

How to Be an Awesome 1st Assistant Director (in one page)

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The 1st Assistant Director is responsible to Production regarding:

1. Health and Safety on-set, and creation of / contributing to Risk Assessments in prep.
2. Assisting the Director to deliver their best vision of the film possible by offering encouragement, ideas (if wanted), and as much time as possible within the shooting day in which to Direct i.e. work with actors, turn over on the shot they want etc.
3. Supporting every HoD/department to deliver their best work, coalesce with all the other HoDs/departments, and have fun*.
4. The Scheduling of the film (in collaboration with Production) during pre-production.
5. Creating Call Sheets with the 2nd A.D.
6. Keeping the project on-schedule.

**time allowing*

The Key Skills Required to achieve the above include but are not limited to:

1. Weighing up multiple (often incompatible) options and priorities and choosing the best.
NOTE: This is required somewhere between 'once in a while' and 'constantly'.
2. Having a thorough overview of the story and therefore the core needs of the telling of it. This is required to achieve the previous point. Experience in Directing and editing (i.e. knowing how a film will cut together) is incredibly useful here.
3. Regular clear communication;
 - Updating Production regarding any challenges arising so that they may be overcome before they become big problems.
 - Cast and Crew can only do their best work if they know where we are in proceedings, what we're focussed on, and what we're doing next.
4. The ability to read a set: understand who's doing what - how fast and how well, and how different people need different support to accomplish their tasks.
5. Impeccable time budgeting and time management skills. I wear a watch and carry a spare; I am surprised by AD's who need to reach into their pockets, pull out their phone and press a few buttons before they can tell me the time...
6. Managing everyone's expectations, including my own:
E.g. 1st AD: 'how long will it take to light this scene?' / Gaffer: 'twenty minutes.'
In twenty minutes time, I will know if the gaffer has a) kept to their agreement i.e. knows what they're doing and/or is willing to tell the truth, or b) if they haven't; I know I'll need to give them extra support or closer attention so they don't delay the shoot.
7. The right amount of urgency. The 1st AD is *the* person responsible for putting energy into starting every shoot day at a brisk pace.

Things that you don't strictly have to do but I think are very important:

- Don't be a dick.
- Learn people's names.
- Be impeccable with your word: trustworthiness builds trust.
- Do not assume. If in doubt; ask.
- Don't take things personally (where possible): often the 1st AD -by dint of being the one pointing out the finite nature of time- can become a target / punchbag for people's own frustrations. Should this happen, not taking it personally helps.
- Do your honourable best. This will vary depending on multivariate factors (time of day, blood-sugar levels etc). If you do this, you cannot later regret that you did not...

Thank you for reading to the end! Notes for improvement / additions would be appreciated:
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