the production machine and the PA is one who keeps it from totally blowing up. Sorry, Stacey.*
11. **Producer(s)** - *That's you. If you're producing this thing and you're the one making all of this shit happen, then you're a Producer. If you're funding it? You're an Executive Producer. In charge of the budget and overall planning? Line Producer. Helping the main Producer(s) by writing, editing, assisting? Baby, you're an Associate Producer. Working in conjunction with another producer on a different team? You're likely a co-producer. Producers make the project come together on time, under budget, and with as few hiccups as possible.*
12. **UPM (Unit Production Manager)** - *BUSY. This person is BUSY and does not have time for your BS. They are usually hired in pre-production and work closely with the line producer or head producer(s) to ensure the working budget for principal photography is accurate af. Sometimes, they are put in charge of logistics and arrangements for certain aspects of the project. They typically work from pre-production to the end of the shoot.*

Alright! You still with me? All this make sense? Great! If not, read it again because I think I did a pretty good job.

Okay, so next step: actually hire these people. Raise some funds with a crowdfunding campaign, apply to production companies if they offer that sort of thing, send word out to your network and get these magicians on set to shoot your thing. If you don't have a thing to shoot, homie, you need to hire a screenwriter. Get something epic to shoot and get that shit in the can.

Now that your film is shot, you might be wondering, "Now, what?"

Well, hopefully not, but if you are wondering that, it's okay because I'm about to give you the 4-1-1.

PART TWO:

WE'RE OFF TO POST PRODUCTION, BABY!

You're going to need a few more **VERY KEY** artists to get the job done right.

- 1. Editor** - *a.k.a. Ama-Fuckin-Deus. This mastermind takes all that raw footage you shot (hours and hours and hours of it) and assembles the story with it. It's a laborious job that requires a keen-ass eye, concentration, and self-motivation. It also requires the ability to collaborate and communicate on a very EXTRA level with the screenwriter and director. Your editor is the gate-keeper to your film's destiny, my friend. Treat them well and your movie will be beautiful. Treat them like shit...guess what your movie is going to look like? Actually, I'm sure it'll look beautiful because of PROFESSIONALISM, but now we all know that you treated your editor like shit, so now, everyone hates you. DON'T BE THAT GUY.*
- 2. Colorist** - *It would be dumb if I used a painter as an example, so I'll just say that this dope human took that beautiful cut of your film from the editor and wrapped it in the most divine wrapping paper ever. It's beautiful because each clip matches all the other clips. It's consistent and it's balanced. It's so good, it looks DELICIOUS. The colorist is to the editing process as the DP is to the filming process. Hire a professional. If the editor you hired also has the skills to color grade, PAY THEM FOR THAT SERVICE. It's its own beast and deserves its own paycheck.*
- 3. Audio Mixer** - *Remember all that beautiful sound you recorded? Actors wore lav's under their shirts? The Sound Mixer on set that day was most likely also holding a boom pole and recording multiple audio tracks just to be safe? Remember when you had to #HoldForRoomTone? Yeah, you do. Well, now this Stereo Jesus™ gets to take the very nearly finished version of your film and mix all of that gorgeous audio into it. All the levels will be nice and balanced. Sound will be crisp and clean. (I'm drooling thinking about it.) Now, I'm going to be very real with you. People can forgive shitty videography. People shoot things on all sorts of cameras; even documentaries are usually filmed with multiple cameras over a period of time and things don't always look consistent. That can be forgiven. Unfortunately, that's not the case with sound. If you're watching a movie or a TV show or whatever the kids are watching nowadays and the audio is shitty, YOU'RE DONE. No one will take it seriously. It doesn't matter if it was shot with an Arri Alexa. It doesn't matter if (insert your favorite director here) shot the film themselves and gave a reason explaining why they chose to shoot it like that. BOTTOM LINE: If the sound is bad so is your film. I'M SORRY! IT'S JUST TRUE. Hire a professional. Don't try to prove me wrong. You AND YOUR CREW just put in so much hard work. So Mix, Mix, Baby. Mix it real good.*

NOW YOUR FILM IS DONE! IT'S BEAUTIFUL! IT'S PERFECT!

CONGRATULATIONS!

Time to polish your nice shoes and invite everyone you love over for a screening before sending it out to hundreds of festivals.

Seriously, though. Send it everywhere. No festival is too big or too small. Exposure is always good! Plus, we've made so many lovely friends and colleagues from attending festivals, so just do it.

OH! GUESS WHAT!

We have a resource for you so you don't even have to do that much work.

I KNOW, RIGHT?!

Just visit www.fatchixinc.com/resources and BOOM. Festival city. You're welcome. We love you. We want you to succeed. There are about a million links and guides on that page to help you figure out your next step as a filmmaker. xoxo

PART THREE:

On Set Etiquette

Allow me to backtrack for a moment. I know we just made a movie and it's gone off to festivals and you're getting all the laurels and it's amazing, but now we need to talk about something very important. It's called etiquette, and it's going to get you places.

Do you remember your time on set? Do you remember how you acted, or better yet, how you reacted in certain situations? If you were directing and your actor flubbed a line or didn't hit their mark, did you make them feel like shit about it instead of communicating with them? If you were the DP and had trouble setting up your shot and ended up shooting something you weren't proud of, did you keep it to yourself instead of addressing it with the Gaffer or Director to come up with something different (and ultimately better)? If you were PA-ing, were you on your phone basically the whole time and fucking up the scene because craft services was downstairs buzzing the doorbell and ruining the shot?

If anything like that has happened on set, it doesn't matter whether you were a witness, or on the giving or receiving end of any of those kinds of exchanges. **PEOPLE REMEMBER THAT SHIT.** You have a reputation now, and guess what? It ain't good, babe.

A film set is a fast-paced, high-stress, passion-fueled, emotionally-charged, organized circus. Sometimes the heat or air conditioning doesn't work on location. Sometimes you have to wake up at 4:00 AM to be on set by 6:00 AM and may not wrap until 2:00 AM. Sometimes you're shooting on the streets of NYC because you can't afford to shoot in a major production studio (like every independent filmmaker) and you're constantly being harassed or heckled by hoodlums jumping into the shot because - YOUTHS - and it totally fucks up your production schedule.

This kind of job or lifestyle isn't for the faint of heart; you need to know how to handle your shit with a smile and 'woosahh' the day away. Be the lightness, warmth and tranquility that the set needs and that's what it will become. If you are a ball of stress and chaos— well, you might as well change the name of your film to *Shit Storm: Awakening the Storm*.

The film community is small, believe it or not, and people like to hire cast and crew based on 2 factors:

- 1. Your Work Experience**
- 2. YOUR ATTITUDE ON SET**

A teacher once told me that everyone on set thinks their job is the most important job.

I've found that to be absolutely true. Everyone wants to do their best because, in the end, that film is what they get to add to their reel.

The fun and funny thing about working in film is that you're going to spend hours upon days upon weeks shooting in close quarters with the cast and crew. You wake up with them, have your meals with them - you break bread with them. You break your back with them. You become a little family unit. No one can be the middle child of that family. No one can be treated like one. I'm speaking from middle child experience here.

No one can act like a spoiled kid. You're all in it together until the movie is shot and off to post. How do you treat your family? How do you communicate with your family when things are going great or when something's not working? If you want to get hired again by the family you're currently working with, the simple solution is to behave yourself. Have fun and be yourself, but fucking act like an adult and don't put your ego ahead of the film production.

Let me ask you this: how do handle yourself under pressure?

I'm sure you're thinking, "I'm super calm," or "I get a little overwhelmed." Maybe you're even thinking, "Pssshhh, baby, nothing can shake me!"

Well, that's awesome for you if that's the case, but you can spend weeks, months or even years in pre-production planning out every little minute detail with Plan B and C scenarios, and something WILL STILL GO WRONG.

It's just one of those things that's been decided long before any of us were born. You have to accept that before going into production. It'll make the whole process easier for you.

Expect the unexpected.

That could mean finding a last minute indoor location because Mother Nature happened, or your lead actor fell into a manhole on the way home from rehearsal the night before shooting.

How are you going to handle the situation?

That's going to decide the success of your future in this field.

It's going to decide your fucking legacy.

Are you going to curl up in a ball? Are you going to isolate yourself? Go on a bender and take it out on whoever's 'fault' it was? Quit?

Or are you going to get your team together to try to find a solution? How are you going to treat them while you're freaking out over the shitty hand that life just dealt you?

The world is changing, FYI. Thank J.K. Rowling. There is a zero-tolerance policy for dickheads on set or anywhere else for that matter, so how are you going to creatively problem-solve while maintaining good vibes?

Everyone has a different way of coping with the stress of film life. Julia likes to break down the night before every shoot because she thinks everything is wrong and she's fucked it all up. This is never actually true, but she's cray and we love her. I like to keep the good vibes going by giving myself a coffee or snack break when I know I'm about to lose my shit.

OMG, I ALMOST FORGOT. That last sentence just reminded me of *something super fucking important*. Want to know what will maintain good vibes on set all the time?

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TWO WORDS:

CRAFT SERVICES.

PART MOTHER FUCKING FOUR:
CRAFT SERVICES, BITCHES.

Feed your cast and crew, and **feed them well.**

I've seen volcanic situations diffuse instantly when the food arrived because everyone had been working ten hours straight and were on the brink of a meltdown and THEY WERE HUNGRY.

If you're the producer, that means the cast and crew are your children. Don't you want them to grow up to be big and strong? Don't you want to see them thrive? They need vegetables. They need fruit. They need water. They need protein and they need **PROPER MEALS.**

Dear GOD, you can't expect your children to thrive if all they're eating are yesterdays M&M's and pizza every fucking day. That's bad parenting and bad producing. Have a plan. Ask about allergies. Take care of your babies and they will take care of you. *That's a fucking guarantee.*

PART FIVE:
That Person

This is the last bit of info I'll share with you today.

Hang onto your butts™ because we've all either been guilty of it or know someone who's been guilty of it.

Of what?

Of being THAT person.

The person who thinks they're better than everyone else. The person who can't talk to you because they're too busy talking down to you and everyone else. The person who obviously has Small Dick Syndrome and needs to make themselves feel worthy by blowing smoke up their own ass.

That Person gets hired on one out of every five sets and they need to be reality checked. I'm not saying pull a *Carrie* and douse them in pig's blood; that's disgusting, messy, and a gross waste of the PA's time cleaning that shit up. It also automatically makes you the new THAT PERSON.

Listen - I've been to acting school. I've met a handful of *That Guy's*, and I've always regretted not following my gut to pull them aside privately and tell them how their attitude affects the air on set.

When Julia and I are working on a project, we can smell that shit from a mile away. We know not to accept that job or hire that person. If you have the ability to delicately steer someone towards the less asshole-y path, then you are a saint and I love you.

Some people have confrontation issues (I'm still working on mine, ask Julia), and get sick even thinking about having an uncomfortable conversation. However, if you can muster the courage to approach the person who's acting out by belittling their peers, you're actually making the world a better place.

You're putting out good vibes.

You will get hired back for being brave and doing what everyone else could not. Chances are that the person being an asshole knows they're doing it and will be grateful to hear it said out loud. You just saved their career. They owe you for life!

If they flip and get defensive... Again, you'll know you were right and so will they and even if they can't admit in the moment, you'll have pointed them toward the path of self-discovery.

If they don't listen? Hey, man, not your problem. You tried your best, and they cursed their own career. No one wants to work with an asshole twice.

Now, READ THIS PART VERY CAREFULLY.

If you are going to approach That Person, do it with love. Do it with care and caution. Do it because you want to see them thrive, not because you have a vendetta. The world doesn't need more dicks, and like I mentioned earlier, there's less and less space for them. So choose love. Love wins in the end - always.

PART SIX:

Own Your Shit (🕒 is 💰)

Okay.

We've made it this far!

I feel like I know you now. I think you're awesome. **I think you're the shit.** Which brings me to our last point(s).

Did **you** think that you were the shit (in a humble way)? Did you feel **confident** about the work you did or the **decisions** you made? Did you feel **comfortable** in your position?

Have you done it many times on many different types of sets? Or have you done it once or twice and are still greasing those experience wheels? Were you on a SAG Low Budget Production with a million dollars to spend when you've only worked on Indie shorts? Does that number totally freak you out because one million dollars is still considered low budget for union projects and you've worked with mostly non-union casts and crews for a fraction of that cost? Like 1/800th of that cost?

Okay, okay, enough with the questions.

I'm making *myself* anxious (and Julia, who is the one editing this. Thanks, Em).

The point I'm trying to make is that the life of film production is beautiful and mysterious and *never the same*.

New job. New people. New locations. New equipment. New craft services.

You were hired to be there because production **WANTS YOU THERE**. You made it to that big budget feature set because *YOU ARE A FUCKING GENIUS*, remember?

I'm reminding you of this now because it's a really important point. **YOU NEED TO ACCEPT IT.**

You cannot walk onto a set second-guessing yourself and stumbling over your insecurities because will only stall production. Stalling production is the kiss of death for your career. Time is money in film.

You Waste Time = You Waste Money = **You don't get hired again.**

Bing. Bang. Boom.

I'm not saying you can't make mistakes.

Everyone fucks up: actors, directors, DP's, etc.

Remember that time someone moved a light on set and Christian Bale literally had a Hernia screaming at the DP and Associate Producer?

Here you go if you haven't seen it: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0auwvAU2YA>

It's kind of hilarious in a terrifying way, or a what-not-to-do-on-set way. Now everyone knows Christian Bale is an asshole and we haven't seen him in much since. Just sayin'.

WE ALL MAKE MISTAKES. WE'RE HUMAN.

But... But, but, but... humans can also *ask for help*.

Yes, I know that can be scary. Yes, I know you have pride. Yes, I know you don't want to look like a clueless dummy on set, but If you're the AC and you've never operated a particular camera before, you'd better ask the DP for help because 'fake it till you make it' *DOES NOT WORK IN THIS SCENARIO*.

That camera is expensive AF, and it's probably the DP's baby.

Have them show you what you need to do and take notes so you don't have to ask again.

If you're the AD and you've never made a call sheet before... *GO ONLINE*. There are tons of resources out there for you if you just Google It™.

No matter what your job is, you have to do your homework before walking onto set. Try to anticipate the needs of yourself and others. Bring another roll of gaff tape, bring an extra dry erase marker, print extra copies of the script. *READ THE FUCKING SCRIPT*.

I don't care if you're the PA or the AC, if you walk onto set and haven't read the script, that's like spitting in the producer's face. Well, maybe it's not *that* intense, but it is lazy and lazy gets weeded off a set in the blink of an eye.

If you're an actor about to film your first scene and you're still wondering why the director chose you for this amazing part— **CHECK YOURSELF!** You were hired because they want you to tell that characters story. Because you fit the part. *Because you're a fucking genius*.

There are no hiring mistakes in a good production. Maybe a few assholes slip through the cracks at times; you'll see that as productions get bigger and more expensive. There are more suits that the production team has to answer to, but they're SUITS with millions of dollars paying for this film to be made. And YOU get to be a part of it. Don't fuck it up by trying to be like the suits.

We didn't choose to be suits. We chose to be *artists*. We chose to be *storytellers*. We chose to make the world a better place by *sharing our experiences*. By *holding hands with humanity*. That is noble AF.

Well, my new BFF, I hope you learned something. I even learned a thing or two while writing this. I learned that I need to take my own advice. I learned that I really love using the ™ symbol, but most importantly I learned... Well, not *learned* so much as *realized* that I *HOPE*.

I truly **hope** that our paths lead us to the same set one day because you are a.... say it..... :). And I can't wait to see what kind of artist you are.

Fat Love,
FatChix