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I WAS A VIDEO GO-FER: REASONS FOR AND BENEFITS
OF STARTING AS A PRODUCTION ASSISTANT
IN FILM AND VIDEO PRODUCTION

By

Timothy J. Rathbun

A THESIS

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ABSTRACT

I WAS A VIDEO GO-FER: REASONS FOR AND BENEFITS OF STARTING AS A PRODUCTION ASSISTANT IN FILM AND VIDEO PRODUCTION

By

Timothy J. Rathbun

Students of media production are often uninformed about the production job market. This thesis includes analysis of surveys conducted of students, industry professionals, and production assistants (PAs). This data indicates that: 1) Students have unreal expectations about the job market, 2) Industry professionals expect that new job entrants will most likely start as PAs, and 3) There are "tricks-to-the-trade" that can help PAs distinguish themselves from others with whom they will be competing for work and the chance to move up. This thesis is presented as a practical handbook that will educate the jobseeker about the position of a PA, describing why it is a logical place to start. It will then help the average PA rise above others in his or her profession to be ready for any opportunity that presents itself.

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1989

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I have come to the conclusion that there are two important ingredients needed to accomplish the writing of a document such as this: encouragement from people and access to a personal computer. The computer may not be entirely necessary but it certainly impresses ones friends who now believe me to be a real "computer-wizard". Encouragement has been the key. It started with my wife, Roxanne, who sat me down one saturday afternoon and said, "What do you really want to do with your life?" She has given up many things and postponed others so that I could pursue an education in video production, now culminating with this thesis. Roxanne has the gift of following through on commitments. By her refusal to let this part of my degree fall through the cracks, the work was completed.

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sending, retrieving, and analyzing three surveys and I thought it would never happen. Carrie gave me my first lesson in statistics in TC335. I forgot most of it or so I thought. Carrie has the uncanny ability to make an individual feel they are intelligent even though one's mind is slow to recall and even slower to apply skills learned in school. I feel fortunate to have her on my committee, but even more lucky to have her as a friend.

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INTRODUCTION

One of the most traumatic times in a student's life has to be the sudden plunge one takes into the job market upon graduation from school. In the case of the video/film production student it can be a difficult transition from being a producer and/or director of one's own student projects to a world where paying clients expect extreme professionalism and proficiency. The typical school experience of students in the media professions offer only a brief, limited introduction into most areas of professional working knowledge. Students who enter the job market seeking producer or director positions, or even assistant producer or director positions, will become quickly frustrated in their search. As in most professions, experience leading to an understanding of the "real world" is necessary to land a meaningful job in the area of production. How does the typical jobseeker gain experience? The problem of needing experience to gain experience creates a dilemma for jobseekers.

Chapter 1 of this study reviews the literature that is written to assist the student in making career choices to determine if it offers them solid advice on how to begin in this business. It compares the advice given in these books to the reality of the real world of production. In

chapter 2 research is presented from surveys of people in the industry to better understand what they look for in potential employees and compares this to a survey of production students. Production assistants (PAs) are also surveyed to better understand their job description. This backdrop of information displays the misconceptions held by students and the lack of adequate information available to them about how to get started in this business.

Chapter 3 is designed to be a handbook for the PA. It starts by offering jobseekers in media production a commonsense rationale for entering this business as a PA. Then it provides a detailed insight into this position and offers the PA ways to excel and make quick progress to more favorable career options.

These findings may provide an easier transition for students looking for careers in this business and help shorten their stint as a PA because of the excellent way they do their job.

CHAPTER I

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Pertinent literature was found in two areas: (1) the career information area as it related specifically to media production, and (2) literature written by professionals about the business. The former of these two areas appears to be written from the outside looking in while the latter is written by people on the inside.

The career information segment of this review includes titles such as: Career Information Center-Communications and the Arts, Making it in the Media Professions, How to Break into the Media Professions, Opportunities in Film, Breaking into Communications, Careers in Cable TV, and Career Choices for Students of Communications and Journalism. Literature written from a professional standpoint includes such titles as: Producing TV Movies, The Business of Show Business, Television Production Handbook, Live TV-An Inside Look at Producing and Directing, Television Production-Disciplines and Techniques, and The Cool Fire.

The main area of concern was whether these career and professional books mentioned the job of a PA as being a viable entry point into this business and provide any details about a production assistant's roles and

responsibilities.

In general it can be noted that the position of the PA was given very little attention in most of the books reviewed. About 90% of the books reviewed made little or no reference to the job of a PA. Some of these book titles imply a more thorough treatment of the industry which includes the PA position as a viable entry point. However, any person attracted to these books by their titles would actually be deprived of information concerning the most practical way into the business, the PA position. The remaining 10% of the books reviewed can be divided into two camps. First, books that mention the PA position briefly, (usually one paragraph consisting of two to three sentences) and secondly books that either have an entire section based on the job of a PA or at least a page of information about this position.

Little or no Reference to the PA

Making it in the Media Professions, A Realistic Guide to Career Opportunities in Newspapers, Magazines, Books, Television, Radio, the Movies, and Advertising, by Leonard Mogel, was not as realistic as its title suggested but was typical of the information given by many of these career books. This book listed some typical job classifications found in television. The most notable jobs always included on such lists were; Producer, Production Manager, Director, Assistant Director, Floor Managers, and various technical positions. The title of Production Assistant was left off this list or only mentioned in passing as it was

in, Career Information Center- Communications and the Arts. One sentence was devoted to the subject of PAs. "To become a production assistant, it is useful to have some college courses in theater, film or television."¹ No other information about starting out as a PA was mentioned. This book also had an extensive table of contents that listed jobs in media that required some specialized training or some advanced training. It seemed logical that a PA position would not fit in this list with broadcast technicians, camera operators, sound technicians, producers, directors. However, another content list was included for jobs requiring no specialized training. Among the fifteen listed jobs the production assistant was not found.

How to Break into the Media Professions, by Caroline Zimmerman, hit closer to the mark but was very vague in terms of specific clues on how to get your first job. Similar to other publications this book made the following statements, "Most companies don't want to take a risk on a newcomer in a more responsible job, until he or she has been observed in an entry level one....If you want to break into the media professions, you must be prepared for the fact that your starting salary will probably be far below what you feel you justifiably deserve."² In other words be prepared to start at the bottom. Beyond this advice there is no mention made about the most common entry level job in any media profession today, the PA. Opportunities in Film, by Jan Bone, suggests that one must "...take a job

doing anything, in order to get in...".' This book failed to mention that there are many people looking into the media professions willing to do anything to get their foot in the door. None of these career books ever mentioned that approaching a employer with a specific job title in mind (specifically the PA position) and experience within that job is infinitely more impressive than the caller willing to do anything. As stated in The Business of Show Business, written by Judith Katz, "I'll do anything, translates into I can do nothing." The job of a PA is within anyone's ability and media employers are always looking for new PAs. Therefore the lack of solid information in many of these career books is suprising.

Breaking Into Communications, by Bob Weinstein, has a chapter heading entitled, "Getting Started: Where Do I Begin?". Three points are made in this chapter, 1) Read! Read! Read! 2) Get Practical, hands-on experience, 3) Ask Questions.' The first point is well taken. Presumably most college students have done their share of reading while in school. The second point never mentioned the job of a PA as the ideal hands on experience because it exposes a person to many areas of this profession in a nonthreatening way. The third point is also well taken but does not deal with the fact that a person has to have exposure to the right people to get useful answers to questions. Being a PA puts the person in an environment in which they work with many professionals in a day to day relationship where questions can be answered by the people

who know the field best. In this book's chapter entitled, "General Tips for landing a Radio or TV Job.", three points were made: (1) Believe in yourself. (2) Target yourself. (3) Monitor the industry.* All three points are well taken. However, by not mentioning the potential of a PA position the author leaves out key information on making these tips practical in the work experience of a PA.

The literature written from a production standpoint, such as handbooks on film or TV production, are even less helpful in providing information about the job of a PA. Many of these books include chapters on how to get started in the business but most fail to even mention the PA position.

Producing TV Movies, written by Everett Chambers, has a chapter titled, "How to Become a Producer". General concepts are written about as they relate to a specific persons situation but the suggestion to start as a PA is not mentioned. In this same book in a chapter titled, "The Crew", refering to the crew requirements of a typical production, the production assistant is not mentioned.

Limited Reference to the PA Position

Examples of the limited information given about the PA position are displayed in, Exploring Careers in Communications and Telecommunications, by John Zacharis, Frances Forde Plude, and Andrew Rancer. It's single reference to the job of a PA was, " There are many routes or avenues into the broadcasting world. One is the Go-fer route; cheerfully doing menial jobs can lead to good

opportunities after you get inside the field. Many people learn a lot by serving as production assistants or technical assistants."⁹ Careers in Communications, by Shonan Noronha, had two paragraphs on the PA. They can be summed up by saying that a PA must be a team player and that this position is a steppingstone on the way to becoming a producer.

In Opportunities in Television and Video Careers, Shonan Noronha writes, "...a PA does any and every job necessary at the time to ensure a smooth flow of the production."⁹ Careers in Cable Television, by Jon Denny, lists the PA in it's "Local-Access Job File" and devotes a paragraph to it.¹⁰ Again, it basically says that a PA does everything and works for about \$3.50-\$5.00/hour. The Handbook for producing educational and public-access programs for cable television also devotes a paragraph to the job of the PA. It is suggested that PAs have a college education and some TV training so that producer can delegate certain aspects of the show to them with confidence.¹¹

LIVE TV, an inside look at directing and producing, by Tony Verna, has a chapter titled, "How do you get job in TV?".¹² The author interviewed several well known media people to whom he posed this very question. Several of the people interviewed talked about starting as a PA. (As discussed later in this thesis the questionnaire given to active producers for this study verifies that starting as a PA is very common among producers.) No other pertinent

information about the PA position was gathered by the author through these interviews.

These examples illustrate how shallow and inadequate the information is concerning a PA in the books that do devote some words to the PA position. There are a limited number of books that actually treat the job of a PA as a specific job classification thus pointing out its importance in the production cycle and it's potential for growth within the organization. However, even these books are given to generalities when describing the job of a PA and how it can be done effectively. Most touched on only one or two of the concepts which should be gathered into one handbook about this position.

Expanded References to the Position of a PA

Career Choices for Students of Communications and Journalism, had about two paragraphs which discussed the PA job classification. The position is described as one in which a person is an apprentice, observing and learning about all phases of creating a program before moving on to positions of increased responsibilities.¹³ Careers in Television, suggests that a PA can "try on" various jobs at a station or production company and when the timing is right the PA can move ahead.¹⁴ A characteristic of these articles is that most of the information relates to what a PA will do but little is said about how a PA can excel at the job thus moving ahead quicker than the average person.

The Business of Show Business, by Judith Katz, has only two paragraphs about being a PA but lists some very

insightful information about how to be a good PA. First, a person's performance as a PA can make or break their career. Enthusiastic workaholics are recommended for more work while any kind of negative attitude can blackball you forever. She calls the job of a PA, "...the best learning experience available for the novice interested in a behind-the-scenes career in television."¹¹ The most thorough piece of literature on this subject was found in Career Opportunities in Television, Cable, and Video, by Maxine and Robert Reed. This book lists over one hundred job titles and devotes at least two pages to each title. It uses a very systematic approach to describe each job category. The classification of production assistant is found in the chapter titled "Production" along with all other production related jobs. This section covers position description, salaries, employment prospects, advancement prospects, education, and experience/skills. Although a curious jobseeker could find out about a PA's job using this book, it only serves as an overview concerning this position. Under its heading "Prerequisites", the special skills of resourcefulness, organizational abilities, cooperativeness, initiative, and typing skills are listed.¹² A more thorough look at each of those skills is warranted however and would be of great help to the fledgling PA.

The Cool Fire, by Bob Shanks is also insightful in talking about the PA position, though his discussion is limited to two paragraphs. He differentiates between show

PAs and staff PAs and listed the general responsibilities of each. He says a staff PA is a high-level gofer who is usually female and usually has clerical duties. A show PA has precise duties and more prestige. This PA works more closely with the director and is responsible for script and talent details.' Shanks gives no further information on how to get that first PA job or to excel as a PA once you are there. His final point specifically about PAs is humorous yet helps validate the reasons for doing this study. He says, "The gofer, as we have learned, goes for things-and, as a rule, reads everyone else's mail. Even so, be nice to him or her, since in a year or two he or she will probably be producing the show."'

One other book that was somewhat informative was The Freelancer's Career Book, by Nicki Montaperto. It is a good overview of how to freelance in today's world. It doesn't mention the vast potential that awaits the freelancer in the media professions and specifically the initial starting point as a PA, but it does suggest freelancing as a whole way of life.' Starting as a PA will give a person a realistic taste of the "job to job" existence a freelancer must face everyday. This would be important for PAs to understand because they may make their life career through freelance work, whether it is a \$75/day PA or a \$1200/day director.

There are no existing books, pamphlets, articles, or periodicals based solely on the job of a PA and why this position is a good starting point for any person entering

the market with limited experience. Many books contain bits of information of interest to a jobseeker in media production but none spell out the reasons that the position of a PA is a logical place to start or describe the position in practical terms. Students can always use practical knowledge when they leave the confines of academia because their focus for the past four years has been fairly narrow. The following chapters help to fill this void in the literature by providing pragmatic information for those interested in entering the job market with confidence.

1. Career Information Center, (Mission Hills, California: Glencoe Publishing Co., 1987), p. 154
2. Caroline A. Zimmermann, How to Break into the Media Professions (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co. Inc., 1981), p. 47, 113
3. Jan Bone, Opportunities in Film (Lincolnwood, Illinois: National Textbook Company, 1983), p. 108
4. Judith A. Katz, The Business of Show Business, (New York, New York: Harper and Row, 1981), p. 193
5. Bob Weinstein, Breaking into Communications, (New York, New York: Arco Publishing, 1984), p. 104-106
6. Ibid., p. 53-55
7. Everett Chambers, Producing TV Movies, (New York, New York: Prentice Hall Press, 1986), p. 3
8. John C. Zacharis, Frances Forde Plude, and Andrew S. Rancer, Exploring Careers in Communications and Telecommunications, (New York, New York: The Rosen Publishing Group, Inc., 1985) p. 36
9. Shonan F.R. Noronha, Ed.D., Opportunities in Television and Video Careers, (Lincolnwood, Illinois: National Textbook Company, 1988) p. 41
10. Jon S. Denny, Careers in Cable TV, (New York, New York: Harper and Row, 1983) p. 39
11. Rudy Bretz, Handbook for Producing educational and public-access programs for cable television, (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Educational Technology Publications, 1976) p. 80
12. Tony Verna, Live TV..AN INSIDE LOOK AT DIRECTING AND PRODUCING, (Stoneham, MA : Butterworth Publishers, 1987), p. 239
13. Career Choices for the Student of Communications and Journalism, (New York, New York: Walker and Company, 1985), p. 142
14. Careers in Television, (Washington D.C.: The National Association of Broadcasters, 1986) p. 7
15. Ibid., p. 70, 71
16. Maxine K. and Robert M. Reed, Career Opportunities in Television, Cable, and Video, (New York, New York: Facts On File Publications, 1986), p. c1,2

17. Bob Shanks, The Cool Fire, (New York, New York: Random House, 1977) p. 42,43

18. Ibid.

19. Nicki Montaperto, The Freelancer's Career Book, (New York, New York: Arco Publishing, 1983) p. 7

CHAPTER II

QUESTIONNAIRE REVIEW AND ANALYSIS

To investigate the expectations and experiences related to PA job opportunities of students, current PAs and industry professionals, three surveys were conducted. The methods and results are described in this section. Specific results of the surveys are also integrated throughout the remaining chapters of this thesis.

Survey Methods

Student Survey

One hundred students were surveyed. A sample of students was chosen that reflected an interest in media production and most likely represented those students that would be seeking production related jobs upon graduation. The surveys were given to video production students in Michigan State University's Department of Telecommunication and in University of Detroit's Department of Communication. Some of the students were interested in production careers and others were not. The exact breakdown is not known. 51% of the respondents were female and 49% male. 77% declared telecommunication as their major, 16% declared communication, and the remaining 7% declared various production related majors. The average student spent 7 hours per week in production related

extracurricular activities.

The purpose of this survey was to evaluate the student's expectations of the "real world" work environment. The information sought included: job sought upon graduation, expected salary, desired career position and expected salary, estimated amount of time needed to get a job, best methods to look for a job, perceived main sources of employment, and knowledge of a PA's work. The survey itself can be found in the Appendix.

PA Survey

30 questionnaires were sent out to PAs currently working in the Detroit production market and 14 of these were returned. Because there is no PA directory, this sample was made up of names gathered from producers working in this market. The respondents were 50% male and 50% female. They averaged 25 years of age, with 30 as the oldest and 22 the youngest. 93% had college degrees and the remaining 7% had some college. Most had majored in production related curriculums such as broadcasting, telecommunication, and communication.

This survey was designed to cross reference many of the same questions asked of the students such as: methods used to look for work, desired career position, expected salary, and qualifications most important in securing a first job. Questions more specific to the job of a PA included: length of time to acquire first job, number of resumes sent out, number of interviews, number of months as a PA, average dayrate, initial responsibilities and present

responsibilities as a PA, when they first became aware of the PA position and who informed them about it. Open ended questions included: the hardest and best part about being a PA, why it would have benefitted them to have more information about the PA position before entering the marketplace, and suggestions offered to newcomers looking for work. The complete questionnaire can be found in the Appendix.

Industry Professionals Survey

35 questionnaires were sent out to producers currently working in the Detroit area. Their names were found in local work directories, such as the Detroit Area Production Guide (published by Zooming In Magazine), by word of mouth, and the author's personal work experience with producers in this market. 21 of these people returned completed surveys. 86% were male and 14% female, with an average age of 33. 24% had some college, 62% had college degrees and 10% had graduate degrees. They averaged 9 years employment in production.

This survey was tied into the PA and student surveys by repeating questions such as: first steady job, starting salary, job search methods thought important, and importance of certain PA qualifications. Specific questions concerning their PA hiring practices were asked such as: how often they hire PAs, average dayrate they paid PAs, and main responsibilities given to PAs. Four open-ended questions were asked including: what is the best way to prepare to enter this business, what position would you

recommend first, and list the strengths and weaknesses of PAs that you've hired. The survey itself can be found in the Appendix.

Survey Results

This section is organized by topic to facilitate comparisons across student, PA, and producer responses.

Table 1 illustrates the high expectations of students who will soon be entering the marketplace. 48% thought they would seek either a producer or director position, while 70% of the working producers said they started as something other than a producer or director. 29% of the producers said their first paid, steady job in video production was a staff producer position, however they may have had other jobs before this position. When asked specifically, 57% said they had at one time been a PA. 38% of the producers started as PAs, however, only 3% of the students considered a PA position as their best starting point. Over 80% of the PAs surveyed wanted to eventually become either a producer or director. 71% of them have looked for full time work unsuccessfully and have become freelance PAs. These statistics suggest that students should adjust their focus and become more realistic in the types of jobs they seek.

In general, Table 2 again demonstrates the wide difference between student's expectations of the real world and reality itself. Table 2 shows that students expectations concerning starting pay scales is higher than what a PA is making after 14 months. (The average number of

months that PAs were in the business was 14.) This may be

Table 1

FIRST JOBS AND EVENTUAL JOBS OF
STUDENTS, PAS, AND PRODUCERS

	Students(%)		PAs(%)	Producers(%)	
	1st Job Desired	Eventual Job	Eventual Job	1st Job	Present Job
Indep.Prod.	14	25	27		72
Staff Prod.	5	5	33	29	
Director	15	21	16		5
Asst. Dir.	7	1	5		5
Prod. Mgr.	5	9		5	
Grip	3	1		10	
Cameraman	6			14	
Audio Eng.	3	3			
Writer	6	3			
Graph.Art.	1	1			
Floor Mgr.	2	1			
Editor	1	2			
PA	3			38	
Gaffer	9			5	
Audio Prod.	7	6			
Talent	10	11			
Other	21	19			20
RF/DK		5	19		
(n)	100	100	14	21	21

one reason for a student's refusal to initially consider such a position. The student's expected, eventual incomes are much higher than the PA's expected income. The PA would know the reality of the business much better than the student and reflect this in their expected income predictions. The producers' beginning incomes at \$15,280 are much lower than either the student's expected income or the PA's actual income but this is influenced by the average number of years the producers have worked: 9.

Interestingly enough, the actual incomes of the producers after 9 years is lower than either the students' or PAs' anticipated incomes.

Table 2
ACTUAL AND ANTICIPATED INCOME/YEAR

	Students	PAs	Producers
Starting Income	\$21,267**	\$20,160*	\$15,280*
(n)	90	14	21
Eventual Income	\$66,577**	\$42,364**	\$38,456*
(n)	84	14	19

* Actual Income ** Anticipated Income

Table 3 is a comparison of job-seeking methods from three separate perspectives. First, from the student's perspective who has yet to try these methods; secondly the PA who has most recently tried these methods; and thirdly the producer who is constantly on the receiving end of the methods listed.

All three groups thought personal contacts were the most important way to seek jobs. Students and PAs thought print resumes were effective but the people who read them, the producers, did not. Phone calls were rated highly by PAs and producers but only half the students thought these were an effective way to seek a job. Over half the students thought a video resume was important but the producers rated it last. Students rated the business card

as least important but nearly 60% of the PAs, who are currently using business cards to get jobs, thought it was an effective way to get work. PAs considered internships the least effective way to get a job, but 73% of the students thought it was an important way to get a job. The disparity between these figures is probably do to students willingness to take any job to get started and PAs wanting to get paid for what they do.

Table 3
PERCENTAGE ADVOCATING JOB SEEKING METHODS

	Students	PAs	Producers
Print Resume	81	71	38
Video Resume	54	21	14
Phone Calls	55	86	76
Business Cards	9	57	33
Personal Contacts	88	86	86
Internships	73	7	57
Volunteer Work	40	36	38
(n)	100	14	21

Both students and producers agree that experience is the most important qualification for landing a job as evidenced in Table 4. One third of the students considered a video resume either the first or second most important qualification in securing a job. None of the PAs thought it important and only 14% of the producers considered it

important. Although the college degree was only favored by 41% of the students, producers considered it the lowest qualification. Students should take notice that producers rated recommendations very high. Producers value recommendations from others when considering whether to hire someone.

Table 4

PERCENTAGE RANKING EACH QUALIFICATION FOR SECURING
A JOB EITHER 1ST OR 2ND IN IMPORTANCE

	Students	PAs	Producers
Production Experience	77	64	80
Good Recommendations	29	77	75
Video Resume	28	0	14
College Degree	41	21	14
Good Interview	21	46	15
(n)	99	14	21

Table 5 embodies the narrow view held by students that broadcast houses are the best places to get started in a production career. 96% listed TV/Radio broadcast houses, cable TV stations, or networks as one of the top three best places to get a job in production. Corporations and ad agencies were only listed 23% of the time, yet the number of jobs available is almost 10 to 1 in favor of the corporations and agencies. This narrowness in thinking only diverts the student's job search and wastes time and effort. These thoughts are discussed in greater detail in

the following chapters.

Table 5

PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS LISTING THREE
MAIN SOURCES OF EMPLOYMENT

TV/Radio Broadcast Stations	65
Cable TV Stations	17
Network TV Stations	14
Film Studios	12
Large Corporations	16
Advertising Agencies	7
Production Houses	7
Public Relation Firms	11
Freelance	6
School Systems	1
Hospitals	1
Newspapers/Magazines	2
Government	2
(n)	100

Table 6 illustrates the changing role of the PA over time. 100% of the PAs surveyed started out by doing go-fer work. Other highly rated tasks included vehicle prep and prop procurement. Their current tasks reflect the producer's willingness to upgrade them to more producer oriented jobs once they have proven themselves. Categories of increased use include: scriptclerking, color titling, pre-building on a character generator, and associate producing. While at the same time their initial responsibilities of running, craft services, and prop procurement decreased. Producers had three main things it

relied on PAs for: (1) go-fer work, (2) craft services, and (3) prop procurement. PAs that show initiative will be slowly integrated into higher levels of responsibility as evidenced by Table 6.

Table 6
PA RESPONSIBILITIES

	% PA Reported		% Assigned by Producers
	Starting	Current	
go-fer/runner	100	70	100
scriptclerk	29	70	14
typing	21	21	24
gripping	43	50	33
color title	0	21	5
assoc.produce	14	36	14
edit	14	21	10
vidifont/CG	7	21	14
craft services	64	57	71
word process.	7	7	0
log tapes	43	36	38
pre-prod.calls	36	43	19
music search	7	21	14
procure props	57	57	67
vehicle prep	43	29	48
(n)	14	14	21

Summary of Analysis

The results of these surveys can be summarized as follows:

-Students have unrealistic expectations of the jobmarket in terms of positions available to them and salary.

-Most producers started their careers as PAs.

-Students perceive that certain jobseeking methods are more effective than producers' perceptions of these

same methods.

-Students have a narrow view of where to look for production jobs.

-PA's responsibilities on the job changed over time.

The student needs to realistically assess where they want to go and outline the best methods for getting there. There is a possibility that a graduating student could get a job as a producer or director at a local TV station earning \$25,000/year, however, this is the exception to the rule. The opinions in these surveys suggest that aiming too high will only delay the inevitable; starting at the bottom as a PA. If a student must start as a PA they should do all they can to succeed at this position so they can move on to better things.

The remainder of this thesis is devoted to helping the new jobseeker understand the PA position to succeed quickly.

CHAPTER III

THE PA HANDBOOK

PA stands for production assistant, also known as, go-fer, runner, grunt, or road warrior. A PA is a utility person that is required to do almost anything at any time. A PA does not require any formal education. It seems a high school student with a drivers license could easily handle the requirements of the job. Once you are on the job people don't care if you have a bachelors degree in telecommunications; however they do care if you have cream cheese to go with the bagels in the morning.

The PA position can be compared with a job in the mailroom in a typical corporate structure. Most of the producers that a PA works for, started out as PAs. In the video and film production industry it is almost considered a rite of passage for a newcomer to the business to start as a PA. A grave mistake made by many college graduates seeking a career in video and film is to think it is better to be a receptionist or junior account executive than to start as a cable toting PA. A junior account executive is basically a go-fer with a suit on. In reality an account executive (AE) is normally a liason between the client and the producer. The jobseeker's logic is that if they work in an advertising company as a receptionist or

junior AE that they have their foot in the door for a production job. This is far from reality. A receptionist or junior AE is stuck in a cubicle with a mound of paperwork and the closest they come to the production is a phone conversation with the producer. On the other hand PAs are in the heart of the action for production work. They are surrounded by industry professionals, they have time to observe these people in action and on a daily basis they are probably earning more money than the entry level account person. It should also be noted that it is impossible to do both jobs. A PA is needed primarily during regular business hours and the work schedule can be very erratic.

Advantages

Starting out as a PA offers advantages to both the PA and those that hire PAs. Companies prefer hiring freelance help like PAs because it enables them to sample an individual's talents before they consider him for a full time position. There is no obligation on the part of the employer to call a PA back once the job is completed. The purpose of this booklet is to insure that a PA will be called back time and time again until he or she moves into a position of more responsibility or become a full-time employee.

The advantage to a PA of being in a free-lance position is that he or she has an opportunity to see the industry from a nonthreatening vantage point which makes it possible to make decisions about the future without being

locked into a job he or she dislikes.

Expectations

The executive producer at a large production house said that he receives at least 6-10 resumes a week from people interested in working for his company. One frustration that he expressed was that these individuals when questioned about what they are looking for in a job, talked mostly about technical positions or producing positions. (The research that I conducted verified this in that 68% of the students questioned were initially looking for either producer, director or technical positions.) He said that the level of experience that they bring to the marketplace qualifies them for none of these. Having future expectations to produce or direct are positive signs that a potential employee is looking to grow and move ahead in the industry, but unrealistic expectations can display ignorance about the market they are entering. This producer liked to hear that an individual thought he or she was good enough to produce but that they were willing to start as a PA because that is where the real life education begins. This does not minimize the importance of formal education but it should only be seen as a building block in the career process.

Starting as a PA

It is important that a prospective PA market himself as a PA rather than a frustrated director who will do PA work to make it in the business. Entering the job market

as a PA helps you focus your skills into an area that you know you can handle as you approach potential employers with marketable tools. The unfocused job seeker tells a potential employer, "... I can do just about anything." This is translated by the employer into, "I can do nothing." A better approach is to say to an employer, "I can handle all the PA responsibilities for your upcoming shoot." Sell your skills as PA first and when the employer likes what you have to offer they will seek more information about your background.

Resumes and Business Cards

A resume will lay out your background for the potential employer, but a business card will get you work as a PA. A resume can indicate a newcomer to the industry while a business card represents a person in business for himself with specific skills to offer a producer.

Business cards are inexpensive and easily obtained. 500 cards will cost about \$50. A resume is usually filed in a desk by the producer while a card is often placed in a notebook with other cards for quick reference. Only 9% of the students I surveyed thought business cards were a viable way to get a job, while 57% of the PAs I surveyed used business cards regularly. Figure 1 shows examples of business cards currently being used by PA's.

To distinguish oneself from other PAs something catchy should be included on the card. A picture, phrase, or even an out of town phone number can spark interest in the mind

of the producer and help him or her remember you when a need arises.

Figure 1

EXAMPLES OF BUSINESS CARDS



If you prefer to supplement your business card with a resume it should be modified to represent your abilities as a PA. In the objectives paragraph a sentence can indicate your desire to work as a PA to learn about the industry. A section of the resume can be devoted to skills, in which you outline the personal attributes that make you ideally suited to be a PA for someone. A bullet pointed list under a heading of "Skills" could include: well organized and industrious, knowledge of craft services, safe driver with good understanding of local area, typing and phone skills.

Looking For Work

Like many people before you, you have sent out dozens of unanswered resumes. You have read this booklet and decide to go into business for yourself as a freelancer. You possess marketable skills as a PA and now all you need is a buyer.

Where Not To Look

A common misconception about this industry is that most of the work centers around local television stations. (This research indicated that 96% of graduating students considered TV stations, networks, or cable TV stations one of three main sources of jobs in this business.) If a person's goal is to work in a live broadcast situation then perhaps local television stations are the best starting point. It is documented in The Detroit Producer's Association Production Guide that there are usually only 3 to 4 major television stations in a medium sized market such as Detroit. On the other hand, there are over 100 production facilities in that same market, each with their own projects, with each project requiring the help of a competent PA. Thus, it may be advisable that broadcast stations should be the last resort and not the first. Another reason TV stations are the last place to look for work became apparent in conversation with a local station manager. He said that it is a common practice to offer internships to eager students who then fulfill the requirements of the station's PAs. There is a constant flow of newcomers and it doesn't cost the station anything.

Add to this some of the strictest union shops around and you have the hardest place in the city to land a full or part-time job. (For those jobseekers still interested in broadcast, the summer months are by far the best time to look because stations need a lot of temporary help to fill in for vacationing workers.)

Where To Get Work as a PA

A good place to start is at advertising agencies. Ad agencies often have separate companies affiliated with them that handle their productions. It may require some investigation through phone calls to find out these company names but this effort will save much time in the long run. Sending a resume and some business cards strictly to the agency will only delay the process as opposed to sending these materials directly to the production arm of the company. The Personnel and Human Resource departments at these companies are of very little help. It is best to call the agency or department directly and get the name of the producer in charge or a list of the producers in the building. These producers are the ones that make the hiring decisions for their individual shoots. It is very common for PA's to stop by an office and leave a business card with the producer. It is important that a producer associate your face with your card when you make follow up phone calls.

Independent production houses are also an excellent starting point for getting PA jobs. These are different from ad agency production companies in that they own their

own equipment and may have their own studio and editing facilities. They are hired by ad firm producers to crew their shoots by providing equipment and operators. Many of these companies will hire freelancers for certain crew positions.

Independent producers are individuals hired by a company to produce programming. Many of these individuals operate under corporate names for tax reasons but are one person operations. These individuals hire PAs every time they have a project. They are an invaluable source of employment and my survey indicates that 60% of them started out as PAs. For new PA's these producers often operate on tight budgets and therefore they are looking for inexpensive help. Being a new PA makes you qualify for a lower dayrate increasing your chances of being hired.

Assistant directors are similar to independent producers in that they are often the people who hire PAs for the projects they are working on. The director is usually not involved in the selection of a PA.

Local chapters of the ITVA (International Television and Video Association) as well as a local groups such as The Detroit Producer's Association (DPA) or a state run office of film and TV ususally publish a directory of who's who in film and video production in any given locale. These source books are better than any other single resource when it comes to contacting potential employers.

After distributing cards and resumes, preferably in

person, you can follow up with your network of producers on a regular basis by phone. My survey indicates that producers thought phone calling was the next best way to get work to personal contacts. Phone calling is fast, efficient and cost effective. Each of these producers have projects that come and go, some on short notice and others with plenty of lead time. By contacting them on a regular basis you may land jobs just because you called when the producer was crewing a particular shoot. If they don't have any work available right then you can ask about their schedule and know when to call for the next shoot.

Answering Machines and Pagers

One of the most important tools for a freelancer to have is either a telephone answering machine or an electronic pager. If this seems expensive just consider that two days of missed work because you weren't by the phone would have purchased the nicest answering machine money could buy. Every freelancer in this business uses an answering machine to communicate. When buying a machine, make sure you get one that can play back messages to you over the phone. When you are busy at one shoot location you will need to respond right away from that location to a phone call so you don't miss other employment opportunities. The other tip in using your machine is to keep your "answering message" brief. This may seem trivial but anxious producers are not always amused by a cute, lengthy answering message. In addition people don't have to be told to leave a message after the beep. We all know

this by now.

If you are on a job, checking for messages throughout the day should be done with discretion. Producers like to have their hired help most concerned about the job they are on, not the job they hope to land for next week. Although there is considerable time in which the PA is away from the set during a shoot, be careful not to give the impression you are more concerned about the next job than this one.

When a producer is in a hurry to book crew members he or she may not have an extra day to wait for people to respond to messages left on their machines. So, several phone calls are made with several different people and the first ones to respond get the job. The electronic pager is an alternative to the phone machine that can help you respond sooner to phone calls. These devices are small units that clip on a pocket or belt. When a call is made to your service it automatically signals you and locks in the number you are supposed to call. Using this system you will hardly ever miss a call or a potential job. This service including the use of the pager is about \$25 a month. Again it could be easily offset by one day's work you were awarded because you were the first to respond to a producer's call.

In a capsule form the same techniques that land your first job as a PA will also be the same techniques that keep getting you work (minus the resumes, of course). The process can be summarized quite simply. Establish a network of contacts and touch base with them regularly.

Most producers in the position to hire freelance people understand the plight of the vendor who must beat the bushes to keep bread on the table. As a result a friendly phone call every 10 days to 2 weeks is not thought of as obnoxious.

Compensation

Getting that initial job as a freelance PA is not nearly as difficult as getting that first staff job. A PA has specific skills and a producer has nothing to lose by trying him or her out. Some producers use inexperienced PAs without pay or for minimal compensation, offering them experience in return. This may be the only way into the market at a particular time, but after a few days on the set, any PA should start earning money. Minimal compensation could be considered \$50/day. \$75/day represents someone new to the field who is given limited responsibilities ie, craft services. \$100/day is the average going rate for most PAs. Once a PA is established and his or her value is realized by the producer, \$125/day can be achieved. PAs who earn \$150-\$200/day are in the gray area of title vs. responsibility, which I will cover later in this booklet. Table 7 demonstrates the survey results concerning current dayrates paid to PAs by producers.

PA's are sometimes also hired by the week or month, which means a deal can be cut with the producer if he agrees to keep you for a specified amount of time. Working for \$75/day for 15 days (\$1125) is obviously better than

Table 7

AVERAGE DAYRATES FOR PAS

	Average	Low	High
Inexperienced/Starting	\$83	\$50	\$150
1 year experience	\$110	\$80	\$175
Seasoned	\$140	\$125	\$200
(n)	14	14	14

holding out for \$100/day and forcing the tight fisted producer into only using you 10 days (\$1000). Remember, it may be two weeks until your next job.

These rates may not seem impressive to the degree-holding jobseeker. My research indicates that most students who will seek jobs in this business expect to make an average of \$20,800/year. However, if you analyze these numbers briefly you might be surprised.

Let's suppose: A starting PA works 10 days/month for 4 months at \$75/day. This totals \$3070. With experience you earn \$100/day and work 15 days/month, for 4 months. This totals \$6000. You give yourself a raise to \$125/day, and for 4 months you work again 15 days/month. This totals \$7500. The yearly total is \$16,570.

These numbers are based on research concerning PAs. Though the average student expects to earn about \$20,800/year, what they actually earn (in clerical jobs, junior account executive positions, or other tangentially related production work) is less than \$16,570/year. And

that is for working 5 days a week, 50 weeks a year. The PA working scenerio above doesn't indicate that this person only worked 32 weeks to earn this money. The other 20 weeks could have been spent earning money on other nonproduction jobs or relaxing on the beach. The point is, being a PA, although a transitory position, can afford you a decent income. Research indicates the average PA with some experience works 15.6 days a month at \$120/day. Across a year that equals \$22,464. The actual working days involved total about 6 months. Even staff PA jobs don't appear as financially sound with the average wage at \$16,200/year for full time work, although staff PA jobs do tend to lead to other jobs of more responsibility (and sometimes more money) more quickly than freelance PA positions. These figures are not as much an enticement into this position as an encouragement to the jobseekers, who think they could never live on the pay of a PA. The flipside of this argument is that a person who is self-employed must provide his or her own medical insurance. This could cost between \$50/month (covering only major medical with a large deductible) to \$200/month. (comprehensive coverage with little or no deductible) But it is important to remember that most part-time jobs and many other full time menial jobs do not provide any benefits either. Working as a PA will not place a person in any worse position in regards to benefits.

Overtime, Half-Day Rates, Mileage

Most industry day rates are charged by either 8 or 10 hours to a day. Anything beyond this is considered overtime. This doctrine does not always apply to the PA. A producer usually expects a PA to work as long as it takes to get the job done without extra compensation. There are exceptions to this depending on the producer and the circumstances of the shoot. Most producers believe it is fair to pay a PA two days wages when a shoot entails 18 to 20 straight hours of labor. There is a growing tendency to pay a PA an overtime rate at 1.5 times their 10 hour rate for extra hours worked. These day rates are quoted as, for example, "\$100 for 10". This indicates to the producer you expect to get paid for every hour you work beyond 10 at 1.5 times your dayrate. Initially, having the job is more important than being paid for every hour you work. If you find this hard to understand, just remember that even though you are working long hard hours, the producer is probably working even longer hours and his or her payrate per hour is likely the lowest on the set.

Sometimes a producer will only need a PA for a couple of hours. In this case the PA may be asked if they have a half-day rate. A good rule of thumb is to offer a rate about two-thirds your normal day rate. ie. \$75 day rate=\$50 half-day, \$100 day rate=\$75 half-day, and \$125 day rate=\$100 half-day etc. A PA being hired for a half day should make it clear that a half day is equal to 5 hours and if the hiree works them past the 5 hour mark the whole

day rate applies.

Along with a dayrate a PA should be given mileage for the use of their automobile. This can average anywhere from .15 to .25/mile. This expense should be noted on a PA's invoice. Most of the time a PA is not given mileage for those miles driven to the place of employment.

The Freelancer and Taxes

A final note about compensation deals with the tax consequences of working for yourself. Person who are self employed must register with the IRS as earning the bulk of their income from freelancing. As a PA you would be legally obligated to file quarterly income tax forms. Not only does the government like to get your tax dollars ahead of time but this system helps to forstall any year end surprises for the freelancer. If you work for an employer full time, that employer is paying 1/2 of your social security allowance (7% of your gross wages). If you work for yourself you must pay all of your own social security allowance. (14% of your gross wages) For the average PA, earning \$20,000/year, this can amount to \$3000 at years end. If you haven't been setting aside \$200-\$300 every month for this throughout the year you could be in trouble at tax time. This also has a flip-side in that as a self-employed person you will have tax deductions that will apply to help lessen your taxable income. A current tax book, such as The Arthur Andersen Tax Guide and Planner 1989, costing \$7.95, would list these items and explain their relevance to the freelancer.

Rising Above the Rest

As in any job situation being a PA involves competition with other people, in this case other PA's. As a PA you will be consciously or unconsciously compared to other PAs that a producer has hired. However, this competition is unique because your next job is never guaranteed and your performance will be critiqued in every project you are involved in. The cliché of only being as good as your last job is often at work and your task as a beginning PA is to distinguish yourself from all other PAs by demonstrating certain skills and forethought that will help you stand apart from all the rest.

Being Prepared

The PA is a utility person, required to do many different things in a variety of situations. For the most part PA's are not asked to do technical jobs. (camera, sound, lighting etc.) These positions require special skills and paying clients expect extreme proficiency. Most recent college grads, although they have worked with technical equipment, lack the expertise required to do a job quickly and correctly the first time. All tasks beyond the technical areas are fair game for a PA. Being prepared to handle any task requires having the right tools to get the job done.

Equipment

This suggested list of equipment will be very useful to the PA on the job and demonstrate to producers that you

are prepared to meet all their needs.

Large Plastic or Metal Cooler- holds ice and beverages for crews on location. Don't skimp and get a styrofoam cooler. A cooler will take a lot of abuse by being shoved in and out of car trunks or sat on by crew members.

Large Thermos- for coffee, can be filled at home or local donut shop. To be used on location where coffee is not readily available first thing in the morning. Coffee is an essential ingredient for any shoot. It is the PA's responsibility to determine where and how to get coffee at any location.

Portable Coffee Maker- some studios have coffee machines as part of the rental agreement and many do not. Having coffee available is crucial anytime. Don't forget sugar and cream.

Dishes and Utensils- if food such as fruit, donuts, bagels and candies are purchased for the crew, dishes on which to serve them are necessary. The appropriate silverware may also be necessary.

Pick-Up Truck or Van- this is not as essential as some tools of the trade, but it could prove to be extremely valuable to the PA and producer. Hauling props, sets, camera equipment, and crew can create a logistical dilemma for any producer. Vans or trucks are most often rented by producers to do these tasks, but the vehicles are only used a couple of hours even though the whole day rate has been paid for them. There can also be a lot of time and effort involved in the pickup and delivery of a rental vehicle. A

PA with a vehicle capable of such things can rent it to the producer at a lower rate. This creates a new avenue to earn more money and provides a more cost effective means of transportation to the producer. Mileage can be charged ranging from .30 to .50 per mile as well as a flat fee per delivery (\$25 to \$50). A PA might be able to use the ownership of a delivery vehicle as an incentive to be hired by a producer. One additional note concerning vehicles that must be rented from a car or truck rental agency. It is useful to the PA to have their own major credit card so that a producer doesn't have to accompany the PA to the rental location and a significant cash outlay will not have to be sustained by the producer. Payment for the vehicle is not normally the responsibility of the PA. Payment will be made with petty cash or through normal billing procedures.

Being Organized

Organization is key to being a successful producer or assistant director. Directors as a general rule don't have to be as organized because someone else is being paid to handle those details for them. I have observed two classifications of PAs in this business. The first one is the reactionary. The other is the proactionary. The reactionary PA responds to problems when they arise usually scrambling to solve them by asking lots of questions and making many phone calls. The proactive PA is more desirable to the producer because he or she anticipates problems but also responds to critical moments more

efficiently through better organization. Certain items will help the PA be more organized and efficient:

Clipboard or Notebook- Used to list the demands of a producer or director. A steno pad seems to work the best. On a long busy shoot the demands of a producer will mount up quickly. If you don't write it down you are likely to forget something. Writing things down and making lists indicates organization to the producer. You may find that you are more organized than the producer for whom you work. This can lead the producer to depend on you and may lead to a more secure future for you as a PA.

Resource Book of Phone Numbers- Everybody in the business has one. It is something that will take time to accumulate but it will go with you when you graduate to positions of more responsibility. This booklet is most useful if organized by job title as opposed to alphabetizing names. Titles include, caterers, cameramen, grips, stylists, editing houses, studios, and talent agencies. Addresses and rates can also be included in this booklet. You should also include social security numbers because many companies require these for tax purposes before payment can be made. When a producer asks you to call an audio post house to hold time for a recording session, he or she would prefer that you find the phone number and know who to ask for on your own. It's one less detail a producer has to worry about in critical shooting situations. On certain remote shoots it might be wise to bring a phone book of the surrounding areas along.

This could save a PA valuable time looking for a phonebooth in the middle of nowhere.

Maps- Maps of the surrounding areas can also be a useful tool. This would be especially useful to the person not completely familiar with the area in which he or she is working. As a new PA you will be asked to go alone to many places you may have never been before. Getting there and back in a timely fashion is important to a producer. Maps can often save a lot of unnecessary travel time. Initially being a "go-fer" will be the primary responsibility of any PA. This will always be the first test of a person's initiative. I've observed producers who become somewhat irritated by a PA who is told to run to the bank to cash a check but expects the producer to explain where the nearest bank is and even draw a map so the PA can find it. A good PA will get this information from a phone book or call the bank and ask for directions. If you can't find a bank, is the producer going to trust you to locate props, equipment or crew for their next shoot? One more suggestion about running here and there for the producer. Calling in to the producer or asst. director from wherever you are may save another trip out and it demonstrates proficiency to the producer.

Art Supply Kit- A tacklebox type kit found in art stores should contain office supplies such as: stapler, 3 hole punch, magic markers, scissors, whiteout and paperclips: All those little things that one would never expect to need on location should be found in this kit.

Petty Cash Receipt Book and Ledger Paper- Being a go-fer involves buying food, art supplies, props, and more food. Most small items will be purchased using cash. The exception to this rule are companies that agree to bill the buyer for the purchased goods. These companies may require an account number or purchase order number before the goods are released. The PA should get this information from the producer before going to these vendors. Most PA's will be entrusted with sizable sums of money to buy things throughout the shoot. Keeping this organized is essential to avoid any money shortage surprises at the end of the shoot. As a PA you may be required to sign a petty cash voucher slip when you receive the cash. This helps the person who is doling out the money keep track of where it is all going. You in turn should do the same if you are required to give money to someone else. This may occur if you are working with other PAs or crew members have an urgent need requiring some of your petty cash. These petty cash receipt books can be purchased at any office supply store. Once you begin to spend your petty cash, receipts for every item must be kept. When the job is over you will be expected to give the producer or AD an itemized breakdown of all your purchases, all the receipts, and any left over cash. Obviously all the receipts and leftover cash should equal the original amount given to you. There are no standardized forms available to help a PA keep this organized. Figure 2 represents a summary format that will help keep the petty cash organized.

[illegible]

Cash Returned \$ _____

DATE _____ NAME _____

Each receipt should be numbered and placed in a letter size envelope. Staple the summary sheet to the outside of the envelope. The easiest way to foul up the petty cash is to let the receipts pile up over several days. Trying to reconcile this after the fact can be a real puzzle. If you record each day's expenditures at the end of that day it could save a lot of time and also forestall any problems like lost receipts or money shortages. By doing the summary as you go, you will be able to give it to the producer during the wrap or soon thereafter. One fault of some PAs is that they take several days to get the summary to the producer after the shoot. The producer is responsible to someone else for that money and he or she is going to want to reconcile all accounts as soon as possible.

Cash management really separates the upwardly mobile PAs from those that are always viewed as strictly PA material. Learning to do this correctly will also come in handy for the PA who will soon graduate to the position of producer or AD. Producers and ADs are responsible for much greater sums of money but the accounting procedures are very similar. The producer who has been using you as a PA for sometime will be more inclined to give you a chance as an AD if they have seen you exhibiting these skills as a PA.

Being a Servant

When involved in a shoot a PA is in a unique position compared to all other crew members. The PA is the one

member of the production team that must interact with all other members of the crew as well as talent, clients, and various vendors. If the gaffer needs a light picked up at the rental house the PA will probably get it. If the AD needs more film the PA will be making that run. If the talent needs a chapstick or the director a pack of cigarettes the PA will get them what they need. If the client needs a script delivered to the office the PA will be the one to do it. A PA must be a friend to all people on the set. Being liked by everyone will always score points with the producer. A PA with a bad attitude will never succeed. He or she will be labeled by crew members as a complainer and probably won't be hired back.

This may be the most difficult part of the job. Being subservient to people you feel equal or even superior to in terms of ability will take some tongue-biting and pride swallowing along the way. However, acting friendly, listening to tired old production stories told by tired old grips and familiarizing yourself with people's individual needs will distinguish you from all other members of the crew. Remembering what brand of cigarettes a director smokes or how a producer likes his coffee may seem small but it stands out to a producer. Before the PA takes off on a run to get something he or she should always ask the AD or producer if they need anything. Depending on the relationship of the PA to the director, the PA might also ask them if they need anything. These "personal" favors will help create goodwill between the PA and various crew

members. A lot of what a PA does is on short notice or in response to some problem that has arisen. Treating vendors with friendliness will almost always yield dividends to a PA in the form of a favor that is performed when an emergency arises. Booking an extra hour of edit time on short notice, returning a dolly late or acquiring a hard-to-find prop are examples of times when your relationship with a person will determine whether the favor is granted. Being nice all the time is not easy but the first person you snub because you are in a hurry may be the person you have to crawl back to for a favor.

Craft Services

Being in charge of craft services for a shoot simply means being responsible for all the food that is on the set during a shoot. This task will more than likely be the first job any beginning PA will undertake. The "coffee and donuts detail" can be considered the lowest common denominator on any set. The fact is, however that a PA's ability to do a superior job in craft services will indicate that they may be too valuable to stay in such a position. The value in having a well organized and thoughtfully prepared food table cannot be over emphasized. It is quite common for some clients and account executives to be more concerned with the food on a shoot than with the quality of the production at hand. Because everyone on the set is likely to peruse the food table, the PA will quickly gain a positive or negative reputation based on the way the food service is handled.

All food purchases will require cash, so the PA should obtain cash from the producer as soon as possible. If the PA is hired on short notice (often the case) he may have to use his own money until they see the producer. The location of the shoot will determine what the food preparation possibilities will be. If the shoot is scheduled at an area studio, then less preparation will be needed compared to a remote location. Most studios have sinks, refrigerators, coffeemakers, and even microwave ovens. A PA who is unsure about the facilities should ask the producer or call the studio and ask. There is still the possibility that even though the shoot is on a stage a coffeemaker and cooler will be needed to keep the food close to the set up. The following list of supplies and food items can be used as a guide when planning a craft service operation.

General Equipment:

Tablecloth	Small bowls for candies
Basket for bagels	Styrofoam plates and cups
Plate for donuts	Napkins
Knife for cutting bagels	Sugar for coffee
Butterknife for creamcheese	Silverware

Breakfast:

Orange, Grapefruit, Apple and V-8 Juices
 Milk
 Coffee and Tea
 Cream for coffee
 Bagels
 Cream cheese
 Donuts
 Fruit: Bananas, Oranges, Grapes, Apples

Snacks:

Soft drinks: Coke is usually a safe bet including diet and decaffeinated.
 Bottled Water is becoming very popular.

Candies: M&M's, Reeses Pieces, etc..

Gum

Certs

Cookies

Vegetables like carrot sticks or celery are unusual, but are very well accepted by crew members.

It is advisable to wait and put the snack food out after lunch because it can act as a "pick-me-up" at a point in the day when the enthusiasm and the energy level of the crew is waning.

Lunch and Dinner

Depending on the size and budget of a shoot lunch and dinner might be catered. It may be the responsibility of the PA to make these arrangements by contacting the caterer. The producer will supply information on the number of people expected and any special menu considerations. The PA should help coordinate the set up of the caterer especially in remote situations. Normally lunch is required for a union crew 5 hours from the call time. For instance an 8 am call (the time at which the crew is to arrive at the location) would require a 1 pm lunch break. The IATSE union in the Detroit area requires that a crew be fed every six hours.

If catering is not done then the job of ordering, transporting, setting up and cleaning up a meal is left to the PA. The PA should be certain enough time is allowed to handle a meal so that a crew is never kept waiting because of food. As mid-morning approaches it may be necessary for the PA to ask the producer what food arrangements are to be made for lunchtime. If food can be acquired close by then

obtaining a menu from a local deli or restaurant can make the job easier. A PA should always follow the producer's wishes about what type of food he or she prefers on that day. Once a preference is made known, the PA can either take orders individually off a menu or, in the case of pizza, determine how much is needed and place the order. Some people on the crew may be vegetarians. Special provisions should be made to accomodate these people. Caterers will ask beforehand if there are any and then offer special dishes for them. If the food is being ordered by the PA then meatless pizza or chinese food might be the best selection. If the budgets allow, never skimp on food. Running out of something is embarrassing and may reflect badly on the producer.

A large table is best for setting up the food. If no tables are available 2 card tables might come in handy. Keeping the tables neat and presentable throughout the day is important. Handling craft services usually requires that the PA be the first one on the set in the morning and that he or she is the last one to leave.

Dresscode

Dressing for success even applies to being a PA. If you want to distinguish yourself from all other PAs you will want to dress at an equal or higher level than the person who hired you. This will indicate to the producer and other crew members that you view yourself as more than a PA but you are doing your job proudly because you see it leading to bigger and better things. There are exceptions

to this rule. If you expect to do a lot of toting and lifting on any particular day then wearing more informal clothes would be wise. However if you expect to have extensive client contact wearing a suit and tie is essential. In the case of live shows such as teleconferences and business meetings there will be a lot of clients involved and dressing up on show day is appropriate.

Stepping Stone to the Future

As a PA you will be surrounded at work by people in a working situation who will be making lots of money. This is especially apparent in this business because most people operate on a daily or hourly rate. All you have to do is add up the numbers to see what the potential is for earnings. If a PA compares himself to this standard he will become frustrated and disillusioned quickly. The key is to use the employment opportunities of this position to garner experience and knowledge about the industry. If you have distinguished yourself as a PA, you may be hired full time by one of your clients or you will soon move into a job with more responsibilities and more money.

A PA who has been in the job for several months should expect that boredom will eventually set in and the novelty of the position will wear thin. Cutting corners on the job is a big mistake at this point because this is the time in which producers may start to evaluate you for positions of increased responsibility. Maintaining that "cut-above-the-rest" work ethic will pay off in the long run. There are

basically two roads the experienced PA wanting to do more can take. The first path is becoming the "older PA" that is worth \$100/day but isn't taken seriously as a candidate for more responsibility. Producers form this opinion of PAs because of various things they have observed while on the job. PAs may begin cutting corners on familiar tasks or start to complain about the type of work they do. PAs who aren't interested in increased responsibility display a lack of initiative that will eventually label them as PA material only. The next chapter reflects on these thoughts from the producers viewpoint. The second road is for the PA who has distinguished him or herself from all other PAs by always offering more to producers than they expected. Hopefully this thesis will help you accomplish this. Once a producer finds this "Super PA" he or she will attempt to use them on every project he is involved in. Jobseeking PAs need not worry because there are always conflicts in peoples' schedules that prohibit continual, exclusive use of individual PAs. If you have producers that begin to depend on you as a PA, you have placed yourself in a good position to ask for more money (maybe an additional \$25/day as a PA), but more importantly you have opened the door to increased responsibility. Now you are earning \$150 to \$200/day and handling the job responsibilities of an AD or associate producer. After this period of time in the business you will know what your options are. Many PAs have easily switched to AP, AD, or freelance producer. The producers I polled listed an average of 24 months for the

amount of time required for a PA to move up to these positions of increased responsibilities.

Starting as a freelance PA has its advantages over other positions like tape tech, assistant editor, staff PA, or junior account executive. These pigeon-holed positions don't have the access to other job opportunities that being an independent PA affords the entry-level worker. Working for several different producers in various companies lets you call and ask about full time job opportunities with people you already know. These people also have first hand knowledge of your skills as a PA. You can be in the right place at the right time as a PA. Very few other jobs will offer this advantage. This position will also give you access to the people who will be your best source of instruction. No other job in this business lets you observe professionals doing their work as well as getting paid for it. You will be in a position to ask questions and learn first hand about almost any aspect of this industry.

Talking to the Professionals

The PA

For those people interested in the world of video/film production, yet not directly connected to the business in some way, there probably remain many unanswered questions about this job. The best place to get these questions answered is from the PA and producers themselves. A survey I conducted of PAs asked two important open ended questions: What is the hardest part and what is the best

part about being a PA?

The Hardest Part of the Job

Most of the working PAs said their job entailed frustration because they continually saw themselves as possessing more capabilities than they were credited for by the hiring producers and other crew members. Being humble and accepting advice although they may have heard it numerous times is part of the average PA's frustration. The average PA wishes to move up to the next level of production (Associate Producer, Asst. Director, Production Manager) more quickly. Doing menial tasks like getting coffee and logging timecodes was difficult for many PAs. Several PAs said that getting steady work was the hardest thing about this job. They also expressed that long days standing on their feet while trying to keep the producer happy was hard work. Understanding what people really want versus what they say they want was pointed out as a difficult task for the PA. Working for unorganized people often makes the job of a PA more difficult. PAs said it made unnecessary work in terms of extra phone calls, more running about, or last minute scrambling to get the job done.

The Best Part of the Job

An overwhelming number of PAs said that getting to know people and forming solid friendships through work situations was a positive aspect of the job. Many thought the money earned was the best part. Having the freedom of

a freelancer's life was was appealing to several PAs. Some said that each production was different, providing a different environment, new people, and new challenges with every project. Having the opportunity to learn about the business while working and getting paid was a positive aspect mentioned by the surveyed PAs. Many PAs also saw the chances for upward mobility greater in this position than others they had tried. They saw themselves as an intregal part of a team when involved in a production, again expressing the camaraderie of the crew members during a shoot.

The Producer

If a person is interested in working as a PA and in turn proving they are the best PA around, talking to industry producers would also be beneficial. Understanding the strengths and weaknesses of PAs through the eyes of the people that hire them would help PAs and prospective PAs correct these areas before they interfere with their own job security. My survey of industry professionals included two open-ended questions about this: List the weaknesses and strenghts of PAs you have hired in the past.

Weaknesses

Complaining about their work or making excuses about why something can't be done was listed often. Most producers have the attitude that anything is possible with a little time and/or money. Hearing negative responses from hired help doesn't go over very well with these

people. They frowned on PAs who constantly needed direction on what to do or those PAs that lacked hustle. Laziness wasn't tolerated. Poor money handlers and unorganized PAs were disliked. Even if the hiring person is unorganized, they expect the PA to keep everything under control. Having a cocky attitude (especially recent college grads) turned off many producers. They didn't appreciate the PA who acted like he or she knew everything because they went to school. On the other hand, shy, quiet, PAs were viewed as having a tougher time making it because this business is loaded with big egos and people with complex personalities. Some of these producers had experiences with PAs who had unrealistic expectations about the hours they were expected to work. Asking to leave early or not wanting to get up early to pick up donuts was the kiss of death for many PAs. Producers expected them to be the first to arrive and the last to leave their shoots. Not following simple directions frustrated many producers about the PAs they had hired. Not being thorough or cutting corners on an assigned task often backfired on the PA.

Strengths

Producers love the "Radar O'Riley" type PA. This is a PA who is always thinking ahead, anticipating the needs of the producer and writing things down so he and the producer don't forget. Being organized and dependable was a top priority listed by most producers, while experience was only listed a couple of times. Common sense and the

ability to follow directions were seen as more important. This involved good listening skills, phone skills, and the ability to relate to many different types of people. In general producers like PAs with positive attitudes, as well as PAs who dressed presentably. Producers liked PAs who when seeing a need immediately sought to meet it, even though it was above and beyond their duties. Resourcefulness was a characteristic listed that impressed many producers. They liked the PA who took action on his own to overcome some obstacle within a task the producer had assigned. The ability to create imaginative alternatives made some PAs invaluable to their producer. Being early or prompt for work and possessing a reliable car is also important in the eyes of producers.

CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY

Students of media production are often uninformed about the production job market. A review of books about jobs in the industry reveals that most are incomplete and not specific enough. This thesis includes analysis of surveys conducted of students, industry professionals, and production assistants (PAs). This data indicates that: 1) Students have unreal expectations about the job market, 2) Industry professionals expect that new job entrants will most likely start as PAs, and 3) There are "tricks-to-the-trade" that can help PAs distinguish themselves from others with whom they will be competing for work and the chance to move up. This thesis is presented as a practical handbook that will educate the jobseeker about the position of a PA, describing why it is a logical place to start. It will then help the average PA rise above others in his or her profession to be ready for any opportunity that presents itself.

GLOSSARY

Address Track Code: Time-code found on either audio channel one or two.

Book or Guarantee: To book or guarantee time at a studio or edit house is to guarantee that you will pay for the time regardless if it is used.

BVU Time Code: Time-code found on a third channel specifically designated for time-code. Usually relating to the 3/4" format for editorial purposes.

Call Time: The time of day that the crew members are supposed to be at the set ready to begin work.

Color Titling: Service offered by most production/edit facilities whereby slides, photos, transparencies, or any graphic artwork are transferred to videotape with a video camera.

Craft Services: Acquisition, preparation, and clean up of all food, beverages, and necessary eating utensils for the production crew on remote and studio shoots.

Day-Rate: Amount of money a freelance worker charges for a given number of hours work during a day.

Degaussing Tapes: Erasing videotapes for reuse by using a magnetic mechanism.

Digital Effects: Special effects used mainly in on-line editing situations that manipulate the picture digitally. The ADO and DVE are common abbreviations for these effects.

Element Tape: Source tape used in edit.

First Refusal: If when calling to reserve studio or edit time all needed time slots are being held by other people, you can be put on first refusal so that if any of that time is released by the other people you are first in line to have it held in your name. If you are able to guarantee the time you need then your scheduler will call the other people and force them to either release the time to you or guarantee it themselves. (The second person in line behind the person holding the time is on second refusal and behind this is third, forth etc..)

Gaffer: Crew member whose main function is lighting the set and dealing with electrical circuits.

Grip: Crew member whose main function is to help gaffer light the set by hauling and erecting lights, stands, and cabels. Also involved in hauling set props and fixtures.

HMI Lights: Lighting instrument primarily used to match daylight color temperature. Requires special transformer.

Hold: When calling to reserve equipment or time at a studio or edit house, this time can be held without any commitment thereby assuring the producer the right to cancel do to a change in schedule.

Logging Tapes: Systematically writing down information found on a videotape usually using time-codes as a reference.

Master Tape: Tape generated in final on-line edit.

Needle Drop: A selected piece of music from a library of music selections.

Off-Line Edit: Editing session done prior to the finished on-line edit in which all edit decisions are made. Usually involves 1/2" or 3/4" tapes copied from the production tapes.

On-Line Edit: Editing session in which final cut is done. Usually done on 1" and often uses an edit decision list (EDL) formulated in the off-line edit session.

Paint Box: Electronic graphic art system offered by production/edit facilities used to quickly create stylized lettering, pictures, and graphic treatments. These screens are then transferred to videotape for use in an edit or live show. This equipment also has the capability to correct film or video frame by frame to delete or include information in each frame.

Petty Cash: Money used during a production for miscellaneous goods and services which will not be covered by a purchase order.

PO Number: Purchase Order Number. Number assigned to a request for services to a vendor insuring their payment for services or equipment rental.

Pre-Lite or Prep Day: Days or days before actual filming or taping is started in which the stage, studio or location is prepared for production.

Shoot Days: Days that actual filming or taping occurs.

Still-Store: Digital recorder/player that can store and sequence hundreds of still frames for instant recall in edit or live situations.

Strike Day: Day or days directly after the shoot days which are used to disassemble the set and return stage or location to condition prior to the shoot.

Talent: Any on or off camera performer used during the production.

Tape Formats: 1/2" includes beta and VHS, these represent consumer grade quality. 3/4" or U-matic is considered broadcast quality. Beta-Cam is high speed beta that is greater quality than 3/4" but not quite as good quality as 1". 1" is considered the highest quality videotape format.

Vidifont: Character generator used for titling. Advanced models have extensive graphic and motion capabilities.

Visible Time Code: Time code which is made visible on the screen, usually done when making copies of the raw footage. The visible time-code relates directly to the code striped on the tape at the time of production. (aka window code, burn-in time-code)

Wrap/Strike: Tearing down the set or stage after the shoot.

APPENDIX

STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

- 1) Are you (circle one): Female Male
- 2) What is your major? _____
- 3) How many hours do you spend each week in production related extracurricular activities?
_____ hrs.
- 4) What kind of job do you plan to seek when you graduate? (circle one)
- | | |
|-----------------------|----------------------|
| independent producer | floor manager |
| staff producer | editor |
| director | assistant editor |
| asst. director | video technician |
| production manager | production assistant |
| grip | gaffer |
| camera operator | scriptclerk |
| asst. camera operator | soundperson |
| audio engineer | audio producer |
| scriptwriter | performer |
| graphic artist | other _____ |
- 5) What do you expect your starting salary to be?
\$ _____ per year
- 6) What eventual career position do you desire? (circle one)
- | | |
|-----------------------|----------------------|
| independent producer | floor manager |
| staff producer | editor |
| director | assistant editor |
| asst. director | video technician |
| production manager | production assistant |
| grip | gaffer |
| camera operator | scriptclerk |
| asst. camera operator | soundperson |
| audio engineer | audio producer |
| scriptwriter | performer |
| graphic artist | other _____ |
- 7) What salary do you expect to earn in this career position?
\$ _____ per year

8) Please rank the following qualifications from most important (1) to least important (5) in terms of getting your first job.

_____ Production Experience	_____ College Degree in Production
_____ Good Recommendations	_____ Good Interview
_____ Videotape Resume	

9) How much time do you think it will take to get your first job?

_____ weeks _____ months

10) Which of the following methods do you plan to use in searching for a job? (circle responses)

Print Resume

Video Resume

Phone Calls

Business Cards

Personal Contacts

Internships

Volunteer Work

Others _____

11) Name the three main sources of jobs in your field.

1- _____

2- _____

3- _____

12) What are the main roles and responsibilities of a production assistant?

13) Would you be interested in more information on careers in production? (circle one)

yes no

PRODUCTION ASSISTANT QUESTIONNAIRE

- 1) Are you:(circle one) Male Female
 - 2) What is your age? _____years
 - 3) Highest level of education completed:(circle one)
 - high school
 - some college (major:_____)
 - college degree (major:_____)
 - graduate degree (major:_____)
 - technical school(major:_____)
 - other_____
 - 4) Have you sought full-time work in video/film production?
yes no
-if yes,what position(s)_____
-
- 5) How long did it take you to secure your first PA job
when you began looking?
_____Days _____Weeks _____Months
 - 6) How many resumes did you send out? _____
 - 7) How many potential employers did you interview with?

8) What methods did you use to find a job? (circle responses)

- printed resume
- video resume
- phone calls
- business cards
- personal contacts
- internships
- volunteer work
- other _____

9) Which qualifications are most important in securing a first PA job? [Please rank from (1) most important to (5) least important.]

- | | |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| _____ production experience | _____ college degree
in production |
| _____ good recommendations | _____ good interview |
| _____ videotape resume | |

10) How long have you been a PA? _____ months _____ years

11) If you are a freelance PA, what companies have you worked for- _____

Do you hold another job unrelated to your PA work?

yes no

if yes, what job _____

How many days per month do you average as a PA?
_____ days

Starting day rate _____/day

Present day rate _____/day

12) If you are a staff PA, what company do you work for?

What is your salary? _____/year

13) What eventual career position do you desire?
(circle one)

independent producer	floor manager
staff producer	editor
director	assistant editor
asst. director	video technician
production manager	production assistant
grip	gaffer
camera operator	scriptclerk
asst. camera operator	soundperson
audio engineer	audio producer
scriptwriter	performer
graphic artist	other _____

14) What salary do you expect to earn in this career position?

\$ _____ year

15) When you first began as a PA what were your responsibilities on a typical project? (circle responses)

go-fer/runner	craft services
scriptclerk	wordprocessing
typing	logging tapes
gripping	pre-production scheduling
color title	music search
assoc. producer	prop procurement
editing	vehicle prep
vidifont/titling	other _____

16) Now what are your responsibilities as a PA?

go-fer/runner	craft services
scriptclerk	wordprocessing
typing	logging tapes
gripping	pre-production scheduling
color title	music search
assoc. producer	prop procurement
editing	vehicle prep
vidifont/titling	other _____

17) What is the hardest part of your job as a PA?

18) What is the best part about being a

19) When did you first become aware of the position and responsibilities of a PA? (circle one)

while in high school
while in college
while job hunting
after taking another job
other _____

20) From whom or what source did you first learn about the position of a PA? (circle one)

instructor in school
industry literature
career books
person in the business (other than a PA)
another PA
potential employers

21) Would it have benefitted you to receive specific information about the job of a PA before entering the production marketplace?

yes no

why _____

22) What suggestions would you offer newcomers wanting to find work in this field?

INDUSTRY PROFESSIONAL QUESTIONNAIRE

- 1) Highest level of education completed: (circle one)
- High School
 - Some college (major_____)
 - College Degree (major_____)
 - Graduate Degree (major_____)
 - Technical School (major_____)
 - Other _____
- 2) Are you (circle one): Male Female
- 3) What is your age? _____years
- 4) Present Occupation_____
- 5) Current Salary: \$_____per year
- 6) Number of years in production related work: _____
- 7) Were you ever hired as a PA?(circle one) Yes No
- if yes, how long did you work as a PA?
- _____months_____years
- 8) What was your first paid, steady job in video production?
(circle one)
- | | |
|--|---|
| independent producer
staff producer
director
asst. director
production manager
grip
camera operator
asst. camera operator
audio engineer
scriptwriter
graphic artist | floor manager
editor
assistant editor
video technician
production assistant
gaffer
scriptclerk
soundperson
audio producer
performer
other:_____ |
|--|---|
- 9) What was your starting salary? \$_____ per year .

10) How many days per month do you hire PA's? _____days

11) How much per day do you pay a PA with little or no experience?

\$ _____/day

12) How much do you pay a PA with one years experience?

\$ _____/day

13) How much do you pay a seasoned PA?

\$ _____/day

14) How long does it usually take for a PA to move to a position of more responsibility? (ie, Assoc. Producer, Asst. Director)

_____months

_____years

15) What are the main responsibilities you give to PA's on a typical project? (circle responses)

go-fer/runner

scriptclerk

typing

gripping

color title

assoc. producer

editing

vidifont/titling

craft services

wordprocessing

logging tapes

pre-production scheduling

music search

prop procurement

vehicle prep

other _____

16) What would you recommend to a person who wants a job in production, in terms of how they should prepare?

17) What position would you recommend they seek first?

- 18) Which of the following job search methods do you feel are the most important? (circle responses)

printed resume

video resume

phone calls

business cards

personal contacts

internships

volunteer work

other _____

- 19) Please rank the following PA qualifications, in terms of which are most important to you when in hiring someone new.

(1=most important, 5=least important)

_____ production experience

_____ college degree in
production

_____ good recommendations

_____ a good interview

_____ video resume

- 20) List the strengths of a good PA.

- 21) What are weaknesses that you've seen in PA's that you have hired?

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