



Taking the next steps towards respect in the workplace

- Anand Kanna, Manager of Motion Picture Services, Actsafe Safety Association



Respectful workplaces. Where was this concept when I was a production assistant?

It seems like the entry level position of production assistant was designed more as a long-term hazing exercise than an opportunity to learn the industry. People just tossing trash or garbage on the ground in front of you and saying, "the PA will clean it up." Respect. Or how about the countless times that we were pulled out of the lunch line at catering and told that "the crew gets their food first." Eh? So, I'm here a couple of hours before everyone else, must clean up after everyone else, need to stay until everyone else is gone, and I'm not considered a crew member? Respect. Or how about the time that the production planned this lavish Christmas party for the crew, complete with fancy invites and gifts, and we, as a group of production assistants, were told by the

production manager that we weren't invited and if we showed up, we wouldn't be welcome on the production after the holiday break. All this happened to me, and on the same production! Respect? Yeah, whatever.

Things got better as I climbed the ranks of the locations department. Respect for fellow workers was always an afterthought, but ultimately people did start to work together, the egos subsided, and we all became a family. Or military unit, going to war. Take your pick. And you might say that there should be a certain level of respect granted to those that have been in the industry long enough to climb to the top of the ladder. Yes, there's a hierarchy on set, and sure, that exists in every industry, but I feel that people in our industry take advantage of their positions and disrespect those in the lower ranks and in other departments more so than in other industries. But why?

Those experiences that entry level workers such as production assistants and camera

assistants go through were always dismissed as “paying your dues”, and it seems that it’s every other department’s responsibility to put those entry level workers through the gauntlet. But why do “dues” need to be paid in THAT way? Shouldn’t dues be paid by working hard, gaining experience, and showing competency?

This concept of respectful workplaces is something that the industry could have been enlightened on 25 years ago, but it is great to see that things are beginning to change, and that respect is coming to the forefront of the conversation.

The new generation of production management, who may have endured similar experiences to me, understand the need to move to a more inclusive, respectful workplace, and are aware of how this helps the collective mental health of everyone on our crews. This influx of new blood has helped immensely. Additionally, we’re talking about respectful workplaces a lot more in the past year or so than we did in the past 50 years combined! It is no longer acceptable to respond with “that’s the way it’s always been,” so there is less tolerance of this type of behaviour. But have these changes made our workplaces more respectful? Has the conversation made an impact? Slowly but surely, it has. But we have a long way to go. And it is time for us to take the next step for the industry.



It is sad to admit that we still need to teach people how to be respectful to one another but giving everyone a basic level of understanding on what a respectful workplace is will be integral for our industry to move in this direction.

Education and simply talking to each other about these issues can go a long way in breaking down the barriers that have been built in achieving a respectful workplace.

That is one reason why Actsafe is launching an Anti-Bullying and Harassment course later in the year. This course will teach you the basics about how diverse we all are and how we can make everyone more included at work. I also recommend MPPIA’s slate of offerings around diversity and inclusion.

You might be saying to me that after 25 years, the hazing of production assistants has ended, and we have come a lot further than I know when it comes to respectful workplaces. Ok, sure. But let me ask you this; if we’re talking about this now, has it really gone as far as it should? And, if we’re talking about this now, then we’ve got a long way to go.

Keep an eye out for Actsafe's Anti-Bullying and Harassment course coming late summer!

