

## 18 Classic Management Mistakes in Film Production

**#1: Undermined motivation.** Management demeans workers, introduces inequalities into the workplace, or otherwise demotivates the labor force through unfair practices. **Example:** *To cut costs, the PM decides that craft service will only serve terrible generic coffee to the crew. However, everyday at 2pm, he sends a PA to Starbucks to buy specialty lattes for himself, the Director, the 1st AD, and the DP, as well as all the cast members.*

**#2: Weak personnel.** Management hires less than qualified workers because they are cheaper, available at the right time, or friends of management. **Example:** *On a low-budget indie, the DP insists that his buddy, who has little production experience, be hired as the 2nd AD. The Director tells the PM to go ahead and hire him, saying, "What's the worst that could happen?"*

**#3: Uncontrolled problem employees.** Management fails to deal with a problematic worker. **Example:** *The Set Decorator misses every deadline, never reads the call sheet, and is consistently ill-prepared on set. After much discussion, the Producers and PM decide to keep her onboard because some of the furniture on a key set are on loan from her, and they don't want to spend the money securing new furniture. As a result, the Set Dressers are constantly having to redo the Decorator's work, and the production is consistently behind schedule.*

**#4: Heroics.** Management sends a signal to the workforce that heroics are expected and problems must be solved independently. **Example:** *At the first production meeting, the PM makes it clear to the entire crew that he isn't willing to handhold through problems. As a result, the 2nd AD is afraid to ask for help when she has trouble securing extras for an important crowd scene. The day of the shoot arrives, and there are nowhere near enough extras to shoot the scene.*

**#5: Adding people to a late project.** Management assumes that when a team is running behind, the best solution is to add more people. **Example:** *A tight-knit set dec team has hit an unforeseen snag in the prep of an upcoming location. When the PM sees they are running behind, he hires four new art department PAs and sends them to the location to help. The experienced team now has to slow down to instruct and delegate to the new PAs, and there's now too many people in the space to work effectively, exacerbating the problem instead of alleviating it.*

**#6: Noisy, crowded offices.** Management fails to supply a suitable working environment that facilitates productivity. **Example:** *To save money, the PM decides to setup the production offices in a large, open, bull-pen arrangement, rather than renting a space with lots of individual offices. As a result, everyone works in constant noise, department heads have to step outside with their cells to concentrate while making phone calls, and meetings are repeatedly disrupted.*

**#7: Friction between crew and management.** Management and crew see each other as uncooperative due to a lack of communication. **Example:** *The PM and the 1st AD get in an argument when the 1st AD calls a premature wrap in the middle of a shooting day because of inclement weather. Instead of discussing the relevant details — that the entire crew and all the vehicles and equipment are isolated on a long clay road in the middle of nowhere, with no shelter, and the coming severe thunderstorm would have left the entire unit stranded and stuck in the mud — they argue procedure and protocol, both too defensive of their own egos to reason with one another.*

**#8: Unrealistic expectations.** Management places unreasonable demands on the crew. **Example:** *The Director comes to set with major script changes that require a new set to be built in an unreasonable amount of time. Rather than being honest with the Director and Producers that the script changes are impossible within the time allowed, the PM says it will get done and charges the Set Builders with the responsibility. Now if it doesn't get done, it's their jobs on the line.*

**#9: Wishful thinking.** No one on the crew really believes the project can be executed within the available budget and schedule, but they proceed with the thought that maybe, if everyone works hard enough and nothing goes wrong, they might get a lucky break and pull it off. **Example:** *The PM and 1st AD determine that the only way to complete production on the available budget is to shoot six and a half pages a day, in three six-day weeks, with no wiggle room for rain dates. Rather than telling the Producers that this is a bad plan and they'll need more money, they proceed as if it is possible, setting everyone up for failure.*

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**#10: Overly optimistic schedules.** Management underestimates the demands of an overly-ambitious schedule. **Example:** A semi-experienced PM and 1st AD set a schedule that under normal circumstances would be very reasonable. Unfortunately, nearly every scene of the script includes child actors and trained animals. Neither having worked with children or animals before, they did not realize their mistake until they were already several days behind schedule in the first week.

**#11: Insufficient risk management.** Management fails to minimize risks on set. **Example:** On a low-budget film, the PM signs off on the non-union cast performing stunts without a stunt supervisor. To make matters worse, when one actor ends up seriously hurt, it turns out the production isn't even properly insured to cover stunt-related injuries.

**#12: Contractor failure.** Management trusts important tasks to an outside contractor without establishing important protections. **Example:** Instead of hiring a full set-building department, the PM on a low budget film decides to contract out all the sets to an outside company that builds sets for theme parks. Unfortunately, in theme park design, falling behind schedule doesn't have the same consequences as it does in feature film production, but the contractor does not understand the difference. The sets are not built in time, and the production is not given the notice needed to adjust.

**#13: Insufficient planning.** Management fails to allot enough time and resources to pre-production. **Example:** In order to save money on a low-budget production, the PM cuts prep time from all the department heads. As a result, a complete tech scout is never held, causing numerous problems later on in the production.

**#14: Abandonment of planning under pressure, without a substitute plan.** Management is forced by unforeseen contingencies to abandon an initial plan but fails to implement a substitute plan, resulting in a directionless production. **Example:** The PM and department heads have planned extensively for a heavy shooting day at a very difficult location. On the day of the shoot, however, the grip truck breaks down on the way to the set. As a result, all hell breaks loose, and no one knows what to do. Instead of pulling everyone together to implement a new plan, the PM leaves each department to improvise on their own, resulting in chaos.

**#15: Insufficient management controls.** Management fails to implement various controls to track progress and address problems. **Example:** On a student film, the PM and 1st AD decide that production reports aren't really necessary since no one is being paid and the budget is so small. However, on the third day, when it is clear that the shoot has fallen way behind schedule, they realize they have no way of identifying where mistakes have been made since no production reports have been kept.

**#16: Omitting necessary costs from estimates.** Management forgets to include small expenses in the budget that add up to major costs. **Example:** One a \$1.5 million production, the PM has accidentally forgotten to include payroll fees on below the line crew, resulting in a huge cost overrun.

**#17: Planning to catch up later.** Management continues to fall behind and does not adjust behavior. **Example:** By lunch on the first day, it is clear to the PM that the Director is doing far more takes with the actors than was planned, and as a result, the day is far behind schedule. When the PM asks the 1st AD what they can do to adjust, the 1st AD says they'll make it up in the afternoon. When they fail to make their day, the 1st AD again tells the PM they'll make it up tomorrow. By lunch the next day, it is clear catching up is out of the question, and something will have to change if the production is going to finish on schedule and on budget.

**#18: Silver-bullet syndrome.** Management signs on to a brand new technology that promises to make up for other deficiencies in the production. **Example:** On an underfunded student production, the DP has convinced the Director that shooting on the RED will add lots of production value to her senior short film, despite the fact that the DP has never shot with the RED and is unfamiliar with the media workflow necessary for post. The Director, seduced by the DP's sales pitch, asks the PM to find a way to replace the free camera provided by the school with the very expensive RED. This will require cuts to every other area of the budget: set dressing, catering, and gas for location scouting. The PM does as instructed, but has no money left for post-production, knowing this is going to cause huge problems for the director down the road.