

The Casting Director

By Kate McClanaghan

NOTE: Folks, in this reading, the term “talent” can be used interchangeably with the term “actor.”

It may come as a surprise to most people as to what a **casting director** actually does, even if you've considered yourself a professional talent (actor) for a number of years. It may interest you to know a casting director does not “rep” you; a **talent agent** represents actors (talent).

A casting director (*or casting agency or casting agent*) contacts a number of talent agencies, often by utilizing an online casting service such as Voicebank.net (for voiceover), Castingnetworks.com (primarily for commercial work), or Breakdownexpress.com (mostly for film and television). Talent



agents, managers, and in some cases, individual actors, submit for specific auditions based on the talent needs of the specific production being cast. The casting agency then selects the actor they feel are most suitable for the job based on their promo, such as headshots, demos,

and reels. Then they schedule the actor and hold auditions for the director and producers.

Generally speaking, final casting decisions are ultimately made by the client: namely, producers, directors, and commercial clients, as the case may be. However, the focus offered to the production and choice of actor is guided by the professional casting director. Casting shapes the initial **pre-production** of just about any project, especially when done well, because, by design, casting agents elevate any production with their experience, insight, and ability to articulate the project demands to the actor, often better than the producers, writers, and directors. This is true often because producers and directors have so many production demands to contend with. Additionally, articulating what's needed and wanted from the actor rarely comes easy to the

client, whether the client looking to hire you as a talent is a corporate client, in advertising, a writer/producer, or a director.



In fact, as counter-intuitive as it may seem, many directors won't offer you any direction at all. And the bigger the production, the less you can count on getting any "direction." The common catchphrase we hear from so many directors is, "I'll know it when I see it." Implying they expect you, the actor, to create something they can work with before they'll offer you any

guidance.

That said, casting directors help determine what the director is after prior to the audition for just this reason. However, telling actors precisely how to do their job *does not* fall under their job description. You're still expected to bring your creative point-of-view and imagination to the table without much prodding or coaxing. It's far too time consuming, and a blaring reminder of your inexperience. This doesn't classify as direction, per se, as so many novice actors might assume.

Suffice it to say, casting directors don't simply hold auditions; they offer industry insights to both the *production* as well as the actor side of the equation, especially with regard to performance, skill, and character development.

Casting directors (like some, but not all, talent agents) determine what the work will entail for each role to be cast, what the job is worth from the agency's experience, and what the clients should expect with regard to the actor once employed. Casting may work with both the producers and the talent agent to determine your rate of pay (especially based on the budget and degree of difficulty), and have a working knowledge of the general work regulation standards that apply to the specific production they are casting.

Some casting directors (but again, not *all*) may take on many of these responsibilities, which might account for the confusion as to who does what; but generally these duties fall to an experienced casting director. Talent agents (casting directors) who take on these responsibilities often do it to service to you, the actor, as well as to the producers who contact them most with work, but it is well beyond their job description and possibly even their skill set.

Additionally, one of the least known responsibilities of casting, again when done professionally and thoroughly, involves background checks. Because, "Oh, sure she's a



wonderful actress, but she's a kleptomaniac and robbed the set blind last time," which could have been avoided with proper casting. Or, "He's got great grit for the role, but legally can't be left alone with anyone under 17 years old on this commercial. He's got a court-order against him." (Doubtful many actors would openly divulge that info.) Nevertheless, casting would serve as the Human Resources (HR) on a production to some extent as well, but then every agency is different.

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