

DOs and DON'Ts
FOR 168 PRODUCERS AND DIRECTORS

By Keith Ray Putman (with acknowledgement to Michael Toay)

Author's note: This list is merely a collection of opinions from one writer-director, along with a few bits of wisdom gleaned from his 168 producer. So, it's all subjective. Nevertheless, *every word is true...*

WEEK ONE

DON'T write the script yourself unless you've been told by qualified people (*i.e.*, someone other than your mom or spouse) that you are an excellent screenwriter.

DO encourage your writer to prepare for the unique 168 challenge. Try exercises such as cranking out micro-short stories in 16-lines or less. Re-read favorite short stories and re-view favorite short films to see what makes them work.

DO pray before brainstorming your story and writing the script.

DO make truthful story, characters and emotional impact your first priorities while writing.

DON'T make a fight sequence, special effect, cool tracking shot or "important lesson" the be-all of your story.

DO go with a simple story. Simple is good.

DON'T attempt a 10-minute version of a feature movie plot.

DON'T get wrapped up in showing everybody how clever you are.

DO be real. Bring something of yourself and your life/lives into your film. Find some real emotion – laughter, shock, love, fear, sadness, relief, joy – at the end of your script.

DO find a great location and try to contain your story to it.

DO know what you hope to gain from your 168 process – professionally, spiritually, etc.

DO bring aboard cool, pleasant people who can stay the same way under pressure.

DON'T call in a bunch of favors from your professional friends unless you have strong confidence in your writer, director and producer. Otherwise, you risk burning bridges.

DO embrace your skill level and team up with others at a similar level.

DO be prepared as a team during your casting sessions. The experienced actors will be attracted to your professionalism.

WEEK TWO

DO pray out loud, as a team before every workday. *

DO keep your filmmaking priorities straight: Telling the story, getting great performances.

DON'T make "the money shot" the point of your production.

DON'T think your "vision" is too personal, grand and ineffable to share with your collaborators. Communication is everything.

DO get the best production sound recordist(s) you can. Bad sound can mangle the best dialogue in the world and degrade the prettiest images ever shot.

DO feed everyone well. Lunch/dinner required. Drinks a must. Snacks help.

DON'T have an involved opening credit sequence on your 10 minute short.

DO leave time for a good end credits roll to acknowledge all the good folks who worked on your film.

DON'T take the 11 minute total running time limit as a mandate. Most successful short films these days are under 6 minutes. If you can, brief is better.

DON'T wallow in your mistakes or the limitations of the process.

DO use the words "I'm sorry" after your temper just flared up.

DO forgive your collaborator who just said "I'm sorry," let it go, and move forward.

DO plan like crazy and be ready to throw all of it out the window.

DO recognize that limitations CAN create space for God's grace and creativity to flow.

DO strive to love/respect everybody you work with in your actions and words.

DO look to see what God is doing and enjoy it.

DO listen.

DO pray. At every stage of the process.

* It worked for our crew to have one prayer leader, who made it clear that joining in was strictly on a volunteer basis (in order to respect our non-Christian/believing cast or crewmembers). During principal, our producer would lead the cast and crew in a prayer just before the first shot of the day. I did the same during post. It always made a difference.