

Agents Open Doors, but Actors Must Do Their Homework

By DEBORAH HARRY | Guest Columnist



I get asked frequently what it takes to be a talent agent. First, you can start by looking at the requirements for obtaining a talent agent license, which are listed at www.labour.gov.bc.ca/talent/faq.htm.

Second, you will need to obtain several reference letters from casting directors so you can use services like Breakdown Services (www.breakdownservices.com) and The Casting Workbook (www.castingworkbook.com). Then, the work starts.

An agent's responsibility is to keep up with the upcoming and current film and television projects in order to secure work for their clients. Breakdown Services and The Casting Workbook allow agents to get the information that is needed on all the projects that are seeking talent. We use these services to submit directly to the casting director.

Agents spend the majority of their day on the phone, submitting their clients, and negotiating contracts. An agent can receive more than 100 phone calls and hundreds of e-mails per day. Agents make their income on all talent contracts negotiated.

If you are trying to secure an agent for representation, there are a few important factors to consider.

You may want to contact the agencies first to find out what their requirements are before mailing out your package. I require a cover letter, NOT addressed to "To Whom it May Concern," or "Dear Sir or Madame." Why would I consider your request for an appointment? Try a little research, it goes a long way.

The value of seeking representation is important because producers and casting directors have relationships with agents, and this allows them to direct their time elsewhere. (Rather than having to deal with actors on an individual basis). Casting directors and producers trust and rely on the agent to submit appropriate clients.

Once we have submitted, I prepare the actors for their auditions by faxing or e-mailing them their sides (the part of the script they will read at the audition) and giving them the proper information about the audition. Casting directors really appreciate when the actor is prepared and doing a great job.

Once you have secured representation, it is important to keep your agent up to date on your progress. Update your resume with every new experience. Don't wait. Networking and building industry relationships is your homework, all day, every day. Remember it's not always "who you know", it's "who knows you." The more people who are familiar with your work, the more opportunities you will create.

Your agent is part of your team and you cannot just sit back and relax once you have an

agent. You need to keep up the momentum and stay positive. People don't like to help or work with negative attitudes.

When building your acting career,

Do:

- Network, network, network.
- Research industry organizations.
- Volunteer for events and indie films and student films to build your resume.
- Read all the trade magazines.
- Be a team player.
- Accept constructive criticism.
- Have your tools for your business—cell phone, pager, fax machine, e-mail.
- Make yourself available for all auditions.

Don't:

- Call your agent every day and ask, "what's happening?" (You are responsible to know what is going on.)
- Change your look without discussing it with your agent.
- Sit at home and wait for your phone to ring.

Remember, be proactive and stay positive. There is a lot of rejection in this business, so you need to stay focused to achieve your dream. □

Deborah Harry has been a talent agent for more than 16 years and owns Deborah Harry Talent in Vancouver, B.C. Visit www.deborahharrytalent.com.