

Casting in a Pandemic

Panelists & Moderator:

- [Michelle Homerin](#) - Manager, Casting @ ABC Signature
- [Leah Daniels-Butler](#) - Casting Director @ LDB Casting
- [Shari Holly](#) - Moderator - Director of Operations @ PipelinesMobile

Notes:

- [The CSU Entertainment Alliance](#) Intro
- [Pipelines Mobile](#) Intro

• Career Journey and how you got started?

- Leah
 - Didn't know she wanted a career in casting
 - Comes from a creative family
 - Always knew that she was a creative person but she didn't know this was a career she wanted to have until she was introduced to it.
 - School of hard knock
 - Office of Jackie Brown and Kim Hart
 - Two black female casting directors at the time
 - Those are the shoulders that she stands on
 - They saw something in her that she didn't see in herself
 - She was a sponge and they encouraged that
- Michelle
 - Grew up in Chicago in the theatre world
 - Wanted to explore TV & Film
 - Worked on Empire with Leah
 - Went to USC
 - Interned a lot
 - Didn't come from a creative family
 - Tried a production company and some other things that she didn't care for but learned a lot through all of those experiences
 - Interned at ICM at television Lit and then went back into the TV talent department
 - Trainee there and then decided she wanted to be closer to creative so she made the jump to the studio side

• How has COVID impacted your work?

- Leah
 - Everything is now being done virtually
 - A LOT of self-tapes
 - In some ways it is good and in some it is not so good
 - She is seeing more actors
 - Only so many auditions you can do and still get your work done
 - But is seeing people she may otherwise not have seen
 - On the flip side there are sometimes people who didn't audition or pre-read
 - Learned how to audition and chemistry read
 - She is a zoom pro for auditioning now



- **How has COVID impacted your work? (CONT'D)**

- Michelle

- The first pilot that cast during COVID - her and Leah did it together
- Leah's protocols and what she figured out are now their standard
- Seeing more actors and more actors of different types
- Unfortunately, the time is limited
- Usually they have under 2 ½ months which is a really tight turnaround
- The good thing is that they can see more actors, even across the country
- Harder to travel for folks who are in different areas

- **When COVID is over - will some aspects still be done remotely or how has the new normal disrupted your job? What will continue and what won't?**

- Michelle

- We have to hope it opens up soon or we will all lose our minds
- They are in Burbank in the lot
- A lot of time is wasted driving to locations
- Zoom meetings will probably be more prevalent
- The past response for someone who is somewhere else was "let me know when they are in LA" - now there is much more opportunity
- She is hoping there will be a good balance of keeping the accessibility while returning to
- Some of the relationship over the prep weeks is lost because you aren't doing them in the same space

- Leah

- Agreed
- She will be hard pressed to go to the office because she has figured it out and it's a good system
- Definitely missing the people in the office and the staff and brainstorms
- It's a different energy for sure
- Maybe change to going in only a couple days of week

- **If someone wants to begin a career as a casting director? How should they prepare?**

- Leah

- If you really want to get into it you have to know actors
- Study film
- She always gives required watching to her assistants - movies they must watch - so they can get an idea of what they are really looking for from actors
- Performance is subject to each individual
- But the core of acting and learning the choices that actors make is something that you have to develop over time
- What to look for, what not to look for
- How to communicate with them
- You're not a director but you will be the first person who reads that material with the actors
- You learn a lot about that through the process and through understanding film and actors
- It used to be different
- She started as an assistant and it was the time of fax machines
- Submissions came through a courier
- It was a different kind of position as an assistant back then
- Find a casting director where you can intern
- Get in the office and learn the things hands on



- **If someone wants to begin a career as a casting director? How should they prepare (CONT'D)**

- Leah

- Casting directors may want you to have the experience before you come into the office but how do you get in the office if you have no experience?
- CSA has an assistance program you can join
- They take you through each and every step that the casting directors and production companies use
- So many different elements, from tools for breakdowns of data, to working the camera, etc.
- Had someone who started as an assistant without having much background but he was eager and hungry to learn
- You can't want to be an actor
- Have to have an affinity for talent and what they do

- Michelle

- Be prepared to write good correspondence
- Communication is really important in this industry
- Phone etiquette and email etiquette
- Being organized
- Being your word when you say you are going to do something, do it
- You are competing against others to move up so think about what you can do gain an edge and be better
- Devote yourself to doing whatever it takes

- **Can you walk us through the different kinds of technology you use?**

- Leah

- “Breakdown Services” for the casting dept
- How they are able to get the character descriptions out for the roles they are trying to cast
- They get a script, it goes through software and pulls the character descriptions, once the roles are approved it goes out to a bunch of casting managers and agents, etc.
- They go through the process of setting up the actors they want to see for each role
- On the actors side there is a service called “Actors access” if you are not represented - you can submit yourself
- If it's not an open search, they may not use it
- Any actor should be on that service
- It's how you can hear about projects that are currently being cast

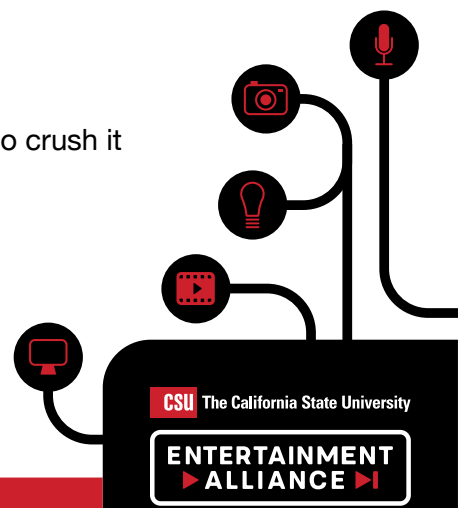
- **What are the do's and don'ts of giving your best performance / audition? How do they impress you?**

- Michelle

- Leah probably sees more mistakes
- Michelle only usually sees the next level
- Everyone who is in the room and watching you, they WANT YOU to crush it
- They want to say yes
- You make everyone's life easier when you come in and slay
- Put it all out there and know that we are rooting for you
- They will give you feedback and notes to be better

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- **What are the do's and don'ts of giving your best performance / audition? How do they impress you? (CONT'D)**

- Leah

- Be prepared
- That is the first thing
- Being off book is great but don't be so off book that you are not open to the fact that the nerves might get to you
- She advises people in the room, take a breath, take a little drink of water
- Will try to make the actor feel comfortable
- Easy to say don't be nervous but understands you might be a ball of nerves
- Use it to your advantage if you can
- Channel those nerves into the character
- Have a clear choice of how you see this character and then be open to adjustments that are suggested
- Things that may not be on the page
- Those are the things that stand out - the choices, nuance, dissection of the character
- Understand the character and the story
- You may need to make up some background on the character
- Print out all the sides for all the roles and you can piece some of the story together - when they can't send a full script - this is a way to put the pieces together
- Don't be late
- Don't make excuses
- Know your boundaries
- Props are not encouraged
- Make bold choices
- Be prepared
- Be on time
- Be kind
- Have integrity

- **Can TikTok work on your reel / samples?**

- Leah

- TikTokers are now getting representation
- It doesn't translate to your skill as an actor though
- Can you understand the complexities and arcs of a character? This platform doesn't showcase the basic training or skills
- It will only show that you can pull it off being on for a few minutes
- She has a read a lot of social media influencers
- Some use the following to build their acting career, etc.
- Actors first, then social media, etc.
- If you start in social media and you go forward without training it will be obvious
- Training is key
- Do as much as you can

- Michelle

- From the biggest talent agencies - when they sign
- Send self tapes - pick a random set of sides
- Get creative and build yourself that way
- Be entrepreneurial
- Would serve better than a TikTok



- **Can your representation reach out for feedback if they don't book in the last round?**

- Leah

- Yes, and they should
- The agent should call them - they won't just go out and offer it to your agent
- So many things can happen
- It could be any number of reasons that you don't book something

- **2nd year film student looking to land an internship - what advice do you have for looking for roles as an intern or an assistant**

- Leah

- Go on CSA - Casting Society of America
- You can upload your resume there

- Michelle

- Think big picture
- What are the steps?
- Get in somewhere else in those steps and you can get an overview
- A lot of people in the industry start somewhere else and then switch into it
- You learn a lot that way

- **What makes an actor stand out to you?**

- Leah

- Bold choices
- An actor that is confident
- It's the most attractive thing you can see
- You can talk to them like a human being
- Don't look at casting folks as the gatekeepers, they are not
- It's hard to tell someone not to be nervous, but have the confidence that you can do it
- You can only do the best that you can do
- If you love acting, then you are doing something you love, and every opportunity to do it is an opportunity to do what you love
- Then landing the gig will be a cherry on top

- Michelle

- Auditioning is a skill
- The more you do it, the better you get
- Some actors aren't good auditioners, it happens
- It's their job to extrapolate what is happening - talent vs. nerves etc.
- They can tell if it's nerves
- Leave it all in the room

- **If they have very little experience how can they stand out as an actor?**

- Leah

- There are times when she has hired actors that have no formal training / experience but they were looking for specific things
- Empire - had to find actors that could sing, and rap, and dance, had to go out of the normal way of casting and open it up to everyday people
- Similar with Precious
- There is raw talent - someone who hasn't acted but can pick up lines, and with coaching they become so much more - having the "it factor"
- There are people that have that instinctively
- The nuance
- Even with that, you need to have some sort of coaching
- It'll show in the performance if you don't have the help



• **If they have very little experience how can they stand out as an actor? (CONT'D)**

◦ Michelle

- Even after you graduate school - go and learn more
- Find classes and opportunities and coaches
- You need to exercise the muscle for it to maintain and grow
- Everyone is learning every day

• **When they send in a self - tape should they send a link or attach a video?**

◦ Leah

- Want to be able to view it track it so she needs to be able to download it
- A downloadable link
- Don't send one video with a bunch of different takes
- Make sure each slate and scene is a clip

◦ Michelle

- Don't send a YouTube link because they can't download those

• **What is the time limit for self-tapes?**

◦ Leah

- There is always a time limit
- Each person has to test on screen and for COVID, etc.
- Get it in as quickly as possible because everything moves so fast

• **When there is a posting for a role on a breakdown service, are you supposed to make up your own lines if none are provided?**

◦ Leah

- That sounds like background which is different

• **Started out as a casting intern, how do you know where you fit in best in the world of casting?**

◦ Michelle

- Trial and error
- No two studios or agencies or companies are going to be the same
- Do your homework
- Figure out what you are looking for
- Do you want a mentor?
- Is there a style you like?
- It's all about your personality and what you want
- Very dependent on those things
- You'll likely have a lot of different jobs in the industry and that is okay
- It's like a game of music chairs so find a good fit for you personally
- Find someone who wants to mentor you in this crazy industry
- Find those people you want to work with



- **Actors Access - are there any other good resources for people looking to jumpstart their career?**

- Leah

- Surround yourselves with like minded people
- If it's tips on how to get in front of a casting director
- The days of crashing auditions are over
- Most casting directors have a social media presence
- She saves a lot of videos because she never knows who might be helpful down the road
- She goes to social also for specialty acts
- Don't email casting directors
- But if you have done something memorable - you might get away with tagging a casting director in the post of it
- They have a folder of all the people they keep in mind as well

- **How do they go about finding what they are looking for in terms of new roles and opportunities?**

- Leah

- Casting About
- Every time she releases

- Michelle

- Cast it

- Leah

- Casting Network

- Michelle

- If you are in a commercial, you never know what that will lead to!

