

**Read on screen, or**

1. Print
2. Fold in Half
3. Put in Back Pocket
4. Read on Set (but  
only on breaks!)

# The Production Assistant's Pocket Handbook

By Caleb John Clark



Second Edition. First E-Publishing  
Copyright © 1992-2000  
Cover art by Ocean Quigley

The P.A. Handbook. ©1999-2000 Caleb John Clark  
<calebjc@well.com> , <www.plocktau.com>

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABOUT THE HANDBOOK.....	3
THE BASIC IDEA USING BIG VAGUE WORDS.....	3
THE BASIC IDEA IN FOUR WORDS (S.T.A.R.).....	4
SET ETIQUETTE 101.....	5
SET ETIQUETTE 102.....	5
Make sure you understand.....	6
Anticipate.....	6
Never spend your own money.....	6
Save all receipts.....	6
Remember peoples' names .....	6
Ask .....	7
Respect.....	7
Don't get involved.....	7
Never become complacent .....	7
Help those in need.....	7
Know where the nearest hospital is...8	
Carry phone numbers .....	8
Check in often.....	8
RADIO ETIQUETTE.....	8
When someone calls you by name: ....9	
Responding to commands:.....	9
Radio Check:.....	10
LOCKDOWNS.....	10
RUNNING TALENT.....	11
GRIPPING.....	12
MISTAKES.....	12
DRIVING.....	13
THE TELEPHONE .....	14
"I UNDERSTAND" THE UNIVERSAL RESPONSE.....	16
GETTING A JOB .....	16
CREDITS .....	18
RECOMMENDATIONS .....	18
RESUMES .....	19
VIBES.....	19
WHAT YOU'LL NEED .....	20
"OPTIONAL" THINGS .....	21
TOOLS OF THE FUTURE .....	22
CONCLUSION .....	24

## **ABOUT THE HANDBOOK**

Some of the advice you are about to read may sound a bit crazy, but keep in mind what is trying to be accomplished in the production process. Like a painting, a movie is a single piece of creative work, but while a painter holds his brush with one hand, a director must sit back and paint his picture with a hundred people holding his brush. Combine this with the strange bedfellows that art and business make, and things are sure to get crazy.

This handbook is designed to act as a supplement to learning on the job, and to give you an edge in the world of production. The incredibly complicated nature of the business has forced crews to develop specific, and sometimes unusual, ways of doing things. At the same time, this complexity has also made it very hard for people to teach newcomers what these ways are. I have taken all that I have learned about what it takes to be a great P.A. (Production Assistant), from my own experience as a P.A., an A.D. (Assistant Director), and a 2nd unit director in feature films, and put it in this handbook. I have also included suggestions from my friends in the business about what they think makes a great P.A., the most important comments coming from Cheryl Pitkin, an 8 year veteran Line Producer in Hollywood. I consider Cheryl's input invaluable because part of her job is to hire and fire P.A.s.

## **THE BASIC IDEA USING BIG VAGUE WORDS**

P.A.s do everything nobody else wants to do. It is an entry level job. Like all entry level jobs, the object is to work yourself out of this job by making yourself too valuable to be

kept in the entry level position. Being a P.A. is also a weird test with only one question; Are you willing to become the best P.A. you can, even though you know that you don't want to be a P.A.? The logic behind this is that the people above you have paid their dues and they expect you to do the same. The other side of the coin is that a good P.A. is very valuable because there is *nobody* else to do the job. Therefore, take pride in all the little demeaning tasks you will have to do. Take the job *seriously*. You are an indispensable part of the production team (if you need to prove this to yourself just get all the P.A.s to hide out where you all can see the set. Then watch as everybody panics as soon as they can't find any P.A.s), Be honored and happy to get coffee, and remember who likes three sugars. If you are an exceptional P.A., you will get promoted very quickly, and the coffee will come to you.

## **THE BASIC IDEA IN FOUR WORDS (S.T.A.R.)**

**SWIFT:** Traversing space or performing movements in a brief period of time. Acting with readiness; Prompt. In other words, boogie. Run to your car. If someone asks for a 3/8 inch bolt, say "No problem" and leave at a brisk gallop. Don't ask what it's for, or what it is, or where to get it. Just leave and find a Grip to help you.

**TACTFUL:** A quick or intuitive appreciation of what is fit, proper, or right. Skill in avoiding what would offend or disturb. Considerate. Basically knowing when to keep your mouth shut and smile, and when to add a bit of valuable input. When to be where you're needed, and when to leave when you're in the way.

**AWARE:** Conscious; cognizant. Alert and informed. Always pay close attention to how you are affecting others. Read the call

sheets so you know what is supposed to be happening. When things get crazy, take a deep breath and think clearly.

**R**E~~S~~OURCEFUL: Capacity for finding or adapting. Skill or ingenuity in meeting any situation. Versatile, and devious. Try to think of solutions to problems, even if they are not yours. Carry things people will need, like aspirin. Get a Swiss Army knife.

This forms the acronym, **S.T.A.R.**

Fitting for the business. I know it's cheesy but it's easy to remember.

## SET ETIQUETTE 101

### Never Sit Down

## SET ETIQUETTE 102

If you're not immortal, and you have to rest now and then, make sure to do it in a quiet out-of-the-way place that's within ear shot, but not eye shot, of those who will call you. Pick a time when you know that the chances of your being called are the slimmest, then check your radio if you have one, and relax. They will call you within 98 seconds; it never fails. So learn how to look alert and really be relaxed.

### *Run if anybody is waiting for you*

It's fine to walk briskly if nobody is waiting on you and you aren't supposed to be doing anything else, and it's a nice sunny day, and you're relaxed, and the shoot is going as smooth as glass, and...

***Make sure you understand***

Communication on the set is as crucial as in a war. When people ask for something make sure you understand or can find out exactly what it is they want. It must be understood by person X that it is understood by person Y, so that both parties understand that both parties understand. Understand? When someone asks for a small flying saucer with one fake blue alien, repeat it to them, in full, every word. It sounds silly and it feels silly to do it, but it works. A simple "OK" will only result in an "OK? OK what?"

***Anticipate***

Anticipate what people will need and you can save yourself a lot of energy. It's the difference between figuring out what someone is sure to ask for and going to get it at your own pace, or suddenly being told to run and get it as soon as possible.

***Never spend your own money.***

You should never have to spend your own money for anything the production needs, even if the company says it will refund you later. If you are asked to do this, say that you don't have any money on you. The only exception would be if you judge the situation to be an emergency and you trust that the production company will pay you back.

***Save all receipts***

Save receipts or anything remotely connected to the production, such as gas and supplies.

***Remember peoples' names***

Not only the key to politics! It's the key being a good PA. Remember names and use them. When you meet someone repeat their name outloud back to them to help you remember and make sure you get it right.

Carry a crew list or ask other people before you call someone "dude" in a weak attempt to hide the fact that you have no idea what his or her name is. Write down the names of people you might deal with again, so that when you call or see them, you can use their names as if you remembered them. Production is about interacting with people. Remembering names lets people know that you respect them, and that they were memorable.

#### ***Ask***

Always ask before touching someone else's equipment.

#### ***Respect***

Respect other departments' contributions to the production. There's nothing worse than a pompous P.A. who thinks that because he is in the production department he is better than other crew members.

#### ***Don't get involved***

Stay away from set soap operas, politics, and gossip. These things are dangerous and can get you fired no matter how good a worker you are. It's best to listen to everything and tell nothing. Besides, if people know you keep things to yourself, you will get to hear all the juiciest secrets.

#### ***Never become complacent***

People will not usually tell you if you are doing a mediocre job, They will just never hire you again. This is why it's a good idea to ask your superiors if they are happy with your work and if there is anything that you can do better. Always try to do things better and faster than the last time. Try new ways to do your job, and learn about other peoples' jobs.

#### ***Help those in need***

Never stand around while somebody is struggling to do something.

*Know where the nearest hospital is*

The Production Coordinator should know this, but if you know it will save time if someone gets hurt. In addition you should know where the nearest grocery store, hardware store, gas station, and print shops are located.

*Carry phone numbers*

Carry all the names and phone numbers of the cast and crew. When you leave the set make sure that you have some change, and the production's calling card number (if there is one).

*Check in often*

When you are off the set on a run or out of contact for any length of time, check in often. When you are off the set on missions, calling every 30 minutes is a good rule of thumb. When you are returning from a run it is sometimes good to check in and see if anything else is needed. This prevents the acute paranoia syndrome that sets in when people can't find a P.A.

## RADIO ETIQUETTE

You may be given a radio. After you have learned to make machine gun and ocean sounds with the static, you're going to have to talk to people with it. The first and most important thing to understand is that radios are not like telephones. When you're talking on the telephone you can hear both people talk if they're talking at the same time. The radio, on the other hand, will block one person out if both people talk. This means that someone could say "Rolling" and if you were calling at the same time you would not hear him/her and he/she might think that

you/he/she had, which could get sticky, not to mention confusing to read.

Radios usually use rechargeable batteries that clip onto the bottom of the radio. Make sure that you have a fresh battery or that you know where the extra batteries are. Batteries should be drained before they are charged and they should be charged every night.

If you are on the set with a radio, turn the radio off when the camera is rolling. It is very embarrassing to have your radio ruin a shot. However, make sure to turn it back on after the shot is over, because it's just as embarrassing to have to say "Well, I guess I must have been walking around with my radio off." The difference in the way radios work is why you have to talk like a cross between Rambo and a truck driver. Here are a few of the most common examples.

*When someone calls you by name:*

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR  
 "Steve!"  
 STEVE  
 "'Go', for Steve."

Always respond with "Go For\_\_\_\_". If you say something like "Ya Here" you could be anybody with a radio.

*Responding to commands:*

PRODUCTION COORDINATOR  
 "If you make it out of that town alive with our lunches, radio in about a quarter of a mile out."

STEVE  
 "Copy."

"Copy" is used to make sure people know that you heard and understood them. Silence just makes everybody nervous.

***Radio Check:***

STEVE  
"Steve here, I need a radio check."

DRIVER  
"Copy on that Steve."

The radio check can be helpful if, for example, you were told to guard a generator from the local wood nymphs. Now you've been waiting for two or three days for a wood nymph to show up, during which time you haven't heard anything on your radio. Wondering if everybody might have gone back to L.A. or maybe your radio's broken, you calmly ask for a radio check. It's much more dignified than saying, "Is anybody out there?"

Radios usually have several channels. The A.D.s will determine which department is on which channel. For example: Production staff on Ch.1. Transportation on Ch.2. You should always be on the same channel as the Production staff. Make sure that you switch back to your channel when you're done talking to another department.

Each show will have some different radio language, so you will have to adapt as you go. But as long as you remember how radios work and the basics that I have mentioned, you will never sound like an idiot.

**LOCK DOWNS**

Lock downs are a common P.A. job. Your mission will be to guard the perimeter of the set from interruptions that would ruin the shot. Usually you will be given a radio, some water and 2 days' worth of food. You will then be sent to a position near a door or some kind

of entrance to the set. Report back to your A.D. when you are in position. Wait for the cue "Rolling!" and yell it out loud and clear, making sure that anybody in your area can hear you. Now you are "Locked Down".

Once you're locked down and the camera is rolling, use the hand signal for rolling to tell any approaching people to stop and be quiet. The signal is made by pointing your index finger straight up and twirling it. If that doesn't work, try jumping up and down (quietly) or pray really hard. The A.D. will yell "Cut!" when the take is over, and maybe "Going again real soon". Repeat what you hear loud and clear so people can get back to work until the next take.

When you are on location, things can get strained. You will be dealing with people who, strangely enough, might not care if you're making a movie. They don't understand the finger twirl, and they might not like being told to be quiet. *Be polite*. Ask them if they wouldn't mind being quiet for a few minutes; explain why. Getting into a confrontation would defeat the purpose of your mission.

## **RUNNING TALENT**

Running talent means shadowing cast members and knowing where they are and what they are doing. The first step is to find them and introduce yourself; tell them who you are and that they should find you if they need anything. I know this sounds like chaperoning, and in a sense it is. The actors' state of mind is very important to the production. They need to stay focused and be kept calm, and that means sending a *neutral* P.A. to relay information. When shadowing talent or even dealing with them in any way, it is your responsibility to make sure that they are content. If actors get pissed off they will waste incredible amounts of time and money. If production people find out that a P.A. pissed

the actor off, they will descend upon that P.A. with a wrath equal to the amount of hassle he/she indirectly caused.

Fortunately, there is the 5th amendment of the P.A. constitution, otherwise known as the "don't kill the messenger" amendment. Take the P.A. 5th whenever things get tense with an actor. It will put you and the actor on the same side, both being enslaved by the evil unorganized production people. Both in utter disbelief that they want *another* take, and all you're doing is just following orders.

## GRIPPING

You might be asked to help the Grips out. You will most likely pick up heavy stuff, haul it, and put it down. As soon as you start these chores you are under the Grips' rule. Listen to them; do things exactly the way they tell you to. There are reasons you may not understand at first for the way things are done, so just do what they tell you and figure out why later. Use gloves if you have to wrap cable, but don't keep them! Gloves hanging off your belt will make you a grip P.A. faster than a Producer can dial a phone.

## MISTAKES

You will screw up. What's important is how you handle yourself after it happens. I was up to my thighs in a river in Maine. My proud mission was to catch plastic rats if they floated out of the frame line (and to act as a lifeguard for the 4 real rats we had). I was tired (excuse), the bugs were thick (excuse), and I was watching the shot because wet rats are a funny sight (excuse). While we were rolling, I

mistook a plastic rat for a real one and quickly jumped into the shot. The director screamed so loud I fell into the river trying to jump back. Later, when they had the take they liked, I went straight to the director to be fired. I figured since I was definitely out of a job I might as well be honest and brief. I said I was sorry that I screwed up. He said it was not a problem (I was lucky he was in a good mood). The point of this story is that you *never make excuses* when you screw up.

The first time that I directed a 2nd unit, we were shooting insert shots with an anamorphic lens. On one of the shots the First Camera Assistant (First AC) forgot to do an effect with the anamorphic lens. This was of course discovered months later while we were editing. I immediately blamed the First A.C. and received no response from the director. I then said that I was sorry, I meant to say that it was *my fault*. This brought a smile to the director's face, and he said that it was fine, he could work around it. This illustrates the fact that as you climb the ladder and get more responsibility, you have to take the heat for mistakes that the people *below* you make.

When you screw up as a P.A., act like the big boys and don't make any excuses. Just take full responsibility and apologize. It is a signal to those above you that you can handle the responsibility of being a leader.

## DRIVING

When you drive, the key is to drive *smoothly*. You should be able to drive all types of cars, light trucks and big vans (at the very least). When you drive on runs, get to your destination as fast as you can without endangering your license and job/life. When you drive crew members, be cool going to work, and get them home fast after work.

When you drive cast or director/producer types, pretend you are a professional limo driver. Drive as if they are

drinking a gin and tonic, and want to relax. That means smoothly accelerating, smoothly cruising, smoothly stopping. The big cheeses are on edge all day, and the last thing they need is for some P.A. to keep jabbing the brakes and doing things that make them nervous. Sometimes the big guys need to think in silence, and sometimes they want to talk. *Don't talk unless they start it*, and be brief. It's a nice touch to get to know the radio stations in the area before you do a pick up, so that you can find whatever your charges are in the mood for.

Driving with production people is crucial, since they will be evaluating you for future driving missions. When the big stars or directors need a ride, they will pick the best drivers from the crew to do it; P.A.s they rode with who were smooth and didn't make them nervous in traffic will have the best chance. It may sound like we're getting trivial, but I have witnessed people being slowly pushed out of the business for little trivial things that they kept doing wrong. People won't tell you that you stab the brakes too much; they will just never give you driving jobs. When done wrong the little things are like bees. One is hardly a bother, but a hundred can kill you.

## THE TELEPHONE

If used properly, the phone is the most powerful tool in the world of production. Learning how to use the phone is a crucial part of being a P.A. In general, *be aware of how you sound*, and *be careful*. It is easy to irritate other people when you are stressed out, and it is also easy to go beyond your jurisdiction once you get in the swing of things. You will have to use the phone to do everything from finding strange props like a 2 foot slab of flank steak (it happens that flank steak is cut so that it simulates muscle tissue, which makes it useful in horror movies) to securing locations.

Whenever you use the phone to contact new businesses, locations, or groups,

etc. make sure to *get the names of the people you contact*, and then write them down as the contact to go along with that number. This saves time when you or someone else calls them back.

You also might have to find people. For example, Carl Sagan (the 'billions and billions of stars' guy). All you know is that this guy has something to do with astronomy. What do you do? Grab the yellow pages and find a telescope shop, because the workers must love astronomy, and know more than you do about Mr. Sagan. They tell you that he's involved with Caltech, the Jet Propulsion Laboratory, KTVK ch. 28, and the Planetary Society. You find their numbers from information (or find one of the numbers and coax the rest from friendly secretaries). Caltech tells you he's at Cornell University, but you don't know where that is. You don't have time to go to the library; what can you do? Call up the nearest high school and talk to a guidance counselor. Call a university. Call the operator. Check 800-555-1212 information. Remember, all you need is the area code. You find the number and get his office, telling his secretary you are calling on behalf of a director in Hollywood, you don't want to talk to him-just a fax number and address (this makes them think it could be important). She is happy to help, and you have tracked down Carl Sagan in 20 minutes, with only a name.

People will help you immensely if you approach them right, something like this: "My name is Caleb, we're making a movie" (this excites most people). "I was wondering if you could help me?" (people love to get involved in exciting things, especially if they have boring jobs). You'd be surprised how much help you can get if you do it right.

I have found that people at small businesses tend to help you more than employees at the big chains who usually don't know what they are doing, where they are, or where anything else in the area is, and they don't care. Small businesses, on the other hand, survive on their own merit and are totally dependent on every customer. If the big

department stores don't have a 123.5 gigawatt phase two turbo infusion pump, call Joe's Hardware, and they will either have one, get one, or tell you all their competitors who do have one. That's how they survive against the big guys. Always call the production office before you return from a run to make sure nothing else is needed.

## **"I UNDERSTAND" THE UNIVERSAL RESPONSE**

A seasoned First Camera Assistant nicknamed "J-gor" once told me what the universal response to any human utterance was. He had heard it from a famous Dolly Grip, and felt it necessary to pass it on to me seeing as it was my first job as a P.A.

The response is, "I Understand". By varying the speed and tone "I Understand" works as a response in situations ranging from, "what a sunny day" or "here's a million dollars", to "my feet hurt" and "get a C-stand". Test it out for yourself. I haven't found any other two words that cover as many situations.

## **GETTING A JOB**

The business, by its very nature, is a catch 22. You can't get a job without experience, and you can't get experience without a job. Therefore the only way to break into the business as a P.A. is to get somebody to give you a chance to prove your abilities. The positive side of trying to find a P.A. job is that if you are good you are a rare commodity, since good P.A.s get promoted quickly.

The first step is to find a production. *Variety*, *Drama-Logue*, and the *Hollywood Reporter* all have sections on current and/or future productions. Your state and local film commissions should know who is in, or coming into, the state.

Once you get a number, and hopefully a name, have your resume in hand and call. Productions will usually accept resumes but that will probably not be enough. If you wait for someone to call you back, you will go insane and those around you will get tired of not being able to touch the phone. Call the production company often. Push it to the edge of harassment. A once-a-day, "just checking on that job, sorry to bother you" will work. Keep it up until you sense annoyance in their voices, then lay off for a couple of days. Keep calling and asking politely until you get a "Yes" or a "No!" answer. Dropping by the set "when you're in the area" , or if you see or hear about a shoot going on, is a good move. Once on the set, ask around and try to find an A.D. a U.P.M., or the Production Coordinator. Then briefly introduce yourself, and ask if they need any help. Production people *always* need help. If you can get your name and offer out before they cut you off, you might start working before you can finish saying "help". If this happens, don't ask any questions; just work hard and wait until the end of the day to see if you're really hired.

Offering to work for free on your first shoot is a move that some will debate. I think it's a great move if at all possible. The money you lose will be offset by the contacts you make who will get you the big jobs later. Offering to work for free shows dedication not related to money, and there's a good chance you will get paid soon after you start working. Sometimes production companies just want to see if you're good before you add to their paper work by signing a contract. Besides, you always get good food and it's hard to spend any money when you're busy 90 hours a week.

Prepare before you go near a set or production office. Wear clothes that make you look like you are already working on the crew. Since P.A.s do everything, try looking like you can do *anything*, from picking a big star up at the airport, to picking up branches in the woods. Jeans, running shoes or day hikers, a nice T- shirt, a rugged jacket, and a fanny pack should do the trick.

Don't make the mistake a friend of mine made. She got an office P.A. position and did not accept it immediately because she wanted to be a set P.A. She tried for that position, thinking she could fall back on the office job if she had to. She didn't get the set P.A. job and when she turned around there was nothing to fall back on and she was out of a job. If you get a P.A. job...*take it.* The object is to get in the system and to meet people. You can try to change jobs once you're on the crew, or after you have at least one gig under your belt.

#### ***CREDITS***

Screen credits are something to write home about. They're a statement of your accomplishment and a boost to your ego, but that's about it. Credits won't help you get work, because nobody goes out and rents a movie to see if your name is on it. Low budget movies will offer you credits in absence of money (or food). They might even offer you credits for something you really didn't do.

My friend was a driver (because he had a car) on a low budget movie and since he wasn't getting paid the Line Producer offered him A.D. credits. Even though he wasn't on the set more than a few minutes, he thought he was a real live A.D. Only after the shoot was over did he realize that although the credits made him feel great, they didn't mean a thing because he didn't know how to do the work.

#### ***RECOMMENDATIONS***

You should have at least one good recommendation from a Director, First A.D., U.P.M.(Unit Production Manager), Production Coordinator, or Line Producer. It should be on company letterhead that has a phone number, People actually call sometimes so make sure you have a real reference with a real phone number. Try to get the highest-ranking person to give you a recommendation. An easy way to do this is to write your own letter and simply have the person read and sign it. Try to get a letter of reference before the shoot is over, which is when everybody disappears and the best intentions are lost in the shuffle.

Recommendations should be copied and given out whenever you give out your resume.

#### ***RESUMES***

You can put anything in your resume as long as you can do what you say you can do. I've always found it best to put down what I really did, with a little creative writing to spruce it up. There are many different styles for resumes, but make sure you have the basic information: What you did, who you did it for, and when you did it. Picking a style is up to you and your creativity.

Whatever style you pick should be on one page, and be easy for people to glance at for 15 seconds (while you're standing in front of them nervously) and get a general idea of what you have done.

I think it's a good idea to have business cards. Pass your cards out at the end of shoots to everybody. Always have some on you in case you meet someone working on a shoot, or you see a production in progress. Business cards work because they are a sign that you are serious enough about your career to spend the time and money to go out and have them made.

#### ***VIBES***

After you have had some contact with the people with whom you will be working, trust your gut feeling about the project. I once drove from Hollywood to Roswell, New Mexico because I had met 3 people who were working on the show and they were all very excited about it. They loved the director and the script he had written, and the cast was great. I felt like I would be proud to have my name on the credits. There's nothing wrong with working shows for the experience and money only, but if you can find a project that feels good, it makes the work much more satisfying.

## WHAT YOU'LL NEED

Things like a screwdriver may seem totally silly to lug around, but they aren't. I was working on a Ford commercial, and in addition to being a P.A., I had to drive a new truck through a river, on camera. I had just cleaned the truck, and we were all set to go when somebody realized that the wrong license plate was on the front. If I hadn't had a screwdriver, I would have had to walk through the river, get one, and walk back, all while the director watched the sun get lower and lower. The moral of this story is that you should anticipate what you might possibly need and bring it. Then bring all the stuff you think you might not need but that you have room for.

Here is a list of the things you will need. Most are cheap and can be found easily. Put your name on them if possible, and if you let someone borrow something, get it back the same day.

1. Clipboard. For holding paper and making you look important to those people who don't make movies. The aluminum kind that closes over the paper is the most rugged and also is good in the rain.
2. Technology. PDAs, cell phone, laptop etc. Depending on company's preferences. Use durable technology, buy extra batteries. Make frequent back-ups of all data.
3. A good street map of the area. Because P.A.s *do not get lost*. In the West, Thomas Brothers' Guides are the best.
4. Fanny pack. To put the following things in.
5. Mini Mag flashlight. Or similar, water/shock proof flashlight that takes AA batteries. For whipping out like a light saber, rescuing those in the dark.
6. Black Sharpie magic marker. Everybody always seems to need a Sharpie. Make sure to get the Sharpie brand; no other kind will do.
7. Small pad of Post-it paper.

8. Sunglasses. Slide on a pair of biker shades, grab your clipboard and butt pack, pull your baseball hat down tight, and you will at least look like one hot P.A.
9. Pens and pencils.
10. Lighter. Even if you don't smoke, other people do. I recommend a Zippo. They work in the wind, and make you look a little bit cooler than the average Bic-carrying P.A.
11. Swiss Army Knife. With a cork screw. Because there is nothing worse than having a bottle of wine and someone to share it with, and no cork screw.
12. Pain reliever of your choice. You can't think with a headache, and it feels good to help others who are in pain.
13. Chewing gum. Good for when you are nervous and want to hide it by looking like you're calmly chewing cud.
14. Paper clips.

#### **"OPTIONAL" THINGS**

It has been my experience that no matter what you bring to the set you will end up using it, and if you left something behind because you thought you wouldn't use it, it will be the first thing you need. So while the following things may be "optional", I only mean optional in the sense that you can probably survive for a few hours without them.

1. Set bag. Usually a canvas briefcase type of deal, with lots of weird pockets. Black is best because it hides evil set dirt stains.
2. Envelope for receipts.
3. Small stapler.
4. Regular and Phillips screwdrivers. A combination type screwdriver saves space.
5. 6 inch adjustable wrench.
6. Pliers
7. Calculator.
8. Old sweat shirt.
9. AA alkaline batteries.
10. Gaffers tape. Possibly the most useful thing ever invented.

11. Extra pens, pencils, Sharpies, paper clips, paper, aspirin, etc...
12. Local Phone Book. This is not necessarily for your set bag, but make sure one is available wherever you are.
13. Small, inexpensive name and phone number computer. These things usually hold around 500 names and numbers, so put in all the numbers you can think of: Crew, cast, local businesses, airlines, rent-a-car companies, etc.
14. A hat.

## TOOLS OF THE FUTURE

It's always dangerous to talk about the future since it can date a work like this, so I will speak generally.

As technology becomes more advanced, it will continue to work itself into the production world. Email reliance, Laptop computers and hand-held organizers, wireless PDAs, etc., will become as indispensable as Sharpies, (if they aren't already) and *everything* will continue to get smaller and more powerful.

My only advice is to use the technology that is most *suited for your task*, and that is *durable* and not just cool with pretty lights and buttons, but *useful*.

Technology makes it very easy to waste a great amount of time with bells and whistles that you end up not really needing. And while computers are fantastic at a great many things, it's good to sit back every once in a while to try and become objective. See if you are just obsessed with pushing buttons, or if you really are saving energy and time.

Since the set is a rough place and that is not going to change, make sure that what you buy is built to take punishment.

As people use more and more technology, it is important to remember to have hard copy and digital back-ups. It will be a few years before they come up with a system that is as versatile as a pen and paper, which are very cheap, need no power source, are fully submersible, have unlimited expandable memory, unlimited fonts and sizes, are usable in any language, need no printer, can be left as a note or made into a hat, an airplane, or a boat, can start a fire, can be used as a shim under a rocking lunch table, etc....etc...

## CONCLUSION

The P.A. position gives you a great chance to explore all the different areas of production, and to find out which of these areas you like the best. The P.A. position is also an excellent place to make the all-important contacts that can help you once you choose your path. Once you have decided, go for it. There are very few old P.A.s in the world. That is what being a P.A. is all about: Coming in cold, paying your dues, and moving on.



**THAT'S A WRAP!**