

how to book the job

by Carla Lewis



booking the job
without annoying the cd

So the Casting Director likes your look and wants to book you. Great! Now what?!

For your reading pleasure, we contacted a number of extras Casting Directors and asked them what they expect (or dream of expecting) from their background actors when they are trying to efficiently book a call. We want to thank them for their words of wisdom and warning regarding this fine art of phone candor and follow through on set. What follows is a primer on how to handle a booking so Casting Directors will want to call you again and again and again.

Note: This information is not for the faint-hearted. We will give this article a PG-13 rating – content may not suitable for those easily offended. If you are guilty of any of the tactics which follow, let this information simmer, so that next time you get that all important phone call, you may be better prepared for an easy, rapid and professional booking from a Casting Director.

Step 1: BE ACCESSIBLE

Casting Directors are often booking for the next day and want to get the job done as quickly as possible. They will often call you and others like you until they get the spot(s) filled. Once the calls are placed it's typically a "first-come-first-serve" basis for who gets the spot. With this in mind, bookings are done at lightning-like warp speeds and background spots are booked pronto. Basically, it's a quick game of phone tag. Whoever calls back first wins. F.Y.I.: Calling Services aside, it's often easiest for a CD to call a cell phone first, then a pager, and lastly a home phone number. We are going on the year 2004, people. If you have a cell phone, CD's will think you are mobile. If you are mobile, you are accessible. If you are a professional working actor of any caliber, you've got a cell phone and the sense to check it often!

Step 2: GETTING THE CALL

If you answer your cell phone, you may move on to Step 3. Rock on! If you don't have a cell or it is turned off, be sure to have a pager and answer your pages right away. If you don't have a pager, you should really get one. Come on folks, even though Mick Jagger and Keith Richards are still touring 30 years later, this is not the stone age. If the Casting Director finds you at home, you are lucky... but you should really get a pager. One major frustration Casting Directors face when calling a home number happens when a non-actor answers who does not understand the nature of the call and makes the busy CD answer a billion unnecessary questions as opposed to taking a simple message. If you do share a phone line with other people, be sure to educate them on this CD calling process. Have them take down the information the CD offers as opposed to asking unnecessary questions (i.e. your roommate answers the phone, "Yes this is Joe Schmoe's house... dude, really? You want to book him on *Beverly Hills 90210: Brenda's Revenge The Movie*?! Dude, is it a TV-movie, will Luke Perry be there, what's the story about, in Shannen Doherty in it...? Blah, blah, blah.") And, people, this banter actually happens!!

Step 3: RESPONDING

If responding to a page, say: "Hi, this is First Name, Last Name returning a page." If you answer a direct call you can just say: "Hello." Don't call saying, "duhhh, uhhh, someone paged me." No matter how you say it, even with a little pizzazz, you still sound like Keanu Reeves in *Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure* – not a good start. Some CD's have expressed frustration when talent ask them to call back on a different number. The better way to approach this is to let the CD know you are not on a good line and ask if you can call the CD right back from a better line. Let the CD make that decision of who calls who back. Call it CD courtesy. Speaking of which, now is not the time to make requests. Please don't ask, "Can you always try me at home first and then my cell?" Or don't answer your

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cell phone and call back later saying, "I was at home, why didn't you try me there?" Come on, people. The time to update Casting Directors with your phone numbers ("Call First" lines – if this type of listing is available – new numbers, etc.) is in their traditional updating way – not when they are calling you to book you.

Step 4: THE QUESTIONS

The Casting Director will have some qualifying questions. Answer as quickly as possible and be upbeat. They are trying to book you on a job, not ask you out on a date. Make it an easy conversation, even if you don't get the job, you have made a good impression. Good impressions will take you far in this industry. Also, when a CD asks you booking questions, there are not right or wrong answers, as long as you are honest – that's the number one rule!

QUESTION #1

"Are you available xyz day(s)" Answer: "Yes" or "No." You should ONLY say YES if: you are flat-out available the ENTIRE DAY (be it an early call or a late call). If you have a prior commitment for the evening, (hot date) but are available for the DAY only, for example, the answer is NO, you are NOT available. Typically, the Casting Director has absolutely no idea how long it will take for the director to get the shots needed and therefore has no idea when the show will wrap. Call times change all the time (Casting Directors are not trying to keep you in suspense, we promise. They themselves have no idea if a Call Time will be bumped up three hours earlier at the last minute). It is important that the talent

they have booked are available the entire day, no matter what. So again, if you have any time constraints (doctor's appointment, dentist's visit, audition, *All My Children*), answer NO.

QUESTION #2

"Have you worked this show before?" Answer: "Yes, I have" or "No, I have not." It's not a quiz, it's a question. Again, be honest. Casting Directors are often looking to see if you were established in the show in a particular scene. If you were deep background on a particular scene, it is often okay to bring talent back for a different scene. On some sets, however, the AD's will freak out if they see a familiar face, and in those cases the CD could jeopardize his or her job by bringing you back. Just answer the question honestly and as succinctly as possible. Don't just say "I wasn't seen." Bad answer. The key here is to impress the CD. Volunteer information, know the approximate date you worked, know where you were in the scene, how many people were there. Knowing this information off the cuff will make the CD appreciate your booking you even more. You are oozing with professional!!

QUESTION #3

This question may actually be a series of related questions that are specific to the job the Casting Director is calling you about. Examples: verifying sizes, special skills, availability, props, wardrobe, etc. Answer as clearly and accurately as possible. As one CD put it, answer questions "about physical details honestly – especially when asked about height – people try to give the answer that they think the CD wants...as opposed to just answering and letting us decide from there (this especially pertains to standing in.)" They know you never threw out those clod-hoppers and stilettos from the 80's, waiting for them to come back into style. They're hip – they have the same darn shoes – and they also know you can easily range 1 to 4 inches in disco height, just tell them your unaltered/unheeled height! Also there is no need to explain that your favorite red, heart-shaped Justin Timberlake pillowcase mixed in with your whites so your white dress is now a little too pink. No one needs to know about your laundry situation.

While your file should always be kept up to date (new numbers, new sizes, new hair-do, facial hair, new union status, etc.), it is better to reveal any pertinent info at this point than to accept the booking and your new self is completely wrong for the call – this makes the CD look foolish. If the CD asks or not, be sure to let the CD know if your look has changed significantly. Even if you may not get the job once you reveal the updated info, it is better to be honest now and maintain eligibility for future bookings as opposed to making the CD look like an idiot and jeopardize those future bookings...ahem!

Keep in mind, these questions are like an "interview" of sorts. This is an excellent opportunity for the Casting Director to get to know you, so you want to be as professional, proficient, and as upbeat as possible. Make calling you easy. No time for chit-chat. Even if you don't fit the criteria needed for this specific job, you have made a good impression. At the same time, keep in mind that too much person-

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ality is not always good either. Unnecessary banter, (sucky gas prices) random side notes (dogging on your Calling Service or another CD) and anything taking the busy CD's time away from getting the job booked is not such a good thing.

Step 5: THE VERDICT

If you are not right for the job because of QUESTIONS in Step 4, simply thank the CD for thinking of you and let the call end. Do not ask for work on a different day: "I'm not available Tuesday but if you can use me Thursday..." This usually goes in one ear and lingers in the frontal-frustration lobe of the busy CD's brain.

Step 6: BOOKING

First, smile. As silly as it might sound, if you smile while you talk, your voice will project it. As one CD put it, "Too many people sound dull and not excited and when we get that, we feel they might flake and not be professional for us. I often find myself asking twice if they are available. They sound like they just awoke or are on drugs heavily sedated." Oh no, people! CD's are giving you a job. Letting them hear that you appreciate the opportunity is a very good thing. (Uplifting, appreciation therapy note: You are sexy, you have good hair. When you flash that Matt Damon/Reese Witherspoon smile, you drip of booking charisma.) This will help them want to offer you that next job. If they feel that you appreciate the work, they feel you will be enthusiastic on set and if you are enthusiastic on set, production will be happy. If production is happy, they will consider hiring that Casting Company/Director again. You represent the Casting Company or CD when you go out on set and CD's want to put their best foot forward. Enough said!

Step 7: THE DETAILS

At this point you should have a pen in hand and paper to write on. First let the CD give you the information. DO NOT JUMP AHEAD of them and start asking questions – this is not a darn race *Seabiscuit*. Each CD has his or her own way/rhythm/pattern of giving out the information. If you jump ahead and start asking questions, they may forget to tell you an important detail. Remember, they do this all day long. Trust them to tell you what you need to know and just listen to them. If they fail to mention a particular item, nicely ask them at the end of the booking. Pretty simple and easy – just keep it that way.

INFO NEEDED:

- 1.) Name of show/project
- 2.) Casting Director/Company booking you.
- 3.) Rate (only ask the rate if it is a Print, Music Video job or Non-Union Commercial – and get the rate per hours.) If it is a standard SAG or Non-Union spot, you should already know the standard rates or can refer to your friendly copy of EWFBFS.
- 4.) Emergency number
- 5.) If you are SAG, you can either

verify that it is a SAG booking or you can simply ask if they need your SS# to clear you with Station-12. (Station-12 is the procedure most Casting Directors are supposed to complete to verify that the booked SAG talent are not must-joins or delinquent on dues.)

The details or answers to the following list may or may not be available at the time of booking. You may be given a hotline to call, the CD may instruct you to call back, or they may call you with the following:

- 1.) Hotline number (if applicable)
- 2.) Call Time
- 3.) Location (sometimes with a *Thomas Guide* coordinate or MapQuest it online – just be sure to get the zip code of the location!
- 4.) Wardrobe
- 5.) Who to check in with
- 6.) Job-Specific notes that might include: "Come camera-ready" (look good – no bed head), "Come having Had" (had food that is – don't be hungry), season-specific wardrobe, job-specific props to bring, etc.

Step 8: THE JOB

Always arrive at least 15 minutes fashionably early. Make sure you are physically on set 15 minutes before your call time. Be sure to check in ASAP, people! Do not sprint over to have breakfast (if available) and then meander over to the AD to let them know you are there. This is a job, people – check in first, get your time card/voucher first, then you can go off to holding and flirt as much as you'd like! Be sure to have your clothes neat, in a hanging bag, and ready for wardrobe to peruse (see Tammy Smith's article *Wardrobe No.. How?* in this issue). As one CD put it: "Bring the right wardrobe. Be more prepared than not. Don't assume just because you like it they will like it. The actors that are prepared, besides being professional, usually work more." Always follow the instructions given on set.

Remember, as far as production is concerned, you are now a representative of the Casting Company or CD who booked you. Handle yourself accordingly. Be professional and courteous. Yes, we do hear horror stories about Production Assistants (PA's) on set who do not treat talent well. We do not want to belittle that negative experience, but the only way to fight it in the larger sense is to be the better person and maintain a professional attitude. Those who react, unfortunately, validate said PA's behavior and fuel the fire. If you find yourself in that situation, be the bigger person and stay your professional, positive self. We can help you navigate recourse after the fact. At the same time, however, do know your rights. Know your SAG contract (if you are working SAG) and know your labor laws (if you are Non-Union.) If you find a discrepancy, bring it up in a professional manner. If you do not come to a resolution you feel is fair or correct, keep

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your cool. The next day you may contact the Casting Company, SAG (if working as a SAG member), or the California Labor Board and deal with the issue.

Step 9: HAVE A GOOD DAY ON SET

Be alert, ready to work and have a good time. Realize how important your professionalism is to everyone on set and ultimately to you. Word does get around. Keep that in mind and keep your cool. Imagine in your interactions with various crew members (craft service, wardrobe, AD's, etc.) that the Casting Director (who could potentially offer you that next job) is watching. The way word gets around in this business, they basically are, so make the Casting Director proud by being a consummate professional. As one CD pointed out: "It is so important to keep your cool in any situation. Who knows if craft service has a great relationship with the producer or director. Don't make them mad or any other department person for that matter. Also don't talk about other crew members in a bad way or the CD, as it does get back to all crew." In other words, pick your words carefully if and when you ever are in a situation where you are talking with any crew member.

Step 10: WRAP

The best "thank you" talent can give to a CD after a day's work would be if the talent performed professionally and made the CD look brilliant for booking said talent. If you, the talent, feel like you need to extend an additional "thanks," send a nice note to the CD. Those little suckers really do go a long way!!

Step 10.5: GO BACK TO STEP 1

Enjoy the cycle. Whoo-hoo!!

TOP 10 LAME & ANNOYING BOOKING ISSUES

#10: Asking any unnecessary questions about the cast, plot, director, etc.

#9: Returning a call days later thinking the job is still available... no way, people!

#8: Asking, "Where is it shooting?" Answer: The CD may or may not have this info at the time of booking. It's not the most annoying question in the list but you should only ask if you really MUST KNOW (you live far way, etc.). Often talent only asks for curiosity's sake – it can just be a bit tiring time after time, ya know?

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