

## THE IMPORTANCE OF THE 2ND CAMERA ASSISTANT

This paper is directed to Job Bidders and Commercial Producers. Its purpose is to create an understanding about the function and importance of the 2nd Assistant to the Camera Department and to the production as a whole. The objective is to ensure that every show of a magnitude to warrant it makes use of the services of a professional 2nd Assistant, and that he or she is paid a salary commensurate with that of the Grip and Electrical Best Boy. Further, it is hoped that this paper will influence Job Bidders to include this position with the correct salary in their original bids.

In order for the shoot to run smoothly (and stay on schedule), it is vital for each department to have a Key and a Best Boy. The Key, as the department head, works directly with the DP to implement his/her directives. In the case of Electrical, it involves lighting changes. With Grip, it involves rigging, proper placement of flags, etc.. In the case of Camera, camera movement, reconfiguration, filter and lens changes and focus are involved.

Each Key has a Best Boy, the person who keeps the equipment organized, who knows where everything is, who prepares the department for the next setup. The 2nd Assistant is the Camera Department Best Boy.

Being a 2nd Camera Assistant involves a highly specialized set of skills, including a detailed knowledge of the theories and workings of a motion picture camera. Additionally, a disciplined attitude toward correct treatment of this delicate equipment is required. As the only person on the set who handles the film between the can and the magazine, and back to the can, he or she is in a singular position to waste thousands and thousands of dollars of effort in a single careless moment - IF they don't have a proper handle on the job. Thus, the 2nd Assistant is in a uniquely responsible position, and should be paid accordingly.

**Not just a loader.** On features, the Camera Department consists of: The Director of Photography, the Camera Operator, the 1st Assistant, the 2nd Assistant, and the Loader. In the feature scenario, the position of Loader allows the 2nd Assistant to stay on the set, engaged in the fulltime job of supporting the Camera Department. On commercials and music videos, although the 2nd Assistant is the one in the bag, their responsibilities don't end there. On commercials and music videos, usually, there IS no loader, just as there is no Camera Operator. What is accomplished on features by five people must now be accomplished by three: DP, 1st and 2nd. To refer to a 2nd Assistant as "the loader" denigrates the responsibilities inherent in the position. It would be like calling the Production Coordinator an Office P.A.. There is much more to it than that!

A professional 2nd Assistant is a highly skilled component of the Camera Department, an invaluable part of the crew, and has a direct hand in ensuring that the entire production runs smoothly. They are also often one of the hardest-working people on the set!

Unless the shoot uses a very small camera package, only one film stock, takes place on one stage, calls for very few configuration changes and does not involve a crane, the need for a professional 2nd Assistant exists as strongly on a one-camera shoot as when multiple cameras are in use. Equipment is constantly being put onto and taken off of the camera. It is the 1st Assistant's responsibility to stay by the camera and attend to the DP's needs, and to the ever-changing needs of the camera itself. In order to do this, the 1st Assistant depends upon the professional 2nd Assistant to organize, locate and prepare equipment for use. This especially holds true when moving around in remote (non-stage) locations where equipment changes are constantly being made. When the 1st does not have a trained 2nd Assistant, he or she invariably must leave the camera to get a called-for piece of equipment or case. Often, this involves the 1st running to the truck while the entire company waits. (In what other departments is this staffing shortage allowed to occur?)

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The 1st Assistant is usually busy doing what they must do for the specific shot or moving the camera from one place to another. They can mentally anticipate equipment needs for a few shots away, but unless they leave the set, often cannot implement these anticipations. The experienced professional 2nd Assistant will have the necessary equipment on set as or before the 1st Assistant asks for it. Multiply this by 20 such occurrences a day, and the Producer has saved a considerable amount of shooting time. Bottom line: *The money you **save** will be greater than the money you *spend*.*

The case has been made that one 1st Assistant can and has been known to run the entire department by him/herself. Perhaps this comes from the documentary tradition of run and gun, where there ARE no electrical or grip departments. The Cameraman, Assistant, Soundman and maybe one Utility comprise the entire crew. Yes, it IS physically possible for one person to do this work. But on a larger scale, it certainly wouldn't be done as thoroughly, efficiently and as quickly as a qualified professional team could do it. Sure, an entire electrical department could conceivably be run by one person; as could a whole grip department. But those people would be run ragged, the quality of work would undoubtedly suffer and set-ups would take much longer. The same holds true for Camera. A team speeds everything along.

Thus, the 2nd Assistant is a vital element of the Camera Department, NOT a luxury, and the professional 2nd Assistant's day rate should reflect the responsibilities of the position and be equal to the rates and OT deals received by the Best Boys in the other departments.

We thank you for your time in reading this paper. We all agree that our main goal is to serve the production. Toward that end, we realize communication is the key to execution: execution of a director's vision, execution of budgetary responsibilities or a craftsman's execution of their trade as it contributes within their department and position. We feel the professional 2nd Assistant is such a craftsman and welcome your comments or questions on how this position can remain a solid, positive contributing part of teamwork within the Camera Department.

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