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Lesson 5

A look at the role of an Assistant Director in Film

There are many roles on a set but were here to give a rundown on a specific role. Besides the Director the most important role on set would be the assistant director “AD” for short. Some people may be aware of the role of the AD or may never even heard of it. Most would wonder what an AD actually is or does? In this paper, I will give a brief yet insightful idea of the tasks and daily rundown of an AD’s day or schedule. Also, the skills a person must have to be an AD.

The two phases pre-production and production heavily begin and end with the AD. A handful things you need to know to be an AD. The AD has to be really involved in the pre-production and are expected to know everything. AD is the “go to person” for information and details. It is highly encouraged in this role to not wait but to initiate don’t be afraid to make the decision(s). People will look to know and what needs to be said or done. All that was just stated before will be re-announced again when the production actually happens. There are many duties and tasks asked of an AD.

Starting with pre-production going through and breaking down the script. Here is where the AD can make key and specific notes up and down the script. Notes like from the props setting/location for both in and out of the script to the slightest or immense sound effect(s) and labeling when or which cast and crew member is needed. The schedule is of what is being shot in order that it is arranged that day, where and who is needed and items or props. Included in the schedule is a “day of days” a chart listing the cast and the days they are working. This slight document helps keep track of cast days of work and what they are paid for that day. This is to help prep prior to making a schedule(s) and call sheets. Once they are made they’ll be dispersed amongst the director, cast and the department heads of the crew (cinematography, lighting, costume/makeup etc..). After receiving the schedule is a great way for the other departments to be readily prepared and aware of each shoot coming up. Also, communicating with certain departments on an estimation how long a scene may take to shoot. It helps navigate or to keep in mind if something may be taken out of or over shooting and delay. Nothing is for sure until the actual shoot happens but it is just nice to be aware beforehand. It’ll help to understand how to deal or prepare with a situation if it may occur.

Production time now is where a person is tested and it will really show if this job is for you. The AD is in charge of a set. Being the AD is the top communicator and calls and clarifies all the shots between the director and the rest of the entire crew. Simply the AD speaks on behalf of the director to the crew. Step one would be the blocking on set right before shooting. This is like placing everyone where they should be. Double checking no extra sound nothing is in the way. Once the director is ready then it is time to make the calls on set. The following order If it is a reshoot just simply go back to the spots everyone was in place before.

The following skills would be the keys to this vital role. Organization of all material (schedules, call sheets, locations and other documents) and cast and crew. Confidence to make a decision and following through on it. As an example, if there is not enough time to shoot a scene this may result in being cut from production. Simply it won’t be in the film. Killer communication to all those around you with constant awareness of the entire shoot on each and every day. It helps immensely when a particular department has any comments or issues the AD will be the first to know refer info back to the crew. The ability to problem solve well and quickly. To have or know the answer to every bad or interrupted situation on a set. Making a list mentally and physically of ways to fix fixable situations and situations that may take time to fix. For examples changing a light if it goes out or another piece of equipment or if a major prop busts and it might take a more than a day to replace. Time management of yourself and others is detrimental for every single day of a shoot. The awareness of which and where cast is and should be on a set when it is time to shoot. Displaying those skills effective and efficiently will be the difference maker becoming a good and great AD.

In conclusion, the AD is a pretty demanding and stressful job. All that is on the mind of the AD can make you almost nuts depending on the person that handles this role. The days can vary each and every day on a set. On the bright side the AD would be the first to know all of this information. An AD is an extremely rewarding role and one of leadership. It is great on a resume for any person seeking a job on a set production. The handling all the pressure on a set but with the rewarding of leading the creative people to a great collaborative piece of work. Sounds like AD can be a good choice for a creative leader that wants to grow not just as a creative but as a person as well.