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## DP's Relationship with Director

Posted by Daniel Gourley - 2008/08/20 10:42

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Re: The directors relationship with the DP.

I have an average technical knowledge, in regards to the camera/lenses/lighting package etc, and I've directed a couple of small indie-music videos with different student/semi-pro DP's.

When I'm describing the shot I want, I tend to know the composition/framing that I want but not so much the lighting. I tend to say things like "need to emphasize loneliness." or "the shot needs more texture to it. Play with the shutter speed. Make it like a dream."

This has resulted in two of the DP's (older than me by about a decade) rolling their eyes.

My question: Do DP's prefer it if a director simply says "Frame it this way and shoot it with lens X"? Is superb technical knowledge the key to being a good DP's director?

From David Mullen, ASC:

You probably should work with DP's who show more respect to their director...

It's not that DP's want to be told what focal length to use, it's just that they also don't want extremely vague poetic descriptions -- a middle ground is nice. Talk to them about practical ways of achieving the mood you desire.

It's OK to start with generalities, but immediately after that, the two of you quickly have to break it down into specific things like color, direction and quality of light, light sources, timing of camera movements, how the scene will be cut, etc. It's a collaboration, a dialogue, between the two of you where you bounce ideas off of each other.

Trouble with only using vague poetic descriptions is that no two people will have the same interpretation of some of these concepts, so DP might wait until the director gives them a more specific direction. Even saying "I want this to look dark" is open for a lot of discussion, dark as in shadowy, dark as in murky, subject dark or background dark, high-contrast hard lighting, soft but dim lighting, etc.

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## Re:DP's Relationship with Director

Posted by Emilio Mejia - 2008/08/22 00:53

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Very interesting topic. It's something that has caused a lot of tension in the latest film I'm shooting. If the dialogue isn't there between key crew members (DP, Director, Gaffer, or 1st AD for example) then ego may take hold and one person may try to impose themselves in a role they aren't supposed to take on. I think the first thing ANY filmmaker should take into a new project is humility and communication skills. If you understand from the beginning that this is a collaborative effort and are willing to talk about the decisions and creative choices that need to be made with an open mind, it makes the process much easier on everyone.

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## Re:DP's Relationship with Director

Posted by Daniel Gourley - 2008/08/22 19:50

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I agree. I think knowing what your job is and doing it 100% and THEN worrying about the rest of the production is a good attitude. I work fast and decisive but will also ask for input but the worst thing is a person who isn't sensitive to the situation at hand and slows the shoot down because it isn't the time for collaboration, but for work.

I love having fun and giving input, but I can ultimately put my individual priorities behind the needs of the overall production.

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