

JOB SHADOW INTERVIEWS



Interview with a Casting Director:

What do you do for a living?

I am a Casting Director for major motion films, national commercials, TV series, Reality TV, Music Videos, Documentaries, etc.

How would you describe what you do?

As a Casting Director, I am contacted by the Producer of the Film, Commercial, Music Video, TV SHOW, etc.; to look for characters that they need for their project. I am sent a script and a list of characters for the roles. I try to find exactly what they are looking for in characters for their projects. Talent Agents represent talent, so, I contact Talent Agents first to take a look at their talent.

What does your work entail?

Once I have had my “casting call” and have contacted agents for talent, I have the talent come in and I put them on tape with the lines to read for the character for them, and submit what I have collected to the Producer and Director, so that they can take a look to see if what I am gathering is anything like what they were thinking for the characters for the specific project.

What’s a typical work week like?

WOW! Well, depending on what kind of project,so, let’s say it is a commercial. I usually have 2 days of prep (preparation) in which I read the script, call the agents, set times for the characters/talent to come in and read. Usually I will be casting for 3-5 days, and it is usually a 12 hour day or longer!

How did you get started?

My way of getting started is so different from the ways others got started. BUT here goes..... My daughter started modeling at the age of 3. She was signed with an agent right away and got work before we had even gotten home! We had a voice mail stating that she was wanted on the cover of

an Easter Magazine! That “Easter” Magazine turned out to be KMART! Well, at the age of 5, she was asked to go and audition for a role in a documentary. So, here we go, knowing NOTHING about auditioning for a film, and when we got to the casting company, there were 100’s of people there. I just said, “excuse me, excuse me” all the way to the front to see who was working here at this company. I got to the front, and said, “Are you two the only two working”? And they said, “YES”. I said, “Do you need some help?” and they said YES!!! I started working for them and worked for FREE for 8 months, and then I started my own company. That was 25 years ago!

What do you like about what you do?

I LOVE meeting new people. I love making the “impossible” happen. Like....it’s 10:00 PM at night and I get a call and they sound frantic and need 200 people by 6:00am. I say, “No problem! I will have them there”!

What do you dislike?

My only dislike is that it is NOT steady work! It’s either feast or famine in this industry. However, right now, there is a lot going on in the Carolinas! HUNGER GAMES was filmed here, HOMELAND, CAGED (Iron Man 3) and others are filming right now! I am actually moving more into producing and I am working on several films right now in different stages of production!

How do you make money/or how are you compensated?

Well, that is a well guarded secret among a lot of people! It depends on the project, and depends on the project’s budget. Sometimes I work for FREE, if it is a friend who is needing help and I know that they will help me when the time comes.

How much money do Casting Directors make?

There are no set rules on what a Casting Director can make. As I mentioned before, it depends on a project’s budget. All rates are negotiable. A lot is “you scratch my back and I’ll scratch yours”. Some take a % of what the actors/extras make, and take a straight weekly salary. So, you could look from anywhere around \$100/day for a lo/no budget film, to up to \$800-\$1000/day or around that. You usually do not make as much when you cast extras as when you cast Leads/Principals/Speaking roles. There are no books out there that tell you how to be a Casting Director.....but I am writing one now!

How much money did/do you make starting out as a Casting Director?

Remember....this was 25 years ago....my first job I worked on doing extras casting, I made \$600/week! You could now look to make \$100/day to \$300+ a day for extras casting, and more for Principal casting! It just depends on the budget that the film has. Wish I could give you a better idea!

What education, schooling, or skills are needed to do this?

Gosh, I did not go to college for filmmaking, but I did go for Psychology, and I DEFINITELY think you need to have the right mindset to work in film. We are all different! We do not work “normal” hours, and some days, I have worked 21 hours straight, and get 3 hours sleep, and right back at it! Casting Directors, especially Extras Casting Directors work the longest! Almost the same as transportation workers! We are usually the first on set and the last to leave, and then we still have to call people for the next day! Sometimes the company will pay for an assistant and sometimes not. It just depends on the budget! Maybe you will find someone that wants to intern to learn, and that will give you some

relief! You definitely have to watch everything! I mean everything! People do make mistakes, and no matter what happens, look for it to be “castings fault”! Ha! That is what I always would think! Always look at all of the paperwork that is given to you. You may have had a discussion with the director and he said he wanted 500 people one day, and you look and it says 1000 people! Well, that is something to check on THEN! Don’t wait!

What is most challenging about what you do?

Everyone’s different personality is very challenging! You never know what someone may say or do! Yep....it can be challenging!

What is most rewarding?

Gosh! I love it so much when someone is so excited that they can be seen in the crowd...way back in the background for just a second!!! OR, if they were picked out of the crowd by the director and have been asked to say something! WOWOW! I love to hear that, because, basically, an extra makes minimum wage, and if this is a bigger budget film, the rates are most likely union rates, and they will now make around \$700-1000/day!!! What a difference! Of course, this rate will include all the little goodies like paying for their wardrobe or their mileage, etc!

What advice would you offer someone considering this career?

Learn everything you can! From being a Production Assistant, to Wardrobe, to Lighting, Photography, Director, Producer, and even going on set to see how it all happens. Sign up to be an extra. The more you know, the more you can help your actors that are going to be going on set!

How much time off do you get/take?

Here again, it is feast or famine. It can be a month, or it can be a week. I am in the Carolinas and the incentives to film here are pretty good. We have the mountains, the lowlands and the beach! We have great locations and great crew and actors. So, that is not a question I could really answer. But, I get enough time off, so that after it has been a few days, I need to find something to do!

What is a common misconception people have about what you do?

So many people think that just because they “have what it takes” , that I will cast them in a big speaking role in a feature film. People write to me all the time and tell me this is their dream, and if I would just give them a chance, or that they have been told that they have the “look”, etc etc. It takes hard work and training, getting acting classes, going to workshops, auditioning for the local theater, drama class at school, plays, church plays, and so much more! Audition for roles that aren’t paying! Get a resume filled up with lots of speaking roles! THAT is what we are looking for! We are looking for those that REALLY WANT IT! If you want it bad enough, you will do anything and everything you can to make it happen. Get the work, make your resume, do not LIE on your resume, and things will happen. If you aren’t getting work, then do something else that MAY help you get work! Are you groomed? Are you taking classes? Are you Networking at any of the Film Meetings? Are you going to Casting Directors workshops? You want to get your face in front of the casting directors! You HOPE that the casting director will tell you the truth! I hold workshops all the time, and I tell everyone that they are here to learn, AND...that I WILL tell you the truth! I don’t want to hurt anyone’s feelings, but it is the only way to learn! I am here to help you and all you have to do is ask!

What are your goals/dreams for the future?

Well, my goals and dreams for the future, I believe are happening now. I wanted to start producing some, and I am doing that now. I have a couple of films that I am working on. I want to make sure that I have helped everyone out in some way or the other, when they have come to one of my workshops. I don't mind actors emailing me and asking questions at all! Or I do have a facebook and they can go there and ask questions!

What else would you like people to know about your job/career?

If you don't have patience, then this is not a career for you! I love meeting people! This is a "high" priority position. You are with the stars, the producers, the directors. I have had people come to my house before, so it gets a little scary! You never know what can happen there! But most of the time it is ok! I have a fence around my house with many cameras, so I feel pretty safe now. But, if you like trying to find the right person for the right role, and working your butt off to find it, then you will LOVE this career! I have a couple of films that are coming up that I am working on. These two will hopefully be filming soon. We are still trying to find investors, and that is the hardest part. But both of these films are true stories and people really want to know about true stories! I am also trying to get funding on a true Angel's story and another TV SERIES that deals with everyday pressures, everyday people problems, bullying, etc. So, hey, if you have an extra \$500k or a \$million to invest....just let me know! ;0)

But, all joking aside, NEVER GIVE UP YOUR DREAM!!!