

# Behind the Scenes

HOW TO SURVIVE  
IN THE MOVIE  
BUSINESS AS A  
**FREELANCE**  
**FILM**  
**TECHNICIAN**



JOSEPH J. ALLEN

Copyright © 2020, Joseph J. Allen

All rights reserved. Printed in the U.S.A.

No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording or any information storage and retrieval system now known or to be invented, without permission in writing from the publisher, except by a reviewer who wishes to quote brief passages in connection with a review written for inclusion in a magazine, newspaper or broadcast.

**Quantity Purchases:**

Companies, professional groups, clubs, and other organizations may qualify for special terms when print ordering quantities of this title.

For information, email [info@ebooks2go.net](mailto:info@ebooks2go.net),  
or call (847) 598-1150 ext. 4141.  
[www.ebooks2go.net](http://www.ebooks2go.net)

Published in the United States  
by eBooks2go, Inc.  
1827 Walden Office Square, Suite 260, Schaumburg, IL 60173

ISBN: 978-1-5457-5307-1  
ePUB ISBN: 978-1-5457-5308-8  
Mobi ISBN: 978-1-5457-5309-5

# Table of Contents

## *Introduction*

Chapter 1 The Hustle Game

Chapter 2 Do It All, See It All, Learn It All

Chapter 3 Movie Hours

Chapter 4 You Are Your Own Business

Chapter 5 Safety And Its Importance In The Business

Chapter 6 Sleep And Its Importance

Chapter 7 Other Useful Information As A Freelancer

Chapter 8 What Makes The Industry Fun

Chapter 9 Unions And How They Work

Chapter 10 Rates

Chapter 11 Hotel, Mileage, Zones And Per Diem

Chapter 12 Movie Equipment

Chapter 13 Movie Equipment Rental Business And How Film Shoots Come Together

Chapter 14 Freelancing And Balance

Chapter 15 Departments On A Movie Set And How They Work

Chapter 16 Freelance Additional Crew And Equipment—Cranes, Lighting, Crew

Chapter 17 Tools For The Freelance Film Technician

Chapter 18 Go At It And Have Fun

Chapter 19 Other Useful Information And Nuggets Of Wisdom

*Acknowledgments*

*About The Author*

# Chapter 1

## The Hustle Game

It's time to hit the ground running and get aggressive. The freelance game is all about hustle. And hustle these days is getting your name, any way you can, in front of people that are in the business and working.

There are a few ways to approach networking:

- The old-school method includes finding a way to meet industry people either at a job or through a contact. Someone always knows someone in the business.
- Seek out young filmmakers and work on their films for free to gain experience.
- Set up a phone call to introduce yourself and ask them the most important question: “Do you have any projects I could help out with?”
- Another option is to go to the union hall of the union you are interested in—if you plan on trying to go union—and turn in your resume. Ask if they have any work available? It's not unheard of that they may send you out on a job right then and there. More on unions and how they work later in the book.
- Get a copy of the film directory in your local town. San Francisco has one called the *Reel Directory*, and they advertise craftsmanship for hire. Get a copy and start calling all the people listed in your field of interest. Be sure to have good information gathering questions prepared. And don't be afraid to ask for an opportunity to work on any upcoming work.

- Contact all film rental houses and ask if they have any jobs going out that they need crew. Ask them if they can tell you the name and numbers of some local key people that work frequently. Once you get those numbers, call and follow the same tips as stated above. Or send an introductory text and ask if they have projects they need help with.

The key is hustle. If you're not hustling to get your name out there, then the phone won't ring. Freelance work and temporary work within the industry is not for everyone. It takes a certain type of person to deal with the ups and downs of the business. You have to be mentally tough when work gets slow and believe that you will be working when the work picks back up. My advice to anyone starting out is to use these methods I list above. But also have other part time or full time work to keep money coming in until you get established.

People come into the business at different ages. If you are in your twenties, your tolerance for not making a lot of money is much higher, mostly because you're coming out of college and used to being broke. Usually young kids in the business don't have a house, family and other things to support and can handle lower wages in the beginning. As you start to get some experience, your rates will start to increase, along with your knowledge of how rates work and fluctuate between movies and commercial filmmaking.

One thing to think about as you start to get more work is how you want to structure your freelance work. Some in the business do not like doing television commercials because they are not consistent. You may be working on a TV commercial three days one week, one day the next, seven days the following and then nothing for two weeks. These schedules fluctuate all the time. But if you are on a TV show or movie, those projects operate on a set schedule and time frame. For example, television shows will usually come into a city and film anywhere from a few days or a few months. If the TV show is filming the entire show in a city, a full television episode takes seven days to film.

For television shows, the studio will have a pilot to shoot first to see how it looks and if audiences like it. If green lit, then the studio will begin filming a

certain amount of episodes to complete season one. That said, any crew that gets hired on the pilot usually has a steady job for as long as the show runs. Sometimes that can end up being a multi year run of work. Working on television shows usually will be six to nine months of shooting. They then take a hiatus, come back and run the same length of time for season two and so on. Again, the attraction is that it is steady weekly work for a freelance technician. Television hours often are very long—anywhere from ten to eighteen hours a day. A regular week can run anywhere from five to seven days and then start all over again. So, as you can see, it can get rather grueling.

Feature films are a bit different. They come into a city and usually film anywhere from two weeks to nine months or more. If it's a blockbuster feature film from Hollywood of two hundred million plus, usually it will be in the city for a long period of time and have massive crews working on it. The same theory applies to working on a large feature film as a television show. It's steady work for a freelancer. The added benefit for many technicians is the stockpiling union hours and money toward their benefits. This is a very important thing for anyone that is a permit technician or journeyman union member.

Some other options for the freelance film technician to think about are working corporate interviews, documentary projects, live action sports or television commercials. All these last scenarios are less consistent. My advice is to be open to anything that comes your way. You never know what a call or text may offer you for a job. That is what keeps it exciting. Try to narrow down what you enjoy doing in the business and focus on getting really good at that. But also, always be open to learning other positions in the beginning. It will only make you stronger as a technician.

One thing you must be open to as a freelancer is the ability to adapt and change. You may hit traction with a crew and be working in the niche of the business that you want at any point. It's often that this happens and you just roll from movie to movie with them. It can be a wonderful experience and a lot of fun that can last for years—travel, cool projects, and new and interesting work all the time. But I urge you to always be on your game. Know that the ride can change at any moment, and you have to have the ability to adapt and change when it does. For no reason at all the group you worked with for years

might just stop calling you to do projects. I stress the importance of always networking on every job. Because if one avenue of work goes away for an unknown reason, you have the ability to put fifteen calls or texts out to other sources of work and be working the next day. This is the nature of the business.

As fun and exciting as it is, things change all the time. Some people rise faster than you to higher ranking positions. Never let that grind on you. It's the path they are on. Celebrate their successes, encourage them and learn from it. Keep yourself up and positive. Once your reputation is set in place as a fun, smart, and consistent technician, then you'll always have work available to you in some fashion. Be open to possibilities. They can be in front of you every day if you pay attention. It can happen this quickly, you meet someone new on set and they are moving on to a project and pull you on to it because they need help. Keep your eyes and ears open. You will be amazed at what you hear and learn. And if you are savvy, you will learn a lot just by listening.



## Chapter 2

# Do It All, See It All, Learn It All

**A**s a freelance technician, in the beginning, you're unknown to everyone. Sure, you may know someone in the business. And you likely reached out to them, and they possibly helped you get your first break. Great! Most new technicians come into the business with little to no experience. It's important in the beginning to come in humble, hungry and with your eyes wide open.

Once on a movie set, look around you. Watch the machine at work. Big budget movies on average are funded for millions of dollars. With that comes big equipment, big crews to run it, big scenes and a big script that sometimes can take a month or years to finish filming. Your first time on set can feel both exciting and overwhelming.

Depending what position you've been hired for, you'll most likely feel lost. And that's OK. Everyone has to start somewhere. Your three best friends in the business are a good attitude, the ability to get your hands dirty and a gritty work ethic. These three characteristics will always get you noticed and get you hired back. For me, I've always tried to help new kids coming into the business. I try to go out of my way to introduce myself to them and give them industry advice. I have been in the business long enough to see young talent that will rise up through the ranks—the kid who is at the lowest position, making the least amount per day but hungry for the *work*, hungry to learn, hungry to tackle all tasks with a good attitude, and is a workhorse. That is the kid who will get noticed and start the ascent in the business.

People come into the business at various ages of life. I came into the business at age twenty-eight. There is no age requirement. If you use the above information, you will always be working no matter what age you start in the industry. In the beginning of your career, it's important to get comfortable saying yes to pretty much every job that comes your way. First of all, that is a great way to begin to learn many things. The business is filled with many talented and creative people. For each job you are hired to do, use my age-old rule of thumb: Shadow the best person on the job. Watch everything they do, how they do it, how they communicate, what tools they use, their work ethic, techniques, and then ask them intelligent questions. At the end of the day, take notes on what you've learned. Study them, then apply what you've learned. As time pushes forward, and you get a few years under your belt in the industry, you can start to really think about which department you like best. Talk to the key people running those departments and express your interest in joining them if an opportunity arises. As long as you carry with you the above-mentioned qualities, you'll be on your way.

**You've Just Finished your Free Sample**

**Enjoyed the preview?**

**Buy: <http://www.ebooks2go.com>**