

After producing over a thousand hours of episodic television I am often asked what managerial skills I believe are required to succeed as an Executive Producer/Showrunner. These are some thoughts about what has worked for us at John Wells Productions (JWP). It is by no means meant to be definitive and is only supplied as a resource – feel free to use and/or adapt anything you find helpful. If you are already a Writers Guild member the WGAw runs a terrific program called the Showrunners’ Training Program that was developed by Jeff Melvoin and a group of dedicated WGAw members (including my first boss, John Wirth) and you should definitely apply. Don’t give up if you don’t get in on your first try, there are ten times more applicants every year than available spots.

There are four areas I believe are essential for all EP/Showrunners to master --

SCHEDULING AND DEADLINES

COMMUNICATION

DELEGATION

LEADERSHIP AND HUMILITY

I’m going to speak to each of these areas and what’s worked for us at JWP, but let’s start with what I believe is the most important skill you need to develop to

succeed – organization. And to get yourself organized you need to create schedules and set deadlines.

## **SCHEDULING AND DEADLINES**

Your biggest challenge as a Showrunner is time. You won't have enough of it. The job is too big, there aren't enough hours in the day. You must create schedules and deadlines and stick to them to succeed.

The most important schedule you must create is a --

### **WRITERS SCHEDULE**

What is a writers schedule? It's the schedule that lists the due dates for each story outline, revised story outline, rough draft, first draft, and second draft you are going to write (or have written) for every episode of your show. Why is this so essential? Because you must have a finished, ready to shoot, script on the first day of every episode's prep period to succeed.

Let me repeat, *you must have a finished, ready to shoot, script on the first day of every prep period for every single episode!*

At JWP we want a finished second draft (third pass) of each script on the first day of prep – a draft of the episodic script that’s already incorporated *at least* one round of studio and network notes. A draft that is ready to be shot.

It’s extremely difficult to succeed as a Showrunner if you don’t have finished scripts on the first day of prep. Why? Because you’re depriving your collaborators (your director, actors, line producer, ADs, designers and department heads) of the ability to do their jobs efficiently. You’re also depriving yourself of the latitude to make changes during prep, to spend money wisely and schedule your show in an efficient manner. You’re depriving your actors of the time they need to prepare properly (late scripts are the cause of most conflicts between Showrunners and actors). Without a script on the first day of prep you’re going to be forced to do everything in production in an accelerated manner -- and that costs money, lots of money. Creating a writers’ schedule and sticking to it is your number one priority as a Showrunner and as a manager.

When you’re hired to run a show, whether it's on streaming, broadcast, pay or basic cable, (whether for 22 episodes or 6 episodes or anywhere in between) understand that you are now the manager of a multi-million-dollar factory. Yes, you’ve written a great script they want to make, but that’s the writing part of the

job. Now you're the CEO of a multi-million-dollar company. We like to think of what we do as a solely creative process, but running a show is also running a huge startup business. One in which you're required to hire 125 to 200 people in the matter of a few weeks and to then begin making your show, on time and on a budget within weeks or a few months. Often with no previous experience as a Showrunner or manager.

Think of your network or studio as a financing partner that's giving you tens of millions of dollars to make a product, your show. Would you give you 40 to 100 million dollars to spend in less than a year? The nervousness you experience from your network and studio isn't crazy. It's not a lack of confidence in you personally. It's the "oh my god", did we make the right decision trusting this writer with millions of our dollars?

From the moment your show gets picked up, you need to be concerned with how you are going to be an organized manager. It's not important that you understand every function of how to produce a show. If you were the new manager of an auto manufacturing plant, nobody would expect you to know how to build a carburetor. You're hiring people who know their jobs.. You're not a composer or a

painter working in solitude, you're running a one hundred-to-two-hundred-employee factory.

And factories require organization, schedules, and have contractual delivery requirements to meet or they lose their customers and their financing. This is true of Showrunners too. I'm going to share a horrible truth. You can succeed creatively but fail managerially as a Showrunner and you may not get a second chance to run a show again for years. But if you succeed managerially and the show fails to attract an audience, you will get another opportunity to be a Showrunner. Most shows fail, everyone understands that. But if your show failed and you were over budget because scripts were late, and the production was chaotic because scripts were late, and your cast was mutinying because the scripts were late -- you will very likely not be given another opportunity to work as a Showrunner. When you've had a show that failed and you're trying to sell your next show, the first thing the studio/network wants to know is whether you were a successful manager on your last show. They call around and ask how you did. If the answer is "it was a mess, scripts weren't done on time, and we were over budget" you're not going to get to be the Showrunner. And in case I haven't said it enough already, the thing you can do to make sure this doesn't happen to you is to make a Writers Schedule and stick to it.

What is a Writers Schedule? It's a schedule that lists the dates that all the story outlines and drafts of your scripts for the entire season are due. The goal is to be on the third draft (rough draft, first draft, second draft) of the script by the first day of prep for each episode. If a writer suddenly dropped dead on the first day of prep we can shoot the prep draft because it was ready to go. Here are a couple of examples of Writers Schedules we've used in the past.

***INSERT WRITERS SCHEDULES HERE – or link to .pdf etc***

We use five steps to get to the second (production) draft.

An initial story outline.

A revised story outline that is due one week after the initial story outline.

A rough draft of the script that is due two weeks after the revised story outline.

A first draft that is due one week later.

A second draft that is due one week later, on the day before prep begins.

You create a Writers Schedule by getting the prep date for each episode from your line producer or unit production manager (UPM) and working backwards from the first day of the final episode's prep to find out when each story/script step for each episode is due.

It's sometimes easier to think of these due dates in reverse order to come up with your Writers Schedule. So, if --

The second draft of the script is due the day before the first day of prep –

The first draft of the script is due one week earlier –

The rough draft of the script is due one week before that –

The revised story outline is due two weeks before that –

And the initial story outline is due one week before that.

This means each script has a seven-week process to get to completion of that second (production) draft on the day before prep begins for each episode.

Why is a Writers Schedule the single most important thing you can do to organize yourself and succeed as a Showrunner? Because late scripts are the explanation you discover when you examine virtually every situation where the Showrunner has failed managerially.

*Over budget? Late scripts.*

*Difficult actors? Late scripts.*

*Hostile line producers and department heads? Late scripts.*

*Disappointing direction from your directors? Late scripts.*

*Incoherent storytelling? Late scripts.*

Let's break these issues down individually.

**Over Budget?** If you don't have a ready to shoot script on Day One of prep, your production team can't plan effectively or efficiently. They can't do their jobs. A finished script on the first day of prep allows your production team to do their best work. They need their prep days to break down the script, set shooting schedules, order equipment and crew. They need their prep days to ask you questions about the scenes, about your intentions for the characters, the arcs, what you want. Your location managers need time to find and permit the best and most cost-effective locations. Your casting directors need time to find the best actors. Your production designers and costume designers and prop masters aren't forced to do everything at the last minute. Doing things at the last minute is expensive, very expensive. When your scripts are late your production team is forced to throw money at everything to keep the company from shutting down. With late scripts there's no time to think, to plan wisely, everyone is in survival mode. You're risking their careers, risking their health. And if you do get another season, many will choose not to return, meaning you're losing good employees



because of your inability to do the most important part of your job – getting your scripts done on time.

***Difficult actors?*** Actors get crazy when scripts are late. They don't have time to read the script and talk to you and your writer(s) about it. They don't have time to learn their lines and properly prepare. They have every right to get angry and belligerent. Put yourself in their shoes. They don't see a finished script until the last minute (or worse yet, they arrive at their trailer in the morning to find new pages for that day's shooting). They don't have a weekend or days off to learn their lines. Or maybe they only get the first thirty pages before shooting begins. They work on those thirty pages but when they arrive on set they discover you've finally finished the script but when you got to the end you realized you had to change things in those first thirty pages that the actor's already learned. Oh and the AD needed to add a scene on the set for the day that didn't even exist before. The actor's never seen that scene until they find it on their make-up chair at five in the morning.

Now your actor is desperately trying to relearn what's changed from what they learned the night before and memorize the new scene for later that day and then they're called to the set and seventy people on the crew are standing around

watching them stumble through as they try to get the lines right. Your actor is humiliated in front of the crew and their acting peers.

You might as well have stripped them naked and shoved them out in front of a full theater audience. They're angry and embarrassed – and that's your fault. And guess what else happens? They stop wasting their time at home memorizing the half-written scripts because they know the scenes are likely going to change. Why should they waste their time? They start coming to set and wandering around with a script learning their lines, taking up very expensive shooting time (a new scene that the actors haven't had time to memorize will take three to four times longer to shoot). Why should they act professionally if you're not treating them professionally by giving them finished scripts on time so they can learn their lines, do their scene analysis, and do their best work?

***Hostile Line Producers and Department Heads?*** Imagine you're a line producer or department head and you don't get a finished script on the first day of prep. You can't do your job. If what your Line Producers, ADs and Department Heads get on the first day of prep is an outline, or a partial script, they can't possibly do their jobs. They can't prepare a schedule or a budget that makes sense. As the Showrunner you've given your line producer, ADs, and department heads a

blueprint for only half the house! How is she or he supposed to figure out what equipment they need to order, what sets need to be built, how many people they're going to need, how much it's going to cost? They can't. And they're afraid to commit to securing locations or building sets or ordering equipment that might not even be in the script when it's finished. Understand that they get their jobs when studio/network executives recommend them, and by putting them in this situation you're jeopardizing their future employment. They have kids, mortgages, bills and believe me, they're not going down with your ship. If you're not getting your scripts done on time, they will sell you out to the studio/network – why should they be damaged professionally for your inability to get your scripts written? And don't kid yourself that giving them a verbal description of what you think is going to be in the script on the first day of prep makes up for a finished script. It doesn't. They'll do some cursory work to find a few locations while they wait but they won't be able to commit to a schedule off your verbal description. You're going to be over budget.

***Disappointing direction from your directors?*** Your directors want to be able to do their best work. Finished episodes are their calling cards for future employment. But if they don't have a shootable script to work from on the first day of prep, they can't spend the time they need to analyze and understand your scenes. To

ask you questions about your intent, the characters' intent, the point of view of what's been written. They can't choose locations, participate in casting, set a shooting schedule, figure out the equipment they're going to need, create their shot lists. Prep periods are already short, there's barely enough time for directors when they get their full prep period. If you're giving them partial scripts during prep (or no scripts), and/or new pages every day, you're depriving them of the opportunity to be properly prepared and you're making them look bad. They can get defensive and angry. You don't get their best work. They must simplify their blocking and camera movements because they're losing valuable time on set while the actors are learning their lines. They don't have the locations you had hoped for because there was no time to permit them. Your show suffers.

And here's something you need to understand – directors talk to each other and if you're running a show where scripts are always late you will find it much harder to book the directors you want in the future. Directors don't want to work on shows where they can't do their best work. You'll be "that" Showrunner. The one that no one wants to work for if they can avoid it.

***Incoherent storytelling? Late scripts.*** This is one of the most damaging consequences of late scripts. Because of all the problems that come with late

scripts (see above) it is very difficult to maintain the integrity and continuity of your episodes in the chaos of a show that's over-budget, with disgruntled actors and unprepared directors, unhappy line producers and overwhelmed department heads. Consistency of performances and visual complexity are sacrificed.

And a finished script on the first day of prep has other benefits. You want to share the Writers Schedule with everyone. Your writers, but also your production staff and your studio and network executives. When your producers and executives see a Writers Schedule – they relax, they understand you know what you're doing, and they know when to expect stories and drafts. They're not calling you all the time asking you when they're going to get the script. They have the schedule that tells them when to expect it. At JWP, production staff (line producers, ADs, casting and department heads), the network and the studio get the Revised Story Outline and the First Draft of every script. This gives the production staff time to ask questions and the studio/network time to give notes.

The Writers Schedule also helps others *keep you* on schedule because your writers know when they have work due and if you haven't started talking in the room yet about an upcoming episode the writer is supposed to be writing, they'll

let you know – “Hey Boss, my story is due in ten days, and we haven’t even started talking about it yet!”

In summary, not having a finished script that is ready to shoot on the first day of every prep period is the number one cause of Showrunner failure. You must be organized to have success as a Showrunner and a Writers Schedule is the most important organizational tool you can master.

Have I convinced you of the importance of the Writers Schedule yet? I hope so.

### **THE SHOWRUNNER’S WEEKLY SCHEDULE**

You’ve done your Writers Schedule, great. But it is the first of many schedules you need to create to keep yourself organized in the chaos that is the day-to-day life of a Showrunner. You need to create a weekly schedule for yourself. There aren’t enough hours in the day when you’re running a show. You must prioritize and delegate. It requires you to discipline yourself and acknowledge that the most precious resource on your show is your time. Every day is a series of mini crises that you can’t allow yourself to be pulled into and a Showrunner Weekly Schedule can keep you from being dragged under. Here’s the one we use.

***ATTACH the sample EXECUTIVE PRODUCER’S SCHEDULE HERE --***

Each week changes slightly based on where you are in your prep and post but each week needs to include two essential sets of meetings. The Writers Meetings and the Producers Meetings.

## **WRITERS' MEETINGS**

We meet as writers three times a week at JWP. Monday, Wednesday and Friday afternoons. Three hours for each meeting. In these meetings we plan and plot the season, the episodes and do group notes on all outlines and drafts. Nine to ten hours a week. No more. After years of running literally thousands of writers' meetings, I promise you that three hours is more than enough time to get everything done you need to get done. Three hours keeps the meetings focused and productive (you don't have to take my word for it, there's extensive research to support limiting group meetings to three hours or less). You don't have more time than this as a Showrunner anyway. These writers' meetings are understood by everyone in production to be sacred and inviolate. Everything else is scheduled around them. No one interrupts them. Everyone knows that whatever they need will have to wait until after the writers' meeting. When we are in the early stages of working out the season (before prep and shooting has begun), we meet five days a week for three hours a day. If you always come into your writers' meetings

prepared and with an agenda of what you need to accomplish, nine to ten hours a week will be more than enough time. While this is all the time the Showrunner can commit to writers' meetings during the week that doesn't mean we discourage the writers from getting together informally to work out issues, pitch ideas, etc. One of the joys of being on a writing staff is the opportunity for writers to pop into each other's offices and assist each other. We never discourage that, but the Showrunner must limit their time with their writers to be able to successfully manage the many other issues that are the Showrunner's responsibility.

## **PRODUCERS' MEETINGS**

Schedule two Producers' Meetings a week on your show (we do Tuesday and Thursday mornings). They take an hour or so. What's a Producers' Meeting? It's a meeting in which everyone on your team with a "producer" in their title gets together to go over the episodes. This includes our writer-producers, the line producer, the production manager, and our post supervisor/post producer. We use this meeting to go through each episode and discuss issues that have arisen along with publicity and marketing requests, time off requests from actors, scheduling issues – you name it. The Showrunner begins by saying "Ep 1". If it's in



prep the writer and production staff then discuss what needs to be accomplished for that episode. If it's in production, production staff gives an update on how it's going and we discuss dailies, etc. If it is in post the post supervisor/producer gives an update on the editorial process, music clearance issues, VFX process, etc. We then go down the list of every episode, one at a time, discussing any pertinent issues. As we get to episodes that haven't yet entered prep, the writers detail sets that may be needed, anticipated locations, guest casting needs, possible SFX and VFX needs. This process allows everyone in the room to hear the same information at the same time, ask questions and get onto the same page. It lets us get ahead of problems. Most importantly it gives you, the Showrunner, an opportunity to weigh in on issues and make decisions that would otherwise require hours of your time if each issue were presented to you separately. It also allows you to push many, many questions that come up at other times into the Producers' Meeting. When you're running a show, you're bombarded with texts and emails asking for your input. If you respond to all of these you'll never have enough time to do the rest of your job! My standard response to 95% of the questions being fired in my direction is "lets discuss at the Producers' Meeting". People get the message not to bother you and bring a list of questions they have to the next Producers' Meeting. A bonus is the meetings facilitate communication

between all your producer/writers and your production staff. Everyone is on the same page about what is going on with your show.

## **OTHER REGULAR MEETINGS**

There are other meetings that need to be in your weekly schedule depending on where you are in your prep and production periods. These meetings are routinely scheduled around your Writers Meetings and Producers Meetings.

## **EPISODIC CONCEPT MEETING**

Because you always have finished scripts the day before prep, a Concept Meeting can be scheduled on the first day of prep. This meeting should take two hours. In the Concept Meeting you (or the writer of the episode) lead the production team through the script scene by scene. We discuss casting, sets, locations, and answer questions. This meeting is attended by your line producer, director, writer (if not you), ADs, production manager, production designer, costume designer, casting director, department heads (props, transpo, etc), extras casting, post supervisor, editor, music supervisor and anyone else you feel is essential on your creative team.

## **CASTING**

We schedule one or two casting sessions each week so the director, and the writer (if not you) can attend casting. While many shows now do their casting digitally, I strongly discourage this. You need to be in the room to get a feel for the actor and to hear the script. It's invaluable and you will end up with much stronger casts. Another plus is you're in the room with your director and it gives you a chance to see how they are directing actors during the auditions. It can give you a sense of whether you and the director are seeing the same interpretations of the scenes, and if you agree on the same actors to hire. Is your director understanding the tone you're trying to achieve? Sometimes the answer to that question is no. And you have time to discuss what you want. Again, invaluable.

### **EPISODIC TONE MEETING**

We schedule a three-hour tone meeting on the third day of the prep period. This is a chance for your writer (if not you) and your director to go scene by scene through the script. We talk about intent, point of view, tone, visual storytelling, etc. This is your time to get your director to understand what you're looking for, answer their questions and make sure they understand what you want. I'm always surprised how often two people can look at the same scene and have completely different interpretations. We also invite the AD, line producer and

editor to the tone meeting. The AD and line producer will be on the set with your director during shooting and it's useful for them to hear what you want. Same for the editor when they get the footage in post.

### **EPISODIC PRODUCTION MEETING**

A two-hour production meeting is scheduled with the entire production team on the last day of prep to go through the script scene by scene and answer any final questions your director and production staff have. This meeting is run by your AD and your presence is essential. Thorough and thoughtful Concept, Tone and Production meetings will substantially reduce the number of questions coming to you during prep and reduce or eliminate the need for you or a writer to be on set.

### **CAST READ-THRU**

On the next to last day of prep we schedule a cast read-thru of the episode with the entire regular cast in attendance. The director, writing staff and available department heads attend. This is usually scheduled at lunch – which we provide -- and will take at least a half-hour of time away from the day's shooting time, but it's well worth it. We ask the actors who have questions about the script to stay after the read-thru so we can answer their questions, always with the director present. Then we listen carefully to these questions and/or concerns and address

them thoughtfully and respectfully. The network/studio often ask to attend and they're always welcome. It's another opportunity for communication with your network and studio. We do ask them to wait to give their notes until after the actors have finished their questions and headed back to set.

## **EPIISODE SCREENING**

When the director has completed their cut, we schedule two hours to screen the cut and give notes. The editor and post supervisor/producer attend. The editor then goes to execute the notes. We invite the writers when possible. These director cut screenings are essential during the first year of any series.

## **EDITING**

When the editor has completed the notes from the screening, we schedule two (three-hour) sessions to finish the edit. If you need more than three to six hours to complete your Showrunner pass on an episode, you need a new editor. It's more than enough time for a talented editor to execute your notes. I like to say that editing is where Showrunners go to die. You can sequester yourself away in the editing room and hide forever -- spend twenty hours on an episode, or more. But you will fail as a Showrunner because you can only do that by ignoring many of your other duties. Editing is like your writers' room; you need to keep your

time there productive and your notes specific. The difficulty is disciplining yourself when an episode isn't very good. You can throw yourself into the editing room for days trying to make a mediocre episode better. But it's only infrequently going to be *that* much better, and you will have sacrificed hours you needed to devote to your many other responsibilities. Your show will suffer because of it. To quote Voltaire "the perfect is the enemy of the good". Nowhere is this truer than too much time spent in editing. Don't sacrifice your show in pursuit of the perfect.

### **WHEN DO I HAVE TIME TO WRITE?**

You'll have noticed on the sample Weekly Executive Producer Schedule that there's no writing time left during the week for you. Yeah. You're going to be writing nights and weekends. That's the job.

### **A FEW FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT USING THESE SCHEDULES**

#### ***What if writers don't meet the deadlines on the schedule?***

We all know that writer. The writer that emails or texts you at ten o'clock on the night before their story/draft/revision is due to say they're stuck. Or it sucks. Or they need more time because their dog ate their cat. Or... or... or...? When I get that call or text or email, I tell the writer to turn in whatever they've got so far, and the writers' room will finish it for them in our next Writers Meeting. We then

give it back to the writer at the end of that meeting and tell the writer to meet their next deadline. If they miss a second deadline, we help them pack their office and send them off to screw up somebody else's life. You can't have that writer in your room. They're trying to hi-jack your show and make it all about them and their needs. It's narcissistic and has no place on a writing staff. They suck your energy and the energy of your other writers. With the Writers Schedule in place, every writer has ample time to bring plot, dialogue or character issues to the room long before their deadline. If they're behind it's because they're procrastinating. As Showrunner you must be protective of your time, no one else's time is anywhere near as valuable. A writer missing a deadline is stealing time and money from you and your staff. Don't let it happen.

### ***When do we give actors scripts?***

Actors receive their scripts during prep on the Friday before we start shooting (and at least two days before the cast read-thru). We always give the actors a weekend to read the script. The script we send has a cover note from the Showrunner encouraging the actor to reach out before the cast read-thru with any concerns or questions they may have. That way there's time to make changes in the script to address their concerns (assuming you agree with those concerns).

We then make ourselves available immediately after the cast read-thru for any further questions they may have. This gives the actors two opportunities to ask for clarification, express concerns and have their questions answered. Changes (if any) are made, and the script is then locked. No dialogue changes are made on set (in rare situations changes are made to accommodate location issues). We shoot what's in the locked script on our shows. The actors have received their scripts with ample time to read and respond. We've had a read-thru -- another opportunity to discuss concerns. We've treated them professionally by giving them time to prepare and ask questions. We expect them to act professionally in return. This system saves endless time on set. The director has had a script from the first day of prep. The actors have had the script and have had several opportunities to discuss it with the Showrunner. Now we shoot.

***Where is time on the Showrunner Weekly Schedule to be on set?***

There isn't any. That doesn't mean I don't visit the set regularly. It's important to visit the set as a leader. Say hello. Ask after your crew members and show your support. But I believe Showrunners should not be on set. And I'm completely opposed to having a writer sitting on set full-time, much less the Showrunner spending their time there. Anytime I appear in front of groups to discuss running a



show, this advice is always met with the most confusion (and sometimes hostility). So why do I believe Showrunners and writers shouldn't sit on set throughout shooting? The presence of the Showrunner or a writer on set full-time undermines your director. The actors and crew inevitably start going to the Showrunner or writer to answer their questions. Approve takes, to discuss changing the dialogue. The writer on set or Showrunner quickly begins to hear about a costume an actor doesn't like, a co-star, etc. The director is sidelined and left to direct traffic, and you're pulled into a torrent of questions that your director should be answering. Why hire a director if you're going to be on set dealing with most of the director's job? Directors hate having writers on episodic series' sets full-time (no matter what they tell you) and word will spread quickly among directors that your show is one of those shows where directors are relegated to being traffic cops. You'll have trouble hiring directors you wanted to hire. You hire directors to direct, let them do their jobs. When you or a writer *are* on set, make sure to defer any question you get from cast or crew to your director. It's easy, when approached, listen carefully then say, "Let's get Lila (insert the name of your director here) over to answer that question." I get it, the set is a fun place to hang out, but don't.

***How can I stay on schedule if the Network/Studio is slow with notes?***

This is when you must suck it up and be a leader. Your network/studio gets your Writers Schedule, so they know when they'll be receiving your Revised Stories and First Drafts. Before you begin production, call (or better yet set a lunch or coffee) with your creative executive partners at the studio/network in which you explain that you will be getting these outlines and first drafts to them on schedule, and you require a prompt response from them to keep the show moving forward in an efficient and cost-effective manner. We ask for notes in 48 hours or less. We're treating them professionally by creating a schedule and sticking to it and we expect nothing less from them. (In their defense, they routinely have outlines and scripts on many other shows appearing without warning at the last minute, so they're often overwhelmed). But you've told them when the outlines and drafts are coming so they can set aside time in their schedules to do your notes and get back to you in a timely manner. If they're not getting notes back to you promptly, this is when you have to show leadership. Call and say that unfortunately you've had to move on to the next draft without their input. When they complain (or get angry or threatening) keep your composure and tell them that any changes they put forward now will be expensive and any costs their lateness causes will be their responsibility. Overages are on them. This isn't hyperbole. Late network/studio notes (particularly notes that come in during prep or the week

before prep requesting major changes) cost money. When you're building a house, change orders cost money and late notes from the network/studio are change orders. Lower-level executives often claim that it's their bosses who are slow to respond, not them. That's their problem not yours. I've been told this is easy for me to do because I have the weight of previous success behind me. Sure, but do it anyway. You will be held responsible as a manager for overages and chaos, and no one will listen to your excuse of late network/studio notes. It's your responsibility to stay on schedule and budget. Late notes from the network/studio are threatening your future. Treat them as such and demand you get your notes on time.

***How can I stay on schedule when I'm waiting for notes from a network, a studio and a producer pod – and they all want time to give their notes separately?***

You can't stay on schedule if this is happening. There's no way for you to successfully manage your show if your producer pod, then studio and then network want you to execute their notes before passing the outlines and scripts on to the next (usually producer pod first, then studio, then network). While there's time to do this during pilot development, this doesn't work during series production. Three separate sets of notes, with days between each set of notes,

being delivered to you is a Showrunner killer. It's one of the things you need to clarify with your possible employers *before* agreeing to take a job. From the first pitch meetings with a producer pod you need to discuss how they expect to work with a studio and network. Will they coordinate notes with the studio and network so you only receive one set of notes, or two at most? If the producing pod expects to have a notes pass on episodic stories and scripts, will they insist that the studio and network consolidate their notes into one set of notes? You do not have time to deal with three separate sets of notes. You need to resolve this early in your conversations with your possible partners.

***How does the Writers' Schedule work for Mini-rooms and Limited Series where the scripts will all be written before production begins?***

Even if you're writing the scripts in advance of production there is still a date when the scripts need to be completed. Usually this is the date when the writers in your room finish their contracts and move on to other work. You're losing your writers and you need to be done by that date. You don't want to write or finish all the scripts yourself. So now instead of the first day of prep of your final episode being the date you work back from to determine the due dates, use the date of when your writers' deals are ending and work your way back in the same fashion

to get three drafts and two outlines. Then pretend that you're doing prep on each episode so you're setting the second draft due date on the next to last script seven business days earlier than the last script, etc., for all the other scripts you're writing. This is also an excellent way to determine if you've been given enough weeks with your writing staff to write the show. If after you do your Writers Schedule you discover that the first outline is going to be due weeks or even months before your writers are scheduled to start, you haven't been given enough time with your writers! You should have at least four weeks with your writers before your first story outline is due.

***What is your schedule's greatest enemy?***

Surprisingly, it's the tool we count on more than any other for convenience.

Your smart phone.

Treat your personal smart phone's number as a national security secret. Give your personal number to no one. Same with your personal email. Not your writers, your producers, your directors, your studio or network, not your actors. You will be bombarded with texts and emails and the expectation is that you'll answer them all. People take it personally when you don't answer quickly -- and you don't have time to answer quickly. You're in with your writers, in casting, in editing, in

prep meetings. I give everyone my office email and my office phone number. My assistant is empowered to determine if something is urgent enough to interrupt me (“the lead actress just dropped dead” or “the set just burned down”).

Everything else can wait. I check and answer emails first thing in the morning and

at the end of the day. Here’s a typical text/email exchange – 10:30am “Urgent!

We lost a location for tomorrow’s shooting! We’re screwed!” Then at 12:45

“Wait, we’re headed out to check another location we saw scouting last week”. At

3:15 “Location looks possible. Going for expedited permits and parking.” Then

finally at 5:40 “Got the permits, we’re good to go!”. You could have spent the

whole day wrapped up in this mini crisis, but that’s not your job. It’s your line

producer’s job and she just solved it. At 6:30pm you read this when catching up

on the day’s emails and send back a quick “Excellent job. Thanks so much for

taking care of this!”

If you give out your personal cell phone it will be filled with texts all day long from

cast, props, costumes – you name it. When I sift through emails at the beginning

and end of the day seventy percent of them don’t require my attention. Another

twenty percent of them get my “Let’s discuss at the producers’ meeting”

response. Only the final ten percent require my attention. We’re addicted to our

smart phones. Pull the digital needle out of your arm and let everyone do their

jobs. They'll love you for it and feel empowered. Occasionally a decision will get made that you don't like, but that goes with running a show. You CAN NOT make every decision. If you try, your show will grind to a halt and you will fail.

## **COMMUNICATION**

Appropriate, timely, respectful and thoughtful communication is central to leadership and essential if you are to succeed as a Showrunner. The communication you have with your collaborators will make (or break) your show.

Who are your collaborators? Your writers, producers, directors, actors, department heads, crew members, your network and studio executives, your agents, your managers – everyone you interact with in selling and making your show. Every exchange you have is about creating trust in you and establishing you as a leader with integrity. You need to be someone who listens, who makes timely decisions and shows concern for everyone's needs and safety.

You have to be truthful, always. Don't avoid confrontation. Don't manipulate. The adage "fake it till you make it" is terrible advice. Never pretend to know what you don't know. It doesn't make you look as if you're in-over-your-head to say you don't know, it makes you someone intelligent and mature enough to recognize

there are others around you who have spent years (often decades) becoming experts at their jobs.

Beyond the methods of communication we discussed in Schedules and Deadlines (Producers Meetings, Writers Meeting, etc.) there are specific communication needs for each group of collaborators.

### **Communication With Your Actors**

Every time I meet with a group of prospective or active Showrunners, the question that comes up more than any other is how to communicate effectively with actors. First and foremost, let's establish that acting is *fucking hard*.

While we may complain that actors often work shorter hours than we do, they are the most exposed and vulnerable of our collaborators. They're constantly being judged -- on their physical appearance, on their performance in every take, on their preparedness. But actors have little control over how their work will ultimately be seen. Their success and career are in your hands. You determine which of their takes will survive in editing. You have ultimate control over what clothing they will wear, their hairstyle, hair color, make-up. You work with the cinematographer to choose how they will look on screen and if the visual style you decide upon will reveal every facial imperfection they have (a serious concern



in our age of digital filming). You decide if the things that make all of us self-conscious will be treated with care. Actors have little control over how they will ultimately be seen on screen and it produces tremendous anxiety and fear – as it would in any of us.

And we require them to be vulnerable. That's what good acting is – the ability to be vulnerable and to share that vulnerability with the audience, utilizing the words you wrote. We have to be aware that the vulnerability we require of actors to do their jobs well often also makes them emotional, insecure and sometimes confrontational. At the beginning of any new show, we're asking them to trust us with their future. You need to earn that trust.

The best way to earn their trust is by *listening*. Actors are interpretive artists. They take your words and bring them to life. They *become* your words. Think of your relationship with your cast in musical terms. You're a composer/conductor.

They're the musicians. They make the music with their craft, their intelligence and their bodies -- their instruments. They're not children to be condescended to or manipulated. They're adults. They need you to write the music and you need them to create the music. That requires collaboration. Listening and discussion.

You need to be in a conversation with your actors about what you've written. You don't have time to do this on set (time on set discussing while your hundred-person crew waits around costs thousands of dollars a minute and is a great way to end up over budget). As discussed in the Schedule section, I give our casts scripts during prep and ask them to reach out with any questions they have before the episode begins shooting. We also hold a read-thru with time left for discussion afterwards. They will have questions and they will have notes. Listen and avoid becoming defensive and/or frustrated. I get why it can be frustrating. Why don't they understand the fantastic line you wrote or scene or whatever? It's clear to you. You get what it means. You wrote it. The scene, the tone, the line – they all make sense. But consider that every question is about confusion (this is especially true of network and studio notes, more later about that). When your actor doesn't understand, you're thinking "what an idiot, it's obvious why this is a great line". Take a moment to consider that maybe what you wrote isn't as clear as you think it is. Listen to what's being said. Try to decipher what the confusion is. Rather than becoming defensive, train yourself to think of every note as a puzzle. "What haven't I made clear?" "What is the actor (or studio/network exec) concerned about?" "Does the actor not understand what the scene is about?" "Are they concerned the line is too wordy and they don't know how to deliver it

without it sounding expositional?” “Are they worried about having to cry on cue or playing drunk?” “Are they concerned that the line reads well on the page but doesn’t sound like normal conversation?” “Have they not understood the tone of the scene?” “The subtext?”

LISTEN before you respond. Make it an exploration for both of you. The very act of listening is sending a strong message that you respect them and their concerns. You’ve lived with your words throughout the writing process, but they’re just coming to them. They’re trying to get inside of the writing so they can embody it. That’s what you *want* them to be doing. After you’ve listened, don’t try to win as if the conversation is a debate. Explain your intent. Listen to their concerns. Often, they’ll be right. Other times they simply won’t have understood and after you’ve explained it, they’ll be fine. If they’re suggesting a change, you may not like what they’re suggesting but consider that maybe it isn’t your best line of dialogue, or the tone of the scene isn’t yet clear. If you’ve listened, discussed, made changes (or not), you will then be able to insist that they say the lines as written. You’ve given them the respect of listening, now they owe you the respect of doing the scenes as written after you’ve listened. If possible, have your director present (or on the phone/Zoom) for these conversations. Instead of you getting a call from the set, the director will remind the actor that this issue was already

discussed, you (as Showrunner) listened and the locked dialogue/scene/tone is what's going to be shot. Leaving your director out of these conversations can lead to awkward moments on set when an actor wants to make changes and your director is in the dark about what was discussed with you.

I also strongly suggest that if you've never taken an acting class, take one. You'll probably be terrible, but a couple of months of preparing scenes and standing up in front of others performing will convince you that acting is an assault on self-esteem. Empathy toward your actors will blossom. An acting class will also help you learn an acting vocabulary that can be useful in bridging the narrative vocabulary you speak as a writer with the emotional-performative vocabulary most actors use to access their craft. Actors and writers are often speaking past each other when in conflict. Basically using different languages, and it's frustrating for both. Many colleges and universities offer beginning acting classes in their extension programs. Many private acting classes are also available to participate in. I don't suggest you take an online course, much of what you'll get out of taking an acting class is what you'll get from being in the room with other actors. Tell your acting teacher that you're a writer who wants to learn about the craft of acting and they will likely be helpful explaining the vocabulary and techniques used by various schools of acting. An acting class will make your writing better.

A note on the vulnerability that is at the heart of all great acting. We hire actors to be vulnerable and that means we have a responsibility to protect that vulnerability. It's not only wildly inappropriate to take advantage of that vulnerability (sexually or with verbal harassment), but it's your job to make sure that vulnerability is protected, always. Your actors are exposed and raw when acting, make sure you provide them with a safe working environment.

And a final note on child actors. You will need to create a relationship with your child actor, your child actor's parents or guardians, your studio teacher, and often a child welfare worker. Communicate with all of them and make it clear that while you are grateful to have them on the show – your primary responsibility is to the child's education and emotional well-being. You need to let the child and the adults involved with the child know that you'll be monitoring their schoolwork and that school must be their priority. Make certain the parents and guardians know that you take the work hours and safety concerns for all of minors you're using seriously. Never ask to go over hours with a child actor. Ask regularly and often how their schoolwork is going. Make sure the child actor knows how important you believe their education to be. If you don't want this responsibility, don't write children into your show.

## **Communication With Your Writers**

For most Showrunners this is the easiest group to communicate with. You see the writers regularly and are usually in the same offices. Beyond the Producers Meetings, I like to begin every Writers' Meeting with a quick rundown of any issues that may have come up on the show. We include the writer of each episode in note sessions with the studio and network. We include all the writers in the studio and network pitch meetings for the season and episodes. This saves a great deal of time filling in the writers later.

We try to include the writer of the episode in conversations with the actors after they read the script. The writer of the script is in the Concept Meeting, the Tone Meeting, Casting, the Production Meeting, the Read-thru, and is invited into editing. I do notes as a group so that every writer is aware of what I'm looking for in the changes and to get input from the entire writing staff (many heads better than one, etc.). This lets the writers turn to each other for clarification of notes when you're unavailable. We also have a writers assistant taking extensive notes in every Writers' Meeting and those notes are distributed to the writing staff.

Writers are assigned their episodes early on so they know when their outlines and drafts will be due (we put the writer's name beside the episode on the Writers Schedule).

I do extensive written notes on every script. We go over my notes, along with the rest of the writers' notes, in the writers' room at the first writers' meeting after the outline or draft is turned in (you, as Showrunner, must turn around your notes quickly to stay on schedule). Then the writer executes the notes.

I very, very, rarely rewrite a script and I never put my name on another writer's script even if I have had to rewrite it extensively through notes or putting it through my own computer (putting your name on a writer's script impacts their residuals and creates a lot of ill will among writers). I believe strongly that you get better work from your writers when they have a sense of authorship. I've given detailed notes and I expect the writer to execute them. I know there are Showrunners who prefer to run every script through their computer before shooting begins. I don't condemn that, but I've found that when writers are executing the notes and the 2<sup>nd</sup> (Shooting) draft comes out of their computer, you have writers who work much harder to get the script to where you want it to be. If every script is going to be rewritten by the Showrunner, why should the writer

bust their ass? The Showrunner's only going to rewrite it anyway. It's been my experience that writers get discouraged and the quality of the work ultimately suffers.

## **Communication With Your Producers**

In the Scheduling section we outlined the meetings that are necessary to keep your producers (Line Producers, Unit Production Managers, Post Producers, non-writing Producers) fully informed throughout prep, production and post-production. Producer Meetings twice a week, producers' inclusion in Concept Meetings, Tone Meetings and Production meetings.

But the most important meeting you'll have with your producers is your first meeting – before they're hired. This first meeting is when you clarify your expectations about how you want your partnership to work.

In almost all cases, your studio or network will dictate/present the line producer and unit production manager (UPM) they want you to hire. Because the candidates for these positions usually come from the studio/network, new showrunners are often suspicious of the line producer/UPM. Is this person going to be working for me? Have my back? Will they work hard to realize my vision for the series? Or are they going to be more aligned with the studio/network? While



it's true that line producers and UPMs are dependent upon their relationships with the production execs at the studios (who recommend them for jobs), it doesn't automatically mean that they can't be your champion and partner. The best ones work their butts off to bring your show to the air successfully. But there is no single manner understood in the industry for how Showrunners and their production staff will interact.

This is why the first meeting is so important. You must candidly and frankly discuss your expectations for your partnership. Tell them that when they join your show you expect them to always have your back. Assure them that you want their candor, expertise and input. That anything they're reporting back to the studio (budget, scheduling, problems, etc.) needs to be shared with you first.

Equally important, tell them you will have a Writers Schedule that you will share with them, and that they will have finished, ready to shoot scripts on the first day of prep for every episode. That there will be Producers Meetings, Concept and Tone Meetings. A cast read-thru will be scheduled for each episode. That you expect budgets on the third or fourth day of every prep and you'll promptly deal with any scheduling or budget issues that arise. A tentative shooting schedule is also due at the same time as the budget.

Tell them that you're looking for a partner. You'll make the final decisions because you're the Showrunner, but you will always listen to and respect their input. Then do what you've promised to do.

This initial conversation, discussing how you want the relationship to work, will quickly determine if you've found the right line producer and UPM. On occasion, you'll meet with a line producer who listens to what you want from the relationship, and you'll get a response of "That's not how I work. I always run the set and meetings." That's your cue to shake her/his hand, say it was a pleasure, but you don't think this will work.

Your studio may complain that this is who they want, but hold your ground, explain to your studio executive exactly what you discussed and tell them the interviewee's response. Ask them to send you someone else to meet. This may well be the first test of your leadership, don't shrink from it. You have the right to work with someone who shares your vision of how the Showrunner/Line Producer relationship is going to work.

This issue of who's in charge comes up often when your show is being produced in another city. "You're not here, so somebody must be in charge where the show is being produced!" is often the cry from your distant line producer. This is a

ridiculous argument in our digital age. You can have the meetings you need over Zoom or a similar platform. You'll fly regularly to the distant location. There's no need for you to relinquish your authority because the shooting company is in a different city.

The first meeting before hiring is of equal importance with your Post Production Producer and/or Post Production Supervisor. You want to have the exact same conversation as you had with your line producer. Nothing said to the studio or network that isn't first shared with you. Your willingness to listen to their input and take advantage of their expertise, but you're the boss. You want them as a creative partner. Clarify how you will be handling editing. On new shows I watch the director's cut with them and the writer(s), give notes and wait for the editor to return with the notes executed. Then I step into the editing suite to do a final cut. Clarify that you expect them to be in the editing room with you (extremely helpful in expediting the process as they'll know what you're trying to accomplish and can help clarify your notes with the editor when you're not available). Clarify if you're planning to be in the sound effects and music spotting sessions (you should be for at least the first six episodes of any new show), and that you will attend the final mix. That you want to hear all composed music and give notes before it gets to the mix stage. As with the line producer, if they respond that

they usually do much (or all of this) on their own without the Showrunner – say thanks, but no thanks. It isn't going to work.

A meeting with any Writer-Producers you're thinking of bringing onto your writing staff is equally important before they're hired. Let them know you'll be working from a Writers Schedule, and that deadlines will be enforced. Tell them how often you'll be meeting as a group. That you'll be including them in the prep meetings on scripts they've written, how notes will be handled. For your more senior writers discuss what their expectations of the work will be. Do they hope to be in editing? On the mix stage? Are you going to need them to be re-writing other writers or teaming up with other writers on the staff occasionally?

If this is your first show as Showrunner expect the studio/network to insist on a strong number two. Usually it's a writer getting an Executive Producer or Co-Ex Producer title. This is the studio/network's insurance policy if you flame out (fall behind, become overwhelmed). But don't assume that person *wants* to push you out and take over your show – they don't. Being a number two is a way for experienced writers to earn a good paycheck while they develop their own shows. Many number twos have created their own show in the past and they don't want to take over your show, they want to create their own show again in the future.

That's the Holy Grail for writers. Have the same conversation you had with your Line Producer, tell them that you're looking forward to their expertise helping you execute your show, but you expect them to always be in your corner. Ask them to be brutally honest with you, but only behind closed doors. In all other settings you expect them to have your back.

The most difficult meeting you're likely to have as a Showrunner is your meeting or meetings with Non-Writing Producers. Non-Writing Producers come in many varieties. Some will own the underlying rights to a book, or story or other piece of intellectual property you want to develop. Others will be managers (even your manager), others will be star actors who are agreeing to be the lead in your show but want to be a producer, others will be the star's manager. There are too many ways that non-writing producers get into the mix for me to list. But the same issue applies to all – what do they expect to be the level of their involvement in producing the show? Don't assume, ask.

Non-writing producers can be your greatest champions or your greatest impediment to success as a manager. You need to clarify the level of day-to-day involvement they hope to have and clearly state what your expectations are for their participation.

Some will be taking a more passive credit – they get paid but don't expect to be involved. But others will have specific expectations of their involvement. If your show wasn't an original idea (something you came up with and pitched), the person or persons who optioned or own the original idea may have strong feelings about what their involvement should be. This is particularly true of non-writing "pods", production entities that acquire material that they then bring to you to execute as Showrunner (full disclosure, JWP is production pod).

You must have a clear and specific understanding of what the Non-Writing Producer (including actor-producers) is expecting their involvement to be. I refer to this as the "butt-in-chair" rule. Are they going to be full time, involved in all daily meetings, in the office every day, giving notes, going to set, in editing – carrying some of the load of producing the show? Or are they planning to "parachute" in occasionally with notes and produce nothing but chaos?

With a non-writing producing pod, do they expect to do a set of notes on every outline and script before it goes to the studio and then the network? If so, do you have enough weeks built into your Writers Schedule to accommodate this expectation? Importantly, like with your line producers and writing producers,

you need their candor and opinions behind closed doors but their complete support with your studio and network partners at all other times.

These can be difficult conversations. You're anxious to get the Showrunning job, or to have the actor in your show. But to lead your show effectively, you need your non-writing producer partners to agree on what your expectations of the working partnerships will be. That's you saying, "You're paying me to be the leader of this group, and if you're not comfortable with letting me lead, then this isn't going to work." No matter how much you want the job or the actor, a less than satisfactory answer is your cue to walk away from the opportunity. Just like you want to get the payment schedule, you want to find out the parameters of any non-writing consulting producers deals. If they're non-exclusive, non-fulltime, available by phone, three days a week, or anything more limited than five days a week fulltime, you want to know.

### **Communication With Your Directors**

To your cast and crew, the director is the most important leader (after you) on your show. Getting your director a finished script on the first day of prep is essential in establishing the relationship you want with your director. When directors don't have a shooting script on the first day of prep they can't do their

job and they know they'll be held accountable anyway for episodes that aren't well directed. This affects their ability to get future work even though the lack of a shootable script during prep is almost always the primary reason their episode wasn't well directed. With a shootable script in hand, they'll have the opportunity to participate with you in Concept Meetings, Tone Meetings, Casting, Production Meetings, Cast Read-thru, etc. Use these meetings to clearly outline your expectations for tone and visual style. Answer every question they have. Listen to their opinions and clarify any confusion they may have. Be candid with them about the strengths and weaknesses of your crew and cast. Be clear about how you want to interact with them on the set when they're shooting. Most importantly, empower the director by never excluding them from your conversations with actors and other collaborators about the script and network/studio comments and notes. Your director is your ally, your voice on the set. Never come to set and have conversations with the cast or crew about the episode that's shooting without including the director (or allow one of your writers to side bar with cast or crew without the director). Your director is responsible for getting your words and vision onto the screen, they need to be always involved to do that effectively. Watch dailies and call your director to tell



them what you appreciate about what they're shooting (particularly if you also want to offer some constructive criticism).

You will often be watching the director's cut after the director has departed for their next job, so be sure to call them after you've watched it to thank them for their work. Not hearing from the Showrunner after you've directed is exactly like being a writer and never getting a call after you've turned in a script. They're artists and suffer from the same insecurity about their work that we all do. Be considerate and recognize their work with a quick call. Likewise, when the episode airs pick up the phone and call your director to thank them for their work. Common courtesy goes a long way, and you want the word to spread that you value the directors you work with. You'll find yourself able to book more of the directors you want when the word on the street is that you respect your directors and are appreciative of their efforts.

### **Communication With Your Producing Director**

I always work with a Producing Director and I strongly suggest you insist on having one on your show. Your Producing Director is a director who is hired full-time to be on your show. They will often be the director of your pilot or first episode(s), and will be your primary director, directing multiple episodes of your series. They

are responsible for the continuity of the visual and performance style of your show. With you, they prep the episodic directors (when they aren't directing). You can't be everywhere, and they become an essential and valuable collaborator. You can't be in the scout van looking for locations or showing up on distant local locations (your office is in Burbank, that day's location is in Long Beach, a ninety-minute drive!).

On a distant city shot show (you in Hollywood, the show shooting in Toronto or Atlanta or wherever), the Producing Director is an extension of you, your eyes and ears. As with your non-writing producers, you need to demand they always have your back. You need them to be candid with you privately but present a united front outside of those candid conversations. Establishing your expectations for this partnership is essential.

### **Communication With Your Crew**

As a Showrunner you need to work hard to prevent a "Front Office vs. Factory Floor" dynamic from developing on your show. It is the God-given-right of every employee to complain about the "Boss" and express disdain for the folks in the front office – and that Boss is you. This is natural and it will happen. See it from the crew's point-of-view, you make many times more than what they make, you

aren't out in the rain/sun/snow, showing up for work at 5:00am and working twelve-hour days. Instead, you are in a cozy office somewhere, drinking fancy coffee, ordering sushi for lunch and keeping your soft, uncalloused hands... well, uncalloused. Crew work is difficult, physical work out in the elements. It's natural that there's some resentment. But you can take steps to reduce this friction.

First, you need to have a physical presence on the set. Yeah, I know I said don't spend much time on set. But that doesn't mean you shouldn't go to the set at all. You need to go to your set regularly. Once a week, twice. It's particularly useful to go by on the first day of shooting and on difficult (page count that leads to long hours, weather) days. If your show is shooting in a different city, try to get there as often as you can. I've written many scripts on American or United Airlines heading to and from Chicago, New York and Washington.

Try to learn your crew members' names. You don't have to learn all of them (there can be hundreds) but show an interest. Start with learning your department heads' names. Ask about their families, how the show is going for their department. Query them about any concerns they may have. Is there anything you can be doing to make their work environment better? As a Showrunner you're also a politician, you need everyone's best work for your show

to succeed and we all do better work when we know the boss cares about us and our opinion.

Send regular memos to the set with any useful news – ratings, upcoming distant location shoots, pick-ups for more episodes, exciting guest casts, etc. You can express your appreciation in a memo on a Monday when you know the previous Friday was a particularly tough day (rain, cold, long hours). Don't only show up on set when there's a problem – the crew will associate you showing up with problems, not leadership.

Pay for crew “treats” to show you're aware of how hard the crew works. Send a coffee truck to set on a late-night shoot. A shaved ice truck on what's anticipated to be a 100-degree day. Pay for crew gifts (startup hats, Christmas gifts, wrap gifts) – and make them nice. Have fun when you're on set, laugh and be verbally appreciative of everyone's hard work. More on this later in the leadership section, but you get the idea. Don't allow the front office vs. the set dynamic to take hold. Be thankful, always. Your crew is working hard for you, make sure they know you appreciate their efforts and appreciate them.

And finally, ask your Line Producer or Producing Director to keep you informed of any tension that may be developing on set and work hard to diffuse it.

## **Communication With Your Network and Studio Executives**

You need to establish strong relationships with your network and studio executives -- your creative executives and your current executives. These are difficult jobs. You need to understand their concerns and the tremendous pressure most are under. As soon as your show is picked up, reach out to each one of your executives and offer to take them out to lunch. Make a personal connection. Learn about their families, the culture within their network or studio. Who do they report to? What pressures are they under? You'll learn a great deal about what concerns your network and studio have just by asking and then listening. Then stay in regular touch. You want to create a work relationship. It will pay off for all of you.

Share your Writers Schedule so your executives know when they can expect outlines and scripts. Tell them about your expectations for a quick turnaround on their notes so you can manage your show properly. Set a schedule with your assistant to reach out to them on a regular basis (weekly at least) so that you have an open line of communication. Tell them what's going on with your show. The directors you're working with, your progress on scripts and production issues. Keep in mind that your executives are regularly in meetings with their superiors

where they're asked "what's going on with..." your show. When you've given your executives information they can then report to their bosses, you've helped them succeed in their position. That's good for them and it's good for you. You want them to be fully informed. That makes you a good manager and they're much more likely to have your back. Executives want to be associated with shows that are well-managed because it makes them look good at their jobs too.

### **Communication With Your Agents and Managers**

Stay in touch with your Agents and Managers as a Showrunner. They are excellent at reconnaissance and can keep track of how you're being perceived as a Showrunner by your non-writing producer pod, your studio and your network. It's awkward for you to ask, "how am I doing?" but natural and expected for your agent and/or manager to be asking "how's she/he doing?". They can get you quick snapshots of how you (and individual situations that arrive) are being seen by your various partners. Early awareness of negative perceptions can be dealt with before negative perceptions become impossible to overcome. Ask your agents and/or managers to keep a finger in the wind for you and let you know what they hear quickly.

Many actors (and occasionally a writer) will want to use their agents and/or managers to intercede on their behalf if the actor has concerns they feel uncomfortable bringing to you. Many people are conflict averse and actors are no exception; you are their boss and they're concerned that raising issues with you might impact how much you write for them in the future (and then of course there are actors who *love* conflict, but that's just more of you listening and working to understand what their issue is). When I'm called by an agent or manager who's relating a problem or concern their actor has, I immediately request a meeting with the actor so we can discuss it in person. I don't want to try and resolve a conflict with an agent or manager acting as translator and mediator. We need to talk face to face, as adults and collaborators. The agent or manager may want to attend with the actor, I try to avoid that, but if it can't be avoided, have them come. Sit down with the actor, listen and talk. If it's a personnel or human resources problem (harassment in the workplace, sexual or verbal abuse, racial or gender insensitivity, etc.) get the proper human resource people from your network and or studio involved immediately.

### **Inappropriate Communication**

We have a simple policy at JWP. No yelling, no profanity and everyone is empowered to hang up on anyone that's being inappropriate. If an agent or manager or network executive or *anyone* is acting inappropriately in their communication with you or your staff, let them know clearly that it's not the way you and your team do business and to call back (text back, email back, whatever) when they're prepared to communicate in a respectful.

## **DELEGATION**

I think of myself first and foremost as a writer and so I want to make sure I have time available for writing. This can only happen if I trust my producing and writing collaborators and actively delegate portions of the day-to-day workload of the show to them.

As I've said, Showrunning/Executive Producing is an impossible job. It can't be done by a single person. Many first time Showrunners believe the job requires that they make all the decisions, but nothing could be farther from the truth. You must accept that the show you've written and care deeply about, is going to be dependent upon dozens of other people working in concert with you and making many decisions on your behalf every day. Your success depends upon the quality of the team you've assembled, how you lead them, the management structure



you put in place (meetings, schedules, deadlines), and the safe working environment you create that allows them to do their best work.

An immediate problem with attempting to discuss Showrunning is the difficulty answering, “What is a Showrunner?” What does the term even mean? The question seems simple on its face. The Showrunner runs the show. But that’s misleading. There is no single definition of what the job entails because every show is different depending upon the talents and experience level of the team you assemble.

I’ve never run a show where the requirements of the Showrunning job were identical to the last show I ran (or any other show I had run before). I’m not even a fan of the term “Showrunner”. I prefer Executive Producer. The title of Showrunner has come into use to delineate the senior Executive Producer/leader on the team now that Executive Producer credits are given out freely. But don’t be led astray by assuming that being the “Showrunner” will mean you’ll be making all the important decisions on your show. You won’t be. And you can’t be. There are literally hundreds of decisions being made all day long by your producers, department heads, directors, etc. You can’t be involved in them all. You must delegate.

And you'll delegate differently based on the strengths (and weaknesses) of your assembled team. I've Executive Produced shows where I've spent much of my time with the writing staff (in the writers' room, doing notes, pounding out plots) because the writers were inexperienced, and the production staff was very experienced. I've Executive Produced shows with a strong writers' room and an inexperienced production staff where I had to spend more time involved in the physical production of the show. I've Executive Produced shows with Executive Producer/Directors who were for all intents and purposes the Showrunners because they were exceptionally talented creative producers. Every situation is different, and you will have to delegate responsibility based on your evaluation of the experience and talents of your team.

But how to decide who to delegate to on a new show? If you haven't worked together before, you are a Showrunner they don't know and don't yet trust. They're afraid you may not know what you're doing and that will impact their future employment (chaotic and over budget shows are career contagious, everyone in a position of responsibility is suspect). There are so many chaotic shows in our industry now that your collaborators will arrive hopeful that their experience won't be difficult, but wary that it may be. You'll be evaluating them

while they evaluate you. You need to gather a team that has the experience to compliment your strengths and make up for your weaknesses.

Be honest with yourself, what do you know and do well? What don't you know and don't know how to do? Staffing a show is like staffing a writers' room. You're casting a group to work together well and to meet *your* needs. You can't put together the team you need if you're not being honest with yourself about what support you need for the areas where you're weakest.

But how to gather a team? First, at every step in your career, on every show you work on, you must identify the artists you find to be talented and great at their jobs. The writers, directors, cinematographers, line producers, ADs, production designers, costume designers, location managers, editors – everyone and anyone who impresses you with their ability and competence.

This is one of the great advantages of working on other shows before you get an opportunity to do your own show. Keep a list, ask them out to lunch, tell them how much you'd like to be able to work together in the future. Then keep in touch after you're no longer working together. When you get a deal to write a pilot, call them up and let them know you're hoping to have a show soon and you want them on it if they're available.

If you haven't worked on a show before you're at a disadvantage. You have to pull your team together from scratch. In this situation you want to hire your pilot director/producing director first and discuss who they will want to bring with them. If the director is only doing the pilot, will the rest of the creative team that they want to bring with them be available to stay with the show after the first episode/pilot? You need ADs, cinematographers and camera operators who are going to stay with you for the series.

This can be a real problem when you're hiring a director to do your pilot or first episodes who works primarily in features. They will often want to bring along their feature film team (or many of them) and if their team isn't going to stay with your show going forward, you'll be starting from scratch again once they've left. Not ideal. You want to surround yourself with a team that will be there for the series. If you hit it off with your Producing/Director candidate, they'll be supplying much of the expertise necessary to assemble your team along with your line producer. But you need to be involved in these hires. Don't let it happen away from your input and participation.

As you interview your collaborators, be honest about what you know and don't know. About how you want to collaborate with them. What you will need them to

do – and equally important – what you won't want them to do. Do you want a producing director who will be involved in the early story stages in the writers' room? Will you want them to prep the episodic directors? Will you welcome them in the editing room, or have them do a cut of other directors' work before you see a cut? Clarity in your first meetings will remove friction in the future.

These same questions apply to your line producer meetings. Be honest with them. Do you know your way around a budget? If not, let them know a portion of their job will be educating you on the budgeting process and helping you make decisions on each episode and on the series' budgets. Let them know you want to be involved in the hiring of your department heads. Many of the department heads will come from your collaborators. The Director and the Line Producer will be bringing the AD team. The Cinematographer will be bringing the Camera Operators, Gaffer, DIT technician, and Key Grip. The Production Designer will be bringing the Art Directors, Property Master, and Set Decorator. They'll be introducing you to Make-up and Hair department heads. Your Line Producer will be bringing the Transportation Coordinator, Special Effects, and an entire office team. The Post Supervisor (or Producer) will be bringing in Picture Editors, Music Editors, Sound Supervisors, Mixers and Colorists, along with your visual effects team. You need to be part of these meetings and hiring decisions. Use these

meetings to introduce yourself as a leader. Establish a rapport with your department heads. Set the tone. Some of these artists you will see infrequently, use these meetings to introduce yourself and your expectations for the kind of workplace you are creating.

Once your team is in place and you begin shooting, you'll be evaluating your team to determine who you can delegate more to and who will need more of your attention. On a show where you've been able to staff your team with some collaborators you've worked with before you already know who you can delegate more responsibility to. As you come to know the strengths and weaknesses of the team members you haven't worked with before you'll adjust to those strengths and weaknesses. Delegating more to those who share your vision of the show and workplace culture. Giving more attention to those who need your guidance.

Don't allow this delegation to be determined by circumstances (you become overwhelmed and don't get everything done so someone else on your team must make the decisions by default). Train yourself to recognize when you're becoming overwhelmed (you will be overwhelmed, I promise) so you can delegate tasks you're not going to get to before they become critical. This isn't you failing, this is you succeeding as a leader. Remember, you can't do it all, no one can. Prioritize

the tasks where you feel your input is essential and delegate other tasks. Your team will appreciate your empowering them to handle what you've recognized you won't get to, and they'll respect you for it.

The most difficult part of delegating is accepting that decisions will be made that are different than what you would have chosen to do. Usually these differences will be minor, but occasionally they won't be. Resist the urge to express your unhappiness with the decision. Ask yourself, how important was the decision that was made differently? Was the difference important or just a different way to go? Very, very few decisions rise to the level of real significance. Keep your perspective. Thank the collaborator for making the decision, suggest you would prefer a different decision should the same issue come up again, but you really appreciate and value their leadership. Nothing destroys the morale of your team more than you going ballistic over something that you didn't deal with because you were overwhelmed and someone else had to make a decision that you then didn't like. The result of a situation like this will be the gears of your production seizing up, no one will want to take the risk of making a wrong decision and so they'll make no decisions. Every decision will come back to you to make and if you thought you were overwhelmed before, you'll definitely be overwhelmed now.

Delegation is one of the most difficult skills for new Showrunners to master, but it is essential to your success. Delegate but stay informed. Accept that not all decisions made by your team will be exactly what you would have decided, but that you're working to create a team that is empowered. They'll learn your tastes over time and soon be making decisions you would have made. Delegating puts you in a position to succeed. Showrunning is drinking out of a firehouse for months on end, delegation is essential to your survival.

## **LEADERSHIP**

Most first time Showrunner/Executive Producers have spent their professional lives in positions that haven't needed them to provide leadership. Let's face it, most of us spent years writing alone -- in our apartments, homes, and offices.

Those of us who have had the good fortune to work on shows where we had producing titles weren't usually expected to provide leadership beyond keeping the writers' room going when the Showrunner was on set, in casting, editing, etc.

But now you have your own show and you're the Showrunner. That means you must provide leadership.



As discussed in Delegation, leadership isn't about making all the decisions, it's about determining where your energies and talents are most needed on your show. But leadership also means you're responsible for creating a workplace that is welcoming, inclusive, diverse and supportive. The kind of workplace where everyone's contributions are valued, and they're able to do their best work.

To point out the obvious, this means a workplace that is absent of anger and aggression. You're the leader. You set the tone. To use a time-honored cliché, the fish really does stink from the head. That means how you act will define the culture of your show. If you're abrupt, stressed and angry, your show culture will be abrupt, aggressive and tense. It is on you to create a positive and supportive workplace from your first day on the job.

It really is the small things. You're leading a team. Ditch your use of "I" and "me", adopt "we" and "us". Greet everyone. Smile. Listen. Laugh. Learn everyone's name. You won't learn everyone's name right away but try and get one or two a day. Before long you'll be remembering most.

Take the time to highlight how everyone is doing a good job. Your opinion is very powerful now that you're the leader. As the Showrunner, one harsh comment can be devastating. That doesn't mean you shouldn't criticize but keep it constructive

and professional – and be sure to follow it up with praise for work you do like.

With the pressures of the job, it's easy to fall into a pattern of only commenting when you have negative reactions to other's work (writers, actors, directors, crew). Everyone you're working with is an artist, they care deeply about their work, you're their leader, they need your approval. Don't withhold it.

Never, ever yell or lose your temper. You will have plenty of moments when you want to (and may well be justified to) but don't. It will haunt your workplace culture for months. Your team will be talking about it behind your back and waiting for you to do it again. People will be frightened of bringing you bad news and will withhold information out of concern you will lose your temper. I've worked on shows with Showrunners who vented their spleen on members of their team and it's toxic, counterproductive and will make your job much more difficult. Take a walk. Close the door to your office and pound a couch cushion. Type an angry email or text to yourself -- and then delete it. Once you're calm, return to the situation, and solve the problem without anger.

Never demean members of your team. I know, this is common sense. But it is routinely ignored. There's no place for it in your workplace culture. Equally important, if another member of your team is demeaning others or losing their

temper, everyone will be looking to you to put a stop to it. If you ignore it, others will question your ability to lead.

Don't look to take the credit. In fact, actively deflect the credit to others. Practice humility. When your network executives, agents, and/or your staff praise you, praise another member of your team in response. An example: executive, "I loved that episode, you're killing it." You, "Thank you. Janel wrote a fantastic script and Kelly directed the hell out of it." Or "I'm proud of the script I wrote, but Kelly directed the hell out of it and Robert was fantastic in that scene at the pier." You're already getting credit for the show because you're the Showrunner, sharing credit and acknowledging others' contributions makes you a leader. Your team will love you for it.

There are many small things you can do to let your team know you care about them and appreciate their hard work. Give start-up gifts (hats or T-shirts work well). Throw a Christmas Party if your production schedule stretches over the holiday. A nice one with everyone's families invited, a Santa and small gifts for the kids. Throw a Wrap Party. Give Wrap gifts (something nice -- jackets, hoodies).

We throw a start-up Garden Party on a weekend before shooting begins for the season. We invite department heads, cast, editors, ADs, writers, network and

studio executives. It gives everyone a chance to meet and put faces to names. The office and post-production staffs are especially appreciative of this event as they often feel removed from writers and shooting company.

Your network/studio may or may not be prepared to pay for these parties and gifts. You need to throw them anyway and pay for whatever your network and/or studio partners won't cough up. Your crew expects it. They know you are making many, *many* multiples of what they're making. This isn't a place you want to be cheap. You can write it off on your taxes as a business expense because it is. If you're sharing your Executive Producer duties with a producing pod and/or another Executive Producer who's helping you as a Co-Showrunner, they should chip in on these parties and gifts. They wanted the Executive Producer credit; they need to help you bear the costs.

Set treats are essential. We look for Friday nights when the crew will be shooting into the evening or days when your crew is working in difficult conditions (rain, cold, snow, heat) and we send something to the set to show we understand they're working hard in less-than-ideal conditions. We send coffee trucks (always appreciated), waffle trucks, crepe trucks, In and Out Burger trucks. Shaved ice trucks on hot days. There are all sorts of treat trucks available. Your Line Producer

and UPM will have plenty of them to recommend. Once a week or once every two weeks is plenty. But beware, your crew will notice if you're not sending treats to acknowledge that they're out there busting their butts for you. And yes, you will pay for these treats too. Recently some Showrunners have been asking their writing staff members to send treats on the episodes they've written – and have asked the writers to pay for them! Don't do this. They won't tell you so, but your writers will resent you for it.

If your show is shooting on a distant location (another city or even country) make sure you're still sending treats and reaching out to make sure they know you're aware of the difficult days and challenging conditions.

### **Responsibility and Leadership**

While you are not the employer (your studio or network is), you are the leader and the decisions you make about how you choose to write and run your show directly impacts the quality of life for everyone on your team.

If you don't have a diverse and inclusive team (writers, directors, crew, etc.), that's on you.

If you writers' spreads are too long (the number of weeks they're in your writers' room), that's on you.

If your shoot days are longer than twelve hours, that's on you.

If your crew is watching the sun come up every Saturday morning, that's on you.

If your assistants and production assistants aren't paid enough, that's on you.

Let's deal with these issues one by one.

### **Equity, Diversity and Inclusion**

As mentioned above, you're not the employer, but creating a diverse and inclusive team is your responsibility. Racial, economic, ethnic and gender diversity are essential to your show's success. While progress has been made in writers' rooms and in the hiring of directors and producers, there is much work still to be done. As showrunner you need to use your influence to ensure your writers' room, the directors, and producers who are hired are diverse. Do it.

Putting together a diverse crew has proven to be challenging. This situation is often blamed on the unionized nature of the workplace, essentially blaming the unions for the slow pace of diversifying our crews. But I would like to take a moment to present another view. Your departments (camera, grips, gaffers, props, costumes, transportation, etc.) are made up of small teams of people who have often worked together for years. When you hire a DP, or key grip or costume

designer, they have teams of people they feel responsible to employ and who they have confidence will do the job well.

I've often encountered reluctance when asking for a diverse crew along the lines of "Okay, I agree we should, but who would you like me to fire?" The department head wants to do a great job for you and has a team they trust can do it. Because these crews have traditionally not been diverse (or not very diverse) the opportunity for diverse crew members to be hired and become a part of the department head's team have been limited. It's a catch 22.

One way we've tried to counter this dynamic (when a department head has a team that isn't diverse) is to increase the size of the department by one or two members who are diverse. Yes, this increases your budget, but that's a small price to pay for building a more diverse workforce. These new crew members gain experience and become members of the department head's team for the future. We've discovered that natural attrition on crews means that new crew members won't be "new" for long and your crew size will return to its original size.

Our network and studio partners claim they are now committed to diverse crews but are often unwilling to accept that getting new (diverse) crew members the experience and credits they need to succeed will require them to spend some

cash. They will often say “Can’t you find someone who’s already experienced?” In other words, “can’t someone else pay to get them the necessary experience and then we can benefit?” This is a ridiculous argument and the Kafkaesque predicament diverse workers trying to enter the industry have encountered for years. Take responsibility for helping change this situation. Insist on a diverse crew and insist that your Line Producer, your UPM, and your department heads understand it’s a condition of you hiring them on your show.

Lastly, you will sometimes hear that your team leaders don’t know where to find diverse crew members to hire (both experienced and aspiring). This may have once been true, but it’s no longer the case. ARRAY has created a fantastic data base of diverse crew members (<https://arraynow.com/>). The major film schools are creating or have created similar hiring databases (<https://careers.usc.edu/channels/participate-in-diversity-initiatives/>). The below-the-line agencies are now representing more and more diverse crew members. And, of course, hiring diverse department heads, Line Producers and UPMs will likely give you team leaders who are already engaged in the campaign to diversify crews and can bring their resources to bear.

## **Writer Spreads**



When selecting writers for your team, you need to keep track of how they're being paid. Your lower-level writers will be on weekly WGA minimums. If you go over the budgeted number of weeks your writers are contracted to work, they will continue to be paid the WGA minimum -- but you need to make sure your show continues to pay them after the budgeted number of weeks has been exhausted. Your writers, their agents and managers are often not keeping track.

Your writers who also have a producer title will be getting the weekly WGA minimums *plus* their episodic producer fees divided over the number of weeks you're budgeted to have them on the show. Once you surpass that budgeted number of weeks, they will keep getting paid the WGA weekly minimum, but they will have already been paid their episodic producing fees -- so now they're working for minimum. If you're going to exceed your budgeted weeks with your writers, you must make sure your writer-producers are still getting paid their pro-rated weekly episodic producing fee *and* the WGA minimum. In other words, it's your responsibility to make sure they're not being taken advantage of because you've exceeded your budgeted weeks with your writers. I realize this is complicated, but the WGA has an excellent pay calculator on their website for figuring out writer-producer pay that you can use --

(<https://www.wga.org/members/career-advice/weekly-vs-episodic-pay>).

Being concerned about your writer-producers' pay and making sure you're not taking advantage of them by working them past the date their episodic producing fees have been exhausted is your responsibility. At JWP we have someone in production (or in our offices) calculate these work spans so we know in advance the dates when each writer will have exhausted their budgeted weeks. We then do a weekly memo to the Showrunner listing when each writer's budgeted weeks will be exhausted. As previously suggested, make sure to get your writers payment schedule so you can be certain they are being paid WGA scale plus their portion of their produceorial fee.

This is one more reason that a writers script schedule is so important. If you stick to your Writers Schedule, you won't be taking advantage of your writer-producers. Equally important, by comparing your Writers Schedule with your writers' budgeted finish dates you'll be quickly able to tell if you've budgeted enough weeks to get your scripts written and produced before your writers are done.

### **Shooting Hours, Night Shoots and Crew Safety**

Keeping your shooting company safe and healthy is your responsibility and is directly connected to what you choose to write. No other industry I know of

considers a twelve-hour day to be a normal workday. That be as it may, you need to ensure that twelve-hour days are the *maximum* work hours on your show. We all routinely hear of fourteen and sixteen-hour workdays. This is not only inhumane, but also dangerous and it is budget suicide.

The inhumane part is common sense. I suggest that every writer on a show that's shooting days longer than twelve-hours spend a full workday on the set. From call to wrap. Don't sit in a chair, stay on your feet all fourteen or sixteen hours, then see how safe you feel driving home or hauling equipment back to the trucks – and then do it again in ten hours.

Having your show work longer than twelve-hour days destroys your crew. People get hurt. People get sick. People quit. Oh, and the next time you're on set and you see a teamster (driver) asleep in the cab of their truck don't think, "Look at that, sleeping while he's getting paid a fortune." Think, "Look at that, he had to get up at 4:00am to get the wardrobe trailer to location and he won't be home before 10:00 tonight."

The dangerous part of long working hours is well documented. Crew members have died driving home after brutally long days. Crew members have been injured. Health suffers. Haskell Wexler did an excellent documentary on the

subject called *Who Needs Sleep*.

[https://theasc.com/ac\\_magazine/April2006/Sundance2006/page4.html](https://theasc.com/ac_magazine/April2006/Sundance2006/page4.html)

And long days kill your budget. The crew works at time-and-a-half after eight hours and double-time after twelve (a simplification because of differences in the various union contracts but you get the idea). That means that for every hour you shoot over twelve hours you're paying your crew *twice* what the first hours of your day cost. Not hard to do the math -- shooting more than twelve hours costs twice what the hours cost at the beginning of your day. This kind of constant overtime adds up quickly and you'll find yourself over-budget fast.

What does this have to do with you? Well, you wrote it (or had it written) and the script dictates the hours required to shoot it. If a writer pitches, "This entire episode is going to take place in a railyard at night..." and you agreed to do it – you just trashed your crew and your budget. Exterior nights are expensive and working nights consistently destroys your crew's health and any hope of their maintaining relationships and a family. If your Line Producer tells you that the show isn't producible within twelve-hour days for the number of days you're budgeted to shoot (7, 8, 10, 12, whatever) you need to take responsibility for changing the script to ensure it can be shoot in twelve-hour days. Way too often

Showrunners don't make changes (you love what you wrote), cross their fingers and hope it will work out. It won't. That's not leadership.

Commit to twelve-hour days. Tell your Line Producer you're committed to twelve-hour days, and you need her/him to help you make it happen. This means you will be making changes in your scripts. Be responsible. Keep your crew safe.

A quick note on *Fratursdays* (the hated term crews use to describe Fridays that begin with a 5:00pm or 6:00pm call and end with watching the sun come up on Saturday morning). *Fratursdays* are a terrible for your cast and crew. They finish on Saturday morning. Drive home (unsafely after being up all night). Try to catch a couple of hours of terrible daylight sleep. Barely get back to being human on Sunday, then set the alarm for 5:00am on Monday morning and head back to work. Don't do it. Make it your mission to require the crew wraps no later than midnight on Friday nights. Your budget and your crew will love you for it. If you do have to shoot into the wee hours of Saturday morning, make sure it never happens more than once or twice during your entire show. And send a coffee cart treat, they're going to need it!

Another quick note on weeks of *all-nighters* (the dreaded shooting all night for days on end shooting schedule). Don't. Really. Don't. Figure out a different way in

your script. Put it in a basement that can be shot day-for-night. Black in a house so you can shoot day-for-night. Do everything in your power to protect your cast and crew so they don't have to endure this torture. Better yet never write it in the first place. When the idea of an "all night episode in the forest" comes up in the writers' room, kill it. That's you anticipating the problems and costs to come and showing leadership in protecting your crew's health and sanity.

When tough days and nights on sets are avoidable, when you've written, or allowed to be written, a scene or sequence that requires a hundred people to be outside late on a Friday, in the rain, in the snow, on a 100+ degree day, etc., show up to demonstrate you understand that what you've asked them to do is a hardship. Sets are a hotbed of "Bet the writers wouldn't have written this if *they'd* have to be out here freezing their asses off!". Show up. Stick around until wrap if it's going to be late. Get cold or hot or whatever with your crew (and don't forget the treat truck). Your willingness to experience the tough times with them will not go unnoticed.

### **Fair Pay for Assistants and Production Assistants**

This is an easy one. People need a fair wage. Making sure they get it is on you. For much too long entry level positions have been underpaid. Ask your Line Producer

and UPM what's in the budget for these positions. Then ask how many hours they're going to be working (Production Assistants are often working the same or longer hours than crew members). Then make sure what they're getting paid is enough to pay for an apartment, a car, gas, insurance and groceries. If you couldn't live on it, how do you think they're going to be able to? The low pay is one reason it's been hard for people that come from less privileged economic backgrounds to get into our industry. Many entry level positions have been filled by people who come from families that can afford to supplement the applicant's finances while they work an entry level job. Make sure your assistants and production assistants are being paid a fair wage that allows them to live in the area where you're going to be based.

In conclusion, be a leader who listens. Who makes decisions that create a safe and inclusive workplace. Be a leader who cares.