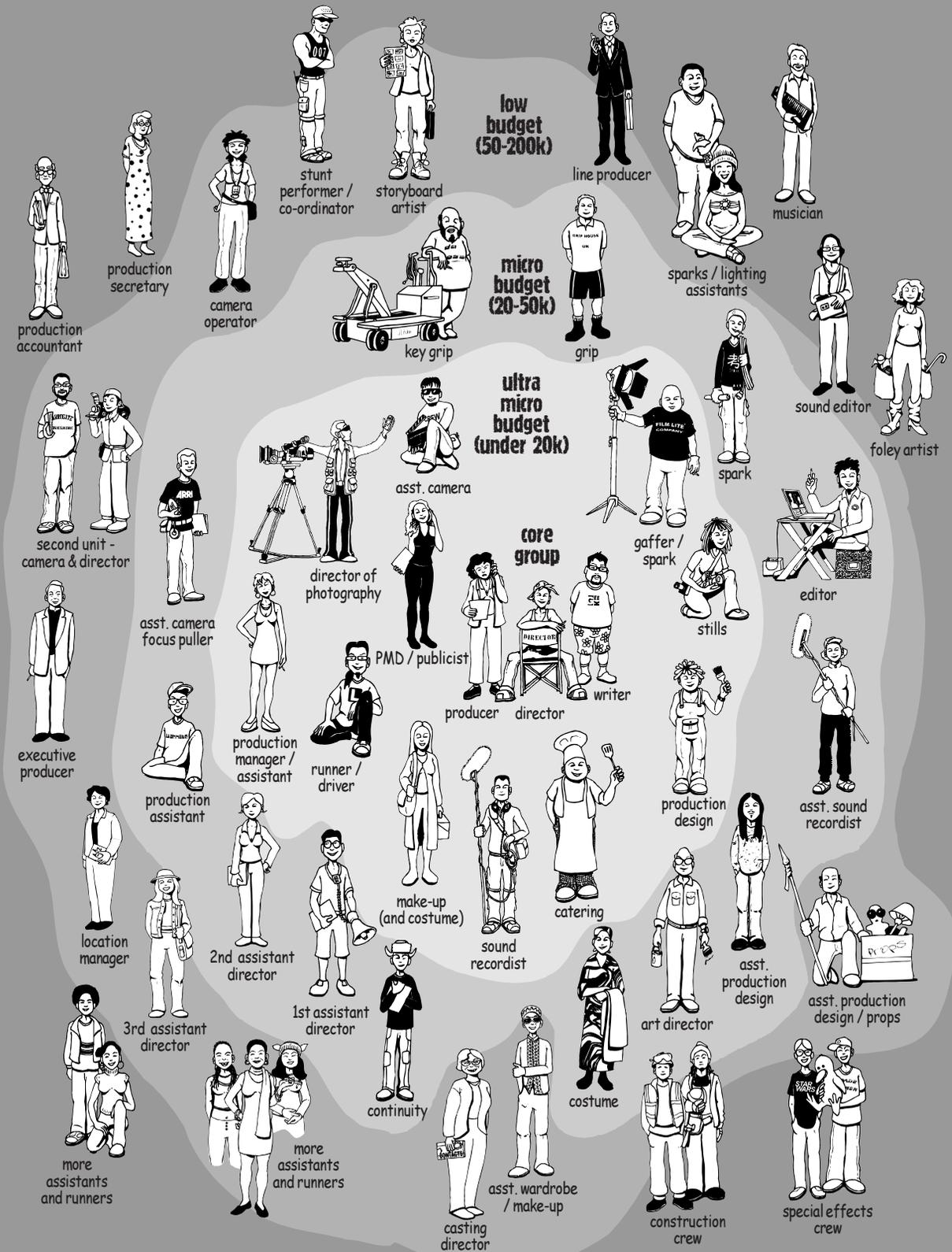


Who's in your crew?



Excerpt from **The Guerilla Film Makers Movie Blueprint**
www.ChrisJonesBlog.com
www.PracticalProducer.net

The crew are the creative labourers who operate the mechanics of your film making machine – be that the camera, sound and lighting equipment... or making the actors look good, the set convincing, the location appropriately dressed... or working on the support mechanisms by supplying the crew with paperwork, information, food and drinks.

This section contains a number of production models for crews of different sizes and budgets. As a general rule, as the budget grows so does the size of crew, which will create more professional shooting conditions, which in turn will produce more professional results... but always at a slower pace. Let's be clear though. More 'professional' does not in any way mean better story telling by default. A great script on a £10k budget will almost certainly make a better film than a poor script on a £10m budget (which does not mean your £10k film will do better business, see the section on sales and distribution. But it may open other doors to new opportunities).

Right person for the right job

As the filmmaker at the top, producer and director, it's your job to hire the best people for the job. That doesn't mean the most experienced. Experience can sometimes come with intolerable ego and continual dissention over working conditions and the budget. A dedicated, eager wannabe who is unproven but you get the positive vibe that they could pull it off, whatever job they will do, is preferable to a talented, established, experienced professional who has reluctantly agreed to do your film and will spend most of the time complaining. Clearly as the budget increases so this particular problem diminishes (conditions and pay improve).

The core group of your film will be the producer, writer and director (often the writer and director are the same person). Over time, others will be adopted into this inner sanctum of your film family, usually people like the production manager/assistant and editor, as they will be around the production so long (and not necessarily during the glorious shoot phase) that they will fully experience the unending hell that is low budget filmmaking. Many late nights will be spent consuming far too many takeaways and too much booze.

Finding the crew

Finding and hiring the best people for the job is both easy and hard. About 70% of the positions on your crew will be filled without much difficulty (camera, runners, musicians, editors, etc.) but the remaining 30% will always be tough to find – there are just some jobs that are not much fun to do, are often thankless, and you can't risk hiring completely inexperienced people (gaffer, sound recordist etc.) The best place to find your crew is under the recommendation of other filmmakers who have made low budget films.

You're not looking to hire the most talented people (but it does help if they are very talented), you're going to be looking for folk with team spirit, hard workers, good communicators, optimistic disposition, unfussy and crucially, not in any way doing it for the money. Once you hire one or two crew members, they will probably know other crew who know other crew... and so you can follow the chain of recommendations and invite people to join your 'motley crew'.

There are agencies that represent crew members but you can forget them because you are not paying. There are several internet resources where crew, both experienced and inexperienced, keep a look out for jobs -

Excerpt from The Guerilla Film Makers Movie Blueprint
www.ChrisJonesBlog.com
www.PracticalProducer.net

mandy.com, talentcircle.org and shootingpeople.org for instance. From the crew members I know, by far the most useful tool now is social media, specifically Twitter and Facebook. Having an online presence and access to a community is now essential.

How long?

Each crewmember will be needed for a unique amount of time. Some starting early (such as the production manager/assistant), some starting on the first day of the shoot (such as the sound recordist), others finishing months after the shoot (such as the editor).

On the whole, people are never given enough time to do their job properly, something that can lead to considerable stress. On a day to day basis, especially during the shoot, its essential not to over work the crew to the point of exhaustion as it will lead to complete breakdown. Avoid shooting more than 12 hours a day and 6 days a week. Remember people have to get to and from location/set which may add an extra hour and a half to their shooting day, and they also need to deal with things like paying the rent, doing their laundry etc. Everyone needs time between shooting days, so you can't have a midnight wrap and a 6 a.m. call the next day. The production does not own the crew, they are welcome and helpful guests.

How much?

How much you pay your crew is up to you, but the less you pay them, the more difficult it will be for them to validate (to partners, debtors, bank managers etc) why they are doing it. If they can't afford to exist, they can't do your film. This is one of the reasons why so many crew members tend to be quite young – they are happy to rough it like students, or better still they live at home with their parents which keeps their personal overheads so low that they can afford to take time off to do the movie. I would also recommend that whatever you pay your crew, you pay everyone the same amount, be they the toilet cleaning floor runner or the visionary DP.

In essence, everyone is doing the film for free, you are just greasing their palm with a small payment to cover their expenses with just enough left for beer and fags. For example, on my second film, 'White Angel' which was made using the second model here, (£20k–£50k budget) we paid crew members £50 a week, plus everyone was also offered a one month tube pass. On my third film, 'Urban Ghost Story' which was produced on the third model, (£50k-£200k) the crew were paid £100 a week and given expenses. In both instances, nobody complained about the pay. Everyone was there because they wanted to be part of this opportunity and experience.

Big break

The big bargaining tool you can offer to all crewmembers is that of experience. A professional camera operator may choose to do your film if they are bumped up to director of photography (DP), a sound assistant may do your film if they get to record sound instead of holding the boom. These are career breaks that professionals find hard to get, but once they have that oh–so–important credit on their CV, and a clip on their show reel, they may find themselves getting jobs on films that prior to your project, they would not have got.

Many crew members will see the small investment of a couple of weeks work, maybe even as much as a couple of months, as a sound investment from moving up from set dresser who was previously paid £500 a week to production designer who will now be paid £1500 a week, so don't feel bad or apologetic about working

Excerpt from The Guerilla Film Makers Movie Blueprint
www.ChrisJonesBlog.com
www.PracticalProducer.net

conditions and pay. You are offering a very big break, and ultimately we're all grown ups and you're not holding a gun to anybody's head. They are free to say 'no thanks'.

Of course, there is a flip side. You need to be completely professional. This is not an amateur shoot. This is a fully professional feature film, except, everyone working on it is an investor in spirit. If you behave unprofessionally, you will be pulled up on it.

As examples of this 'big break for free work deal', each and every film that I have made has been crewed by younger and less experienced people than the fully professional version would have been. Whenever I move to the next film, I of course would like to hire the same crew but almost always find that the talented people I previously worked with don't need the break anymore. Whilst they might want to do the film for old times sake, they are unable to do so because they now carry the trappings of wealth, such as a new car, mortgage, perhaps even partner with children. Those who do come back, almost invariably take a step up the ladder – for instance, Stuart Roweth was a spark on my second film 'White Angel', was camera operator on 'Urban Ghost Story' and is now a professional DP. Harry Gregson Williams wrote the score for 'White Angel', his first film. He then went on to do little films like 'Armageddon', 'Enemy of the State', 'Chicken Run'...

Lead not rule

On a philosophical point, you the filmmaker, the creative and business head of the production, should seek at all times to lead and not rule. It's a subtle distinction. Like the stories of great generals of the Roman Empire, you must always be seen to fearlessly fight on the frontline, eating with the grunts and generally inspiring the crew through limitless enthusiasm, appreciation of hard work, tolerance of genuine error and at all times a exude a cool, even tempered, unflappable impression that you are in complete control.

If you choose to rule your crew, very quickly people will quit. No one will be barked at to do a dull, overworked, underpaid and thankless task. If you want to rule, get your chequebook out. It's the only way they will stay. Leadership comes easily to some people; a crew can sense it in the director almost immediately. If you do not have such a temperament, you'll need to work on it before you get to set.

Cock- ups

Everyone makes mistakes. In light of the fact that you are not paying people and they are often being asked to do jobs they are not used to, you have to accept that there will be a number of silly mistakes. Generally, you don't need to give any crewmember a hard time about this, as they will feel terribly guilty and rather stupid for doing it in the first place. Just make sure they don't keep doing it.

Production meetings

At the end of each day it's good to hold a very brief 2-3 minute production meeting for the crew. Remember that they are investors in the film as well and should be treated with respect. Use the meeting to keep them informed as to how much was shot or dropped in the day, what you'll be shooting tomorrow, what you have just been editing and how good it looks etc. The AD department will also use this time to pass out call sheets for the next day.

Excerpt from The Guerilla Film Makers Movie Blueprint
www.ChrisJonesBlog.com
www.PracticalProducer.net

Wherever possible, congratulate a crew member whose hard work generally goes unnoticed and (if appropriate) give them a little round of applause. It's a bit happy clappy I know but everyone leaves set with a goofy grin and the person whose hard work was recognised will work that bit harder the next day.

Producer on set

During the shoot, a smart producer will take a moment every so often to visit the crew members that perform the worst and most unappreciated jobs. Taking a cup of tea to a stressed out production runner, who would normally take a cup of tea to the producer is sending a strong and simple message – 'the most important person on the film (the producer) values the contribution of the least important person on the production (me)'. Result? The 'valued' crew member works as hard as they can due to 'inspiring' leadership.

Confrontations should be avoided when possible. But they do happen as your crew is full of ordinary people doing extraordinary things. Occasionally the pressure cooker will blow. The best way to deal with this is to take it off set and outside, let the crew member rant, agree with them, stroke their ego and give them a little loving, remind them that the film is not being made on a low budget out of choice and that everyone is under pressure...most of all, ensure that they know that you understand and sympathise. *'It's alright to make mistakes, just do your best...'* Then send them back into the furnace.

Excerpt from The Guerilla Film Makers Movie Blueprint
www.ChrisJonesBlog.com
www.PracticalProducer.net