

Interview: Agent Extraordinaire Deborah Harry

by Cath-Anne Ambrose

CAA: What drew you to agenting?

DH: When I was 21 I opened up my own model and talent agency. Prior to that I was in the fashion industry as a runway model. I was travelling all over Europe gaining experience in the fashion industry and with all the wonderful contacts I made when I was over there, I came back and said I should do something with all these relationships. I actually put a game plan together when I was in Europe and I asked them what I would need to do in order to do to provide a service for them in the Toronto market. They told me what I needed to do and I took it very seriously. I established my own agency, put the portfolios together and started shipping them out to Europe and within 3 months I was already getting contracts from Japan and all over the place. It didn't really fall in my lap, it was something that I actually did the research on and got the opportunity to broaden my horizons.

CAA: How would you describe your philosophy as an agent?

DH: To be happy and enjoy what you're doing, very important! I truly enjoy and laugh every day with all my clients. I have to laugh. It's serious business when you are negotiating and putting deals together and that's the business side of it. You can still also have a bit of humour whenever you are putting that together as well, it helps people relax in a stressful industry. Dealing with positive and like-minded people. I'm really blessed that way, I've got a great group of clients.

CAA: How do you perceive the relationship between agent and client?

DH: Team player. They are part of your team. It's not just what I can do for them or what they can do for me, it's in tandem so that you can have a really great working relationship and get to know your client really well.

CAA: A few years ago the BC Government began licensing agents, do you think that helped curb agencies that were using deceptive business practices?

DH: I believe so. I sure hope it did, I sat on that board for a year, and we worked out all the bugs we could possibly work out. It's a buyer beware market so it gave us a tool to actually educate people so it gave us an edge. Technically, there are still ways people get around it because the modelling agency is not regulated, just the talent agents.

CAA: An agent needs to be an expert negotiator, know union collective bargaining agreements inside out yet also have a creative eye for selecting material and talent. Aren't these sort of left-brain vs. right-brain type skills?

DH: I guess it is a combination. I find it easy, I know people's rates and who will work for what so the only time it comes down to negotiating is when there's a big feature coming in or an independent and they've already worked out with the union what they are willing to pay.

If my client won't work for that then they won't work for that. It doesn't stop me from submitting them because I want the client to have the opportunity of turning it down. If they say no I totally respect that.

There are always extra things you can negotiate. Their credit, single card, trailer, size of the trailer and that sort of thing. I always believe in just asking, you don't ask, you don't get!

CAA: Do you believe there is any difference in being an agent in Canada vs. being an agent in a larger market such as Los Angeles or New York?

DH: There definitely is a difference, the difference is in LA you have to be SAG franchised as an agent. Their bond is a lot bigger. The way they work in the US is they have managers and agents. Managers are really not supposed to submit to the studios because they hate double submissions. But what the manager is doing is because they have a closer relationship with the client. All that the agent really does is the submissions and paperwork. There are a lot agents who are turning into managers.

CAA: You handle directors, writers, and actors. Which do you prefer?

DH: I've been repping the actors for 17 years and directors and writers for the past year and a half, so it's making my life exciting. Merging the actors and the writers it's allowing them to interact with each other, do script readings together, build relationships. My goal right now is to do four independent short scripts by the end of this year with my writers and my actors and directors. I'm going to be the creative producer only and put it all together. This will give me the tools I need when I'm talking to producers and they ask "does your client have any finished work that I can see?" Even if it's a well-produced independent short and it's well done that's a big enough tool to get a really decent size option for their work. So I'm always requesting tools from my clients. Give me the tools

I need. I can't make stuff up, I'm not a magician I can't make things happen unless the clients give me certain things to help them.

CAA: What are you looking for in the clients you want to work with?

DH: I'm really impressed when I take on a client who's already come to me with a game plan. They are focused. I basically tell them, this is the deal, I'm gonna match your energy. The harder you're gonna work, the harder I'm gonna work.

CAA: How necessary is it to have an agent to succeed in this business?

DH: The majority of the casting directors will say "get an agent". Obviously if the casting director deals with respected agents they know the person coming in the door has already been pre-screened.

CAA: What do you like most about your job? What do you dislike?

DH: I love the challenge. That's what keeps me positive and that's what I look forward to when I wake up every morning. As far as what I dislike; the rejection. Helping people deal with rejection is the hardest part of my job and turning the negative into positive.



Agent Deborah Harry

Cath-Anne Ambrose is the Production Associate on MGM Television's hit Sci Fi Series "Stargate SG-1"