

wardrobe no...how?

by Tammy Smith, Casting Director

tammy talks wardrobe
what you need to know

I have to be honest. One of my favorite parts about what I do, is the compliment - the compliment that comes from a producer or director, the morning of a big scene: "the people look great...excellent job!" It is the validation that fuels us to continue to give the care and enthusiasm for booking the scenes that remain on the project, or even in just our career. Of course for us CD's, it is about the faces. BUT, what would a great face be without the right clothes?

Seriously. Wearing the appropriate clothes for the scene is really half the battle. Many of you may or may not know this, but straight "out of the gate" at the start of a movie or show, the costume department and the extras casting department have to become "new best friends." Extras Casting carries out the needs of the wardrobe department to bring the look of the movie to life. Yes, of course, hair and make-up factor in as well, but unless it is a period movie or some stylized piece, hair and make-up are more on autopilot. "It is the clothes that make the man!" (Who said that??? I can't remember, but it was someone famous and I'll leave figuring that out to you). Your wardrobe is crucial to the "end product" - the perfectly cast background actor.

There is a laundry list of helpful hints on this subject (yes, pun intended). There is a discipline that surrounds this entire subject matter. The main philosophy that both Dixie and I live by with regards to your wardrobe, is that wardrobe is to a background actor as a pencil is to a mathematician... as a toolbox is to a plumber... as a whistle is to a lifeguard... as a...oh, you get it already. It's YOUR JOB.

You show up to work with the items you need to do your job. Should be a simple task, right? For some, it is. For that "pro" who has been "around the block" a few times in the whacky world of extras casting, bringing the right clothes, along with that just perfect attitude is a cinch. You "get it"... you show up to every set with a garment bag full of the wardrobe options that perfectly "fit the bill" that was described to you on your confirmation line the night before and you rarely even have to wear anything other than the first choice that you wore ON you. If that person is YOU, than feel free to skip this article and maybe check up on your communication skills by reading Carla's article on "How to talk to a Casting Director" (also located in this issue).

However, if that person is NOT you, then peruse the rest of this article with care. Wash in gentle cycle and lay flat to dry, because your ability to fulfill your job by arriving to set WELL-prepared is a delicate garment that you must take care of, or you will end up throwing it away.

Lets get one thing out of the way. Some of you may be saying, "but that's a load of crap - you show up to set with your entire closet, practically, and the wardrobe guy checking your clothes snubs his nose at your choices and flits into the wardrobe truck and fetches you one of THEIR outfits." Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, YES... WE KNOW this happens. That is his choice. I have two comments on that premise. First of all, you must not let that idea be a factor in ANY WAY when you are picking out your clothes the night before. You shouldn't count on that as

the "answer" to choosing your options of wardrobe to bring to set. Unless you are a Non-Union newcomer who hasn't acquired the basic clothes you tend to need in our business, we are counting on you to bring what we asked you bring. If you don't, it reflects very, VERY badly on us. We expect you to bring what we ask. We DON'T expect you to know every creative detail the Costume Designer is thinking of and wants to produce as HIS or HER "work" for the camera. You may have four excellent top choices in your bag, but the costumer is painting a picture for the director along with the "clay" we have provided them with (that's you!).

Sometimes they just have something else in mind for you. Sometimes they are just being ridiculously finicky and micro-detail-oriented. That's THEIR job. Whatever it is, ROLL WITH IT. Don't ever let that make you slack off on the next gig when asked to bring the same type things or even a completely different look. As long as you followed our directions and brought, to the best of your knowledge and resources, what we described for you to bring, you are covered. Besides, a lot of times there are certain looks that the designer pulled for the scene and planned on "flavoring the scene" with these clothes. You also never know what the director has told the designer in regards to how he wants the scene to "read." They don't always know WHO they will end up putting those outfits on in advance, so everyone has to show up with the idea that they will be wearing their OWN clothes.

The other comment I have is that, if you are consistently having your own choices rejected or not chosen by the costumer, you may need to think about what your choices are. Maybe you AREN'T bringing the right stuff after all. Maybe you aren't bringing a good range of stuff (everything looks TOO similar). Granted, you will usually KNOW this as it is happening, because I have yet to find a costumer who is afraid to comment on bad or lacking choices to a background artist. If you are constantly being dressed with wardrobe stock, and you brought what you thought was a good bunch of choices, then you might be doing it wrong.

The only exception to this, is what I mentioned above. A newer Non-Union person can't always be expected to have tons of appropriate background clothes (especially for upscale scenes). That is a general statement and it does NOT pertain to EVERY Non-Union person, but even when you HAVE the right clothes, it takes experience to get into the groove of knowing what to bring to set and how to mix it all up with options and how to think ahead, etc. We KNOW this factor. It is usually pre-discussed among the "powers that be", and we take that into consideration. So does the average costumer. If the look of the scene is super-critical, they will usually do a pre-fitting/wardrobe show-and-tell, especially if it is a scene with a lot of Non-Union talent.

Again, Non-Union talent have a larger potential for not having an array of set-savvy clothes. I don't mean to offend and I know this isn't always the case. It is just a correlation that is a reality for us. For example, unless you have been a Non-Union extra for a long time, or you had a previous career in something business-oriented, a Non-Union person tends to be a bit short on the business attire. That's a basic concept for us



CD's. Besides trying to cast "around" this by booking Non-Union talent that we KNOW have the right clothes, if we know you are newer to the extras casting world, we only expect you to do the best you can. Even if it means bringing the basics (i.e. a plain off-white dress shirt, dress slacks, a pair of dress shoes, etc.), we know there will be augmenting taking place with the wardrobe in that set-circumstance. Just always do the best you can with your wardrobe and keep a humble attitude about it and you will go far.

And now the laundry list I promised - most of it dirty laundry - some of it freshly cleaned and folded. It all comes out in the wash...(okay, I'll stop)!

1.) Listen carefully to your instructions when booked and throw "less is more" out the window. MORE is more. Choices, selections, options- all of these variations of semantics are a "given", as far as I am concerned. Would a carpenter show up to work with nails and no hammer or chisel? The chisel may never get used, but it is there if needed. That whole nonsense that we can't ask you to bring "changes" without paying you for them (SAG) is so tired, I just fell asleep typing. Unless we SAY the word "changes" when they are actually requested, then it merely becomes creative "options". Besides the fact that we have added the key word "volunteer" in front of the word "options", not bringing at least a few options for the required look gives a wardrobe person license to sending you home. Oh, and if you are a SAG member and are having one of those "pissy" moments right about now over the idea that it is beneath you to drag more than one whole outfit you and the costumer have telepathically decided you WILL be wearing in the scene, well, you better take a "get a clue" pill and rethink this, unless you actually like getting sent home from work. 'Splain THAT to Lucy, or Mom or your dog when you get home, r-right before your friendly CD, who booked you, telepathically tells you what a dumb, dumb, DUMB move that was.

2.) Bring outfits you actually are prepared to wear, along with a lot of humility and openness to the creative pulse that makes a movie. Try to leave your high maintenance alter ego (or main ego for some) at home. Don't bring pants that haven't fit you in six

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years, nor a skirt that you rea-a-a-ally aren't happy with the way your BUTT looks in it, or a jacket made of a material that is too itchy to wear in a hot room full of 200 other people. THINK AHEAD on these little idiosyncrasies and bring only clothes that you are happy (within the criteria) to BE IN. Also, learn to love being in ugly choices that the costumer has pulled for you off the wardrobe truck. Their creative choice is THEIR CHOICE. Unless a piece of clothes is uncomfortable (like shoes) or compromises your morals or is really an obnoxiously inconsiderate choice based on your physical attributes or lack thereof, then you need to grin and bear it. Ya gotta play the game by the creative rules. Cry babies or difficult, high maintenance people in regards to their wardrobe are highly undesirable and you will get sent to detention for misbehaving in class.

3.) If a wardrobe person is "less than compassionate" with you when dealing with you on set, that is unfortunate and personally, I'd like to choke anyone who is mean or condescending to "my people." The best way to handle yourself at the mercy of a mean wardrobe person is to ignore him or her. It's not always easy, but please try not to give in to their sometimes displaced stress or frustration by biting back. Unfortunately, then the finger gets pointed at you and it is a no-win situation. Try to rise above it and feel pity for the ignorance of anyone who is rude to you (imagining they just need to get laid is often helpful and you get to have your own little fun without uttering a peep). If YOU were the offender from the start or if you were being the type of person described above in #2 to evoke this treatment, well then you are on your own. This is usually when you get "told on" by the PA wrangling you and it's all downhill from there.

4.) If you absolutely DON'T have ANY of the clothes that were described to you, for the scene, in order for you to bring, whether you are Non-Union or SAG, there are a few ways to handle that:

A.) Contact your CD or Calling Service immediately so they can decide what to do. It could be a bigger deal than you think, and you need to C.Y.A. (please don't tell me you don't know what that means). *Editor's note: sad to say, we didn't know. Ooops. It means: Cover Your Ass.*

B.) Going out and buying what you need is always an option. Especially if the purchase is an investment because it will be an outfit you can wear in other scenes down the line (especially when it is a basic need, like a suit or an earthy, muted-toned light sweater). This is not necessarily EXPECTED of you, but it IS if you claimed to have the clothes and really don't.

C.) The buying/returning scam thing is your choice. I know people do it all the time. That is up to you. We can't encourage people to do this, however, for those of you who didn't think of this little tip, Nordstrom's is especially lenient with returns... heh heh.

5.) If you should chose to go to set with very little or inappropriate clothes for the scene (Russian roulette for SAG members)- Never ever, ever, ever, EV-V-V-ER blame the CD. Man-Oh-man, if the CD finds out that you tried to pull the ole "but-this-is-what-Tammy-told-me-to-bring"-nonsense when confronted with a disappointed costumer, you will be lucky to fly under the radar and have it go undetected by the CD. I don't know

about other C.D.'s, but Dixie and I are known for rambling on and on about the wardrobe and/or the look of the scene on the confirmation lines. For example, if we tell you no red or blue, and you just HAD to bring your new red dress and try to pull it off with "we weren't told not to bring red," you better sit down and turn off your cell phone because you can expect either a kick in the butt, or a "curious" little phone call with a fuming CD on the other end - right on the spot. Costumers LOVE to call the CD and try to carry out that blame AS IT IS HAPPENING, to try to make an example out of the truly guilty party. Really, folks. This is one of the most heinous crimes you can commit against a CD. If you were told the wrong thing, that is ONE thing, but lying and displacing the blame, rather than just humbly admitting it was all you had, or you brought it anyway, is just so wrong. I don't know what else to say except that wrongfully blaming the CD for ANYTHING is a move that you will regret down the line. Ba-a-a-a-d Karma.

6.) What constitutes "Wardrobe basics?" I think "EXTRA" WORK for Brain Surgeons covers this pretty thoroughly, but I'll embellish. Besides the obvious notion of casual, upscale casual, business, upscale business,

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downscale, etc., always know the city you are supposed to be conveying and the season. If it isn't mentioned, than that usually means it is Los Angeles and moderate, medium weather. It's fairly safe to assume that. Bringing layers is always a good way of covering yourself if you are unsure. If it is a specific weather scenario and/or a city-specific look, you can be sure it will get mentioned on your confirmation line.

7.) Wearing expensive clothes can be tricky. Yes, there are many scenes where we ask you to wear upscale clothes and they cost money. That can make anyone nervous about them getting damaged or stolen on set. First of all, if you are hyper-sensitive about your clothes, besides being extra careful, consider buying cheaper knock-offs. We have Ross, we have Men's Warehouse, etc. There are many places that you can buy very inexpensive wardrobe basics that will pay for themselves in no time at all. If you are dealing with truly expensive clothes, and that is what you need to bring, well, be cautious and expect a certain amount of "wear and tear." A good production will generally reimburse you if your clothes are damaged excessively (or dare I say it, stolen). Trying to abuse this system by throwing a fit because your pants got a snag in them when you sat down on a bench in a public location is not the thing to do. Things that could have happened in real life are unfortunate when they happen on set, but not always regarded as cause for reimbursement. Unless damage happened directly because of an action that you were directed to do, or negligence by the location department (i.e. unsafe environments), a certain amount of wardrobe

"war wounds" should be expected and not over-reacted about. Some people really abuse the system and try to get reimbursed or blackmail the PA checking you out at the end of the night for normal wear and tear types of things - or they're even outright scamming for extra money. This makes it hard for people (or YOU) down the line when something REALLY happens that production should indeed reimburse you for. It is a gray area, I admit, but try to be objective and know which "fight" to pick, and scamming can usually be smelled a mile away.

8.) Hats and accessories are always a plus. They aren't always asked for specifically, but you should try to bring ALL of the things that decorate yourself in order to present a completed "picture" for the PICTURE!! I do not advise bringing EXPENSIVE versions of accessories. Unless you have those \$4,000 diamond earrings practically GLUED to your ears or a \$5,000 Rolex with a super strong band that CAN'T come undone, you are looking for trouble by bringing expensive items and it is your own risk to take. But a nice array of normal or cheaper accessories can make a costumer's day and it certainly makes us CD's look good. If you look good, WE look good. And if WE look good, WE get hired again and again, and so will you.

9.) Always show up with your clothes, CLEAN and not in need of a major ironing job. Of course we know things get a certain amount of creases on the way to set in that squishy garment bag, but showing up with you're dress shirt balled up and in a duffle bag is so lame (I feel like you should have to speak to my Mom about this). And trust me, you don't want to have to answer to my mom about why you are wearing a wrinkled shirt. (I hate ironing and until college, used to try to get away with wrinkles... big ones.) Yes, the wardrobe truck always has a steamer on it and they will steam out the normal level of travel wrinkles, but when Cruella de Wardrobe has to slave over YOUR outfit for 1/2 hour just to make it presentable, you are on the wrong track and better jump on the right one before you get chastised by any number of people involved. That's usually when they pull something off the truck for you to wear just to make it easier - NOT what we want them to be FORCED to do. Bring your clothes in a presentable manner so that the costumers can really see what they are and can choose them or veto them accurately.

I know there are more nuances to discuss where Wardrobe is concerned. I also know that the Wardrobe Department can be a source of major stress for you when you arrive on set. Just try to get through it all as best as you can by arriving as well-prepared as you can, with wardrobe in tow that helps the costumers to carry out their job.

Getting an "A" for effort is just as good as an "A" for getting all the answers right. Just don't ever let your guard down and lose your enthusiasm for bringing the "right stuff" to set. I know Dixie and I are known for having a high percentage of the background show up looking perfect for the scene. THAT can only create a positive effect with any CD that books you - and the better you look, the better you will... well, LOOK!!!!

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