

How Freelancers Can Succeed by Ande Schurr

The 3 minute read for newer freelancers (and old dogs who like new tricks!)

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How to last the distance as a freelancer

Ande talks with Ronnie Hape - long time Unit Manager for films - about problems, priorities and press-ups.

The wisdom and methods behind success of any kind is found in no place better than with those who have lived and breathed it for decades. Henceforth, I will dedicate a good portion of my future writing efforts to interviewing such freelancers to find and essentialise the secrets of their success. First on my list is a man who has the least defined role of all: the unit manager/craft services. When asked what he does Ronnie Hape said: "My department is about making the crews' life more comfortable so they can get on with their job and forget about all the BS: where's my phone; I forgot to do this; I ran out of petrol; I need a coffee etc. It's caring for people rather than being a technician as such".



At first glance, Ronnie Hape doesn't inspire the look of a successful businessman. By his own admission, he is usually pulled up at the airport customs and searched for drugs such is his associative appearance! The real Ronnie is far different.

Setting a pace for freelancers of all ages to follow, the 50 year old Auckland-based Unit Manager for TV commercials and films does 150 press-ups daily (three reps of fifty) and keeps his mind active by beating Asians half his age at car-racing games in video-parlours.

We spent 2 hours at Revel Cafe on K Road discussing freelancer job-longevity. Ronnie's philosophy is very simple: there is no magic to 'lasting the distance' in the film industry as a crew member; no superior skills required or talent. **There is only one thing. Character.** Skills do not hire you in this industry, says Ronnie, the quality of your character does. How do we learn character in order to have his sort of long-standing success? I gleaned these three insights:

1. **LEARN CORRECT SET ETTIQUITE.** There is and will always be a hierarchy. Observe it each time.

Do you walk in-between the director and producer when they are chatting? Do you stand on the camera or boom operator's cables? Do you place coffee on the vid-split table? There are plenty of people who think they are important on

set because of the role they have. Take away the role and what is left? The people with character are those who do not change their behaviour just because they have a fancy role. Instead, says Ronnie, they have respect for all crew people; respect for what they do and knowledge of how to be on set.

2. **KEEP A STRICT SENSE OF PRIORITY.** "My day often starts at 4-5am, putting up easy-ups, get the power settled, agency chairs, setting up the unit table, getting coffees. My day is all tucked into those first three hours – it's intense".

You can't just turn up and do your job. You need to keep thinking ahead: am I prepared for rain? Do I have enough petrol? Self discipline is essential.

3. **MONITOR YOUR MISTAKES AND LEARN FROM THEM.** Ask for honest feedback from those whom you trust in higher positions.

And having asked for feedback, says Ronnie, you must be brave enough to accept, and act, on it. In this industry there is no feedback given. Unless you are a social friend, the producers and production managers will simply not hire you again if they do not like something you do. Instead they will talk about your mistake to a colleague, not to you.

"You may think you've just made a mistake but to them it's a major cock-up and so you get branded. Own your problems. If you made a mistake, tell them early - I forgot this, I broke that. If people in your field are getting plenty of work, and you're not, then what other conclusion can you make other than you have made a mistake that needs correcting with others or at least within yourself."

In summary, Ronnie Hape has a youthful vigour about him.

His desire to help newbies shows that he is not in the game just for himself but here for the betterment of the industry. With film newbies thinking they can start at the top of the ladder as a director or cameraman, rather than the old fashioned way of 'doing their time', ambition often overrides respect. Ronnie's philosophy is put your character first. Learn old fashioned common sense from the truly great people in our industry and then the long successful career may be yours.

Best wishes,

Ande

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