I. The Producer’s Domain

Television has affected—and reflected—the culture of global communications for over a half-century. And now, the explosion of new media shows every sign of having a similar impact, as it bursts onto the scene with innovative possibilities and real challenges. Even the very word itself, “television,” takes on new meaning. As we enter this extraordinary era of media transition, traditional television programming, viewing habits, advertising models, and delivery systems must inevitably change with the times.

TV and its new media offshoots must be fed, and it’s the producer who feeds them. The producer is central to every aspect of a project—from the wisp of an idea to a tangible piece of work. In theory, a producer has unlimited potential to educate and entertain. But the trade-off is intensive hours, stressful demands, and myriad responsibilities.

The demands of viewers and the appetites of commerce require a continuing stream of unique programming, or content, for television and new media to survive. This content can range from sitcoms on NBC and TV movies on Lifetime, to internal corporate training videos for IBM, or segments for CNN cable news; from one-minute “webisodes” for mobile phones, or an intricate video game, to 24/7 content for online channels—regardless of the delivery system, each of these content formats has a producer in charge. The producer must satisfy both the client and the viewer, and utilize the talents of the cast and crew, manage the budget, possibly write the script, and master dozens of skill sets.

The definition of a producer: An idealist, a realist, a practical dreamer, a sophisticated gambler, and a stage-struck child.

Oscar Hammerstein

CHAPTER

What Does a TV Producer Really Do?

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Producing for TV and New Media

A producer’s job description combines art with craft, commerce with technology, and leadership with collaboration. There is arguably a producer’s personality and mind-set that comes with the territory; some people who want to be a producer are naturals; others may simply not be right for the job. So, whether you become a producer, or work with producers, or simply want to adopt a valuable producer’s skill set, you can start by exploring the many layers of responsibility and creativity involved in producing. This chapter, as well as those that follow, examines the producer’s vast domain, its benefits and challenges, and reveals what a producer needs to know about the many phases of a project’s development.

I love bringing talented people together. There’s no greater feeling than standing on a shoot, sitting in an edit, or watching the final product on TV, knowing that you as the producer pulled together an incredible, hard-working group of people to create something.

Justin Wilkes, excerpt from interview in Chapter 11

An effective producer is a multitasker, regardless of the content or its delivery system. A producer might not only research, write, and produce a program or segment, but might also shoot it, edit the footage on a desktop system, mix the audio, design and add graphics, or write and record narration or voice-over. The increasing availability and low cost of equipment, along with decreasing budgets, make these skills both valuable and necessary to the producer.

A producer’s talents cover a broad spectrum—from creative to technological, from the first hint of an idea to its final broadcast, from finding finances to marketing. In this chapter and throughout the book, we’ll explore the producer’s role: finding, writing, developing, and pitching an idea; budgeting a script; negotiating a deal; securing financing; planning, shooting and editing; and creating a team of talented people with great attitudes.

Producers are risk takers, who seize an idea, run with it, and convince others to follow them.

Gorham Kindem, The Moving Image

Clearly, this book can’t cover each detail of every producer’s job, although most major points are discussed. For everything you’ll explore in the following chapters, there are dozens of books, web sites, and seminars that target these specifics in more detail. Each bit of knowledge adds to the producer’s arsenal.

II. DEFINING A TV AND NEW MEDIA PRODUCER

I’m a producer. I do whatever is necessary to turn an idea into a finished product. That means at different times I’ve been a salesman, director, film editor, casting director, creative consultant. I’ve even driven the bus.

David L Wolper, Producer: A Memoir

Without a producer, there is no project. The producer propels the project from an unformed idea to final broadcast or download. He can nurture the project from conception to distribution and might also be the writer, director, and/or the source of the financing. At various stages of production, he may bring in other producers who can help in handling the hundreds of details that need supervision or polish.

The producer is usually the first one on a project and the last one off. She is essentially the overall project supervisor. She gets the project off the ground, and then supervises
CHAPTER 1  What Does a TV Producer Really Do?

every step of its development and production. Not every producer originates the idea; often, a producer is hired to work with a network or production company after an idea has been created and sold. Some producers do it all themselves, others are part of a producing team. It’s work that’s exciting and exhausting.

The job of a producer of television and new media is different from a film producer’s job. Conventional wisdom defines feature films as the director’s domain, theater to be the realm of the actor, and TV as the domain of the producer. In most cases, the feature-film producer acts as the liaison between the studio and the production, providing a support system for the film’s director; increasingly, producers shepherd their own scripts or projects, hiring the director and cast, and overseeing the film’s integrity, production value, and marketing.

In television and new media, the producer is the governing force who often doubles as the director, unless the project is heavily actor-oriented, like network episodics, sitcoms, and drama. The producer usually hires and fires the director, writers, key department heads, actors and other talent, crew, and anyone else needed to bring the project to life. The director in television generally makes more of a technical contribution, working with the talent and crew on blocking and lighting and rehearsing lines, or is in the control room, making camera decisions on a live or prerecorded show. But it is the producer who makes the final decisions; the buck stops there.

I carried my tape recorder with me everywhere as a kid. I had this odd fascination with recording things and playing them back. I taped everything. As I got into school, I brought my video camera to school. It was this odd fascination with wanting to play things back for some reason. By the time I was old enough to try and figure out what I was supposed to do for a living, all I really knew was I wanted to continue this process of recording something and making it into something.

Matt Lombardi, excerpt from interview in Chapter 11

Who and What Makes a Good Producer?

These digital cameras now? People can make a show—make a movie. That’s what I like. The industry is just so hard to get into, you know, unless you have a lot of money. Now, people that have an idea of some kind of media that they want to share can put things on YouTube—the sky’s the limit now. It’s wide open for people to be as creative as they can possibly be.

Sheila Possner Emery, excerpt from interview in Chapter 11

If you’re eager to meet challenges and can multitask and handle a steady stream of demands and questions, if you are slightly type A or obsessive–compulsive and like to run a tight ship while still having fun, you have the makings of a good producer. Combine those qualities with creativity and flexibility, an openness to new ideas and information, a genuine respect for all kinds of people, and an ethical and profitable approach to business—if this all sounds like your personality, you could wake up each day excited to go to work as a producer.

The majority of working producers truly enjoy their job. They like its random nature, and welcome the challenges. The job fits their personality. Some producers are calmer or nicer or more organized than others; some act badly, others can inspire. As you read the interviews with contributing guest speakers in Chapter 11, you’ll see that producers tend to choose this work because it genuinely excites them.
A good producer:

- **Is a problem-solver.** A producer anticipates what’s needed, and solves problems rather than creates them. He’s smart and plays fair. He’s a nurturer, an arbitrator, can be both a leader and a team player. He’s a risk taker with contingencies for any predictable scenario—he has a plan A, plan B, and even a plan C.

- **Is the master of multitasking.** Whether the project is a low-budget documentary or an expensive weekly drama, the producer balances dozens of tasks at once. She might be an entrepreneurial executive producer who secures the financing and makes deals, or a producer commissioned by the executive producer to work on aspects of the project, such as segments, postproduction, music, and so on. She might also be working in several stages of production at once.

- **Is a middle man.** The producer who’s wise enough to be on set regularly (even though he may not be needed) becomes the point person for the director, the DP (Director of Photography), the actors, and the crew members who rely on his leadership. The producer balances the needs of the network or client with the needs of the talent and cast.

- **Wants to know everything.** A good story and useful information are both at the core of a producer’s craft. The world of producing changes daily so the producer researches everything at her disposal—books and magazines, the industry trade papers, newspapers, the Internet, plays, biographies, art and history, and philosophy. She looks for ideas that interest her and that might also appeal to a wide audience. Her goal is to understand where the media industries are going, as well as keep current with what is popular now. She watches TV and explores new media.

- **Enjoys the process.** The producer is comfortable doing business and being creative. He doesn’t need to know how to do everything—like write, direct, edit, create sound design, and light and design sets—but he does know how to hire the best people to do those jobs. He creates a loyal and talented team who can all work toward a common goal—creating a compelling story.

To paraphrase Gertrude Stein, a producer is a producer is a producer. The needs of each individual job may fluctuate but the skill sets on most jobs are similar. A good producer can produce almost anything—a two-hour documentary, a half-hour sitcom, streaming online video, a 30-second commercial, a mobisode, a corporate image piece, even a music video. The projects may differ in content and length. They may require skills in producing a specific kind of program or content; but the creative, financial, technical, and interpersonal skills required are similar for all producers.

I don’t really think there is a “producer’s personality,” but I think there are many qualities that a good producer should have, if he or she wants to do the job well and also be able to sleep at night. Despite the clichés of what a producer acts like (sharp-dressed, fast-talking, megalomaniacs), I think that honesty is very important. Anything else will eventually come out anyway, so aside from basic ethics, there’s really no point in making things up to cover your bases, or to convince someone of something that isn’t true, just so you can get out of them what you want.

*Michael Bonfiglio, excerpt from interview in Chapter 11*

**III. THE MANY ROLES OF A PRODUCER**

To see it from the outside looking in was always exciting to me. Anything in this business that helps you learn, to me, is always interesting. It’s never
The producer in television and in new media has the power to educate, entertain, and emotionally move an audience. But developing a project takes time and energy—a lot of both. No matter what its length or content, each project goes through the following five stages of production, and each of these stages needs a producer.

The Five Stages of Production: From Idea to Wrap

**Stage One: The Idea (Project Development)**

Your idea might be a full-length script or a simple one-paragraph treatment. During the five stages of production, this idea is developed, fleshed out, and hopefully produced. In the project development stage (explored in Chapter 3), the entrepreneurial producer often, though not always:

- Either writes or finds material to option, or obtains all rights to found material. This material can be an original idea, a script, a book, a story on the Internet, a newspaper or magazine article—a producer can find material from many sources.
- Evaluates the project’s initial costs, funding sources, and likely markets.
- Develops the idea, first into a story synopsis and then into a formal proposal, or pitch, for getting financing or development funds.
- Oversees the development of the idea. In dramatic programming, this might include writing the show’s *bible* that covers the overall narrative arc, with plot lines and character sketches for a season of shows in a series.
- Develops a rough estimate of the budget.
- Pitches the project. Raises network or client interest. Obtains financing that covers the project’s initial development or that spans the entire project. A development deal can range from simply developing the script to producing a pilot.
- Negotiates and obtains contracts for licensing fees and other legal aspects of the project’s distribution or broadcast.
- Selects, interviews, and hires a director who shares the project’s visions and can deliver on schedule. Not every project requires a director; often, the producer may fill this role.
- Selects and hires a writer or team of writers (staff and/or freelance) to develop the idea further.
- May consult with and hire additional producers, associate producers, and/or a production manager.

**Stage Two: The Plan (Preproduction)**

By now, the original idea has taken a more tangible form. It can provide a kind of blueprint for the research and hiring of the essential crew members who will take it to the next stage. In the preproduction stage (explored in Chapters 4 and 7), often, though not always, the producer:
Producing for TV and New Media

- Is the principal point person for the financing and/or distribution group. Is involved in negotiations, contracts, rights, and union discussions. Secures rights and permits for locations, music, and other elements.
- Breaks down a script or treatment into a rough budget estimate.
- Continues consulting with the director on aspects of the script and production.
- Depending on the scope of the project, hires and consults with the line producer, location manager, director, cast, DP, production designer, postproduction supervisor, editor, musical composer, and graphics and special effects personnel, as well as essential crew such as camera operators, audio recordists, lighting designers, and other production areas such as make-up, wardrobe, props, construction, transportation, catering, and more. The director may or may not be involved in the hiring process.
- Hires and supervises legal consultants, accountants and auditors, production coordinators, office managers, script supervisors, producer assistants (PAs), interns, among others.
- Supervises the completion of the shooting script.
- Scouts and approves all locations (often with the location scout, director, and/or DP).
- Consults with the production designer on sets, construction, props, and the overall look of the production.
- Consults with the DP and director on shooting format (HD, 24P, P2, film, 4K, etc.).
- Breaks down the shooting script to prepare the overall shooting schedule, call sheets, and production report forms (usually with the line producer and/or production coordinator and/or executive in charge of production).
- Negotiates with appropriate unions on contract and fee agreements.
- Prepares all contracts and deal memos, or oversees them after the unit production manager (UPM) has compiled them.
- Signs off on the final budget.

Stage Three: The Shoot (Production)

Stages one and two lead to the actual shoot, where the vision of the project can now be captured on tape or memory card. During the shooting stage (detailed in Chapter 8), usually although not always, the producer:

- Is on set or on call, always available.
- Consults with the writer(s) and supervises any changes.
- Works closely with the line producer.
- Works with the production designer and approves all aspects of the project’s overall look, tone, and mood.
- Consults regularly with the director, on-camera talent, production designer, and other key department heads.
- Screens the dailies with the director (and often the editor).
- Prepares, balances, and/or approves the daily or weekly cost estimates.
- Stays on top of any press or publicity material generated and carefully supervises what’s appearing in the media about the project.

Stage Four: The Final Product (Postproduction)

The footage has been logged and loaded into the computer, and now all the pieces are ready to be joined together in the editing room and audio facility. At this stage, it’s unlikely that you can reshoot additional footage, so it’s up to you to make it work through careful planning for the shoot and postproduction. During the postproduction period (which you’ll explore in Chapter 9), usually but not always, the producer:
CHAPTER 1 What Does a TV Producer Really Do?

- Often screens and logs all footage, and supplies the editor with a “paper cut” (see Chapters 4 and 9) that acts as a script for the editor, with notes, time-code references for footage, and reel numbers and logs. Lists all graphic elements and audio components. (Templates for these forms are available on the book’s companion web site.)
- On most projects, is fully present during editing or comes into the editing room on a regular basis to review the editor’s work in progress.
- Continues as the point person for the network, client, or producing group regarding issues of the final cut, timings and show lengths, standards and practices. Keeps track of all other delivery requirements.
- Keeps a close eye on the budget. Postproduction can be one of the least controllable financial aspects of the project.
- Selects, negotiates, and books postproduction facilities, such as editorial houses and editors, stock footage facilities, audio studios, composers and/or stock music supervisors, graphics houses and designers, and so on.
- Is familiar with all footage, selected takes, B-roll, cutaways, and other elements needed in the edit. May work closely with an assistant who’s familiar with the footage.
- Regularly supervises the editor. Is responsible for the final cut, depending on contractual agreements.
- Works closely with the musical composer and/or stock music supervisor.
- Supervises audio sessions including narration, dubbing, ADR, foley, rough mix, and final mix.
- Works closely with the graphics designer(s) on show titles, in-show bumpers, opening and end credits, special effects, and other graphic design elements.
- May organize and conduct focus groups or audience testing and supervise any editorial changes that could result from their responses.
- Signs off on the video master of the final cut for client delivery.

Stage Five: Next Steps (Wrap Up and Distribution)
The project is edited and ready to go, whether for broadcast, online, and/or for a client. Still, the producer must deal with several vital details. In the wrap-up stage (explored in Chapter 10), often but not always, the producer:

- Pays and reconciles all outstanding invoices.
- Finalizes all legal contracts and other issues still outstanding.
- Reconciles all budget issues and submits a final report to the client.
- May distribute copies of the final product to key personnel on the production.
- May be involved in advertising and promotional campaigns, including on-air promos, online advertising and PR, print ads, Internet blogs, and grassroots campaigns.
- May consult with the network or production company on publicity, such as special events, public relations photos and artwork.
- May work closely with the network or production company on securing international broadcast, copyright issues, ancillary rights, licensing, and so on.
- May coordinate press activities by carefully controlling what material is appropriate for release to the press.

Why Become a Producer?
A producer’s job demands hard work over intense periods of time. Yet most producers genuinely love their job, partially because they find its demands to be stimulating. Producers work their way up from different places—some begin as interns, others as
Producing for TV and New Media

a PA, a secretary, a production coordinator, or an assistant. Some producers make the transition from their former careers as lawyers, writers, directors, actors, agents, or managers. Still other people have the financing and entrepreneurial passion to fund projects independently.

Over the last few years, universities have recognized the value of curricula that focuses on producing for television and new media. Their classes can be excellent sources of information, ideas, and discussion; yet, as you’ll read in Chapter 11, many important aspects of producing can be learned only on the job and in the trenches. Out there in the real world, television and new media continue to evolve on a daily basis.

I do think there are a lot of creative advantages to television—the immediacy, the amount of financing, funding—making it vastly superior to film, particularly now in cable television.

Brett Morgen, excerpt from interview in Chapter 11

Many producers started off as writers or directors or actors who had an idea for a project they wanted to see actualized. They wanted to brand their idea with their own unique voice, and because they wanted that voice to be heard, they refused to relinquish control over the development of the idea. They chose to become producers so they could protect that idea’s vulnerability and actualize their original idea. They saw their vision to be rather like a fragile newborn, one who is sheltered by legal, fiscal, technical, interpersonal, and creative knowledge. Reinforced by these assets, their vision can grow and thrive.

Creativity, Clout, and Control

Every producer works toward some kind of payoff. The payoff can be financial, creative, experiential; ideally, it’s all of these. That payoff is more likely to occur if the producer uses the components of creativity, clout, and control.

Television writers, for example, seldom have enough clout to be guaranteed that their script will be produced and aired as they originally wrote it. For the most part, writers—even the best of them—are regularly hired, used up, fired, then replaced.

But when writers can understand the producer’s skill set, or even take on the producer’s role, they can dramatically increase their control over their project, especially if they can develop a reputation as a strong producer who is also creative, and who can write and/or direct.

This overall concept of originating and nurturing an idea can be explored through these three very different lenses.

Creativity: Inspiration and Creative Skills

Your idea is the creative essence of your project. As its producer, you may write it yourself, or you have found an idea that’s been originated by someone else. Then, after you’ve legally secured it, you develop it and flesh it out, and finally, you make it come alive.

Your team may be small or large, but it’s a vital creative component. This team brings together the writers, actors, directors, crew, and production designers whose visions are aligned with yours. You’re creating and building a team of talented people who share your passion, reflect it in their work, and bring positive creativity and energy into the process.

Clout: Networking and Contacts Skills

The cliché hasn’t changed: it’s who you know, plus what you know. Networking has become a way of life, so you can research opportunities to meet people at festivals,
organizations, school clubs, openings, charity events, and dozens of other events in your locale. If nothing currently exists, exercise your producing skills by putting on networking events or organizing film/TV festivals. Create an online presence, write a blog—the opportunities to connect with like-minded people in an online world are endless, as social networking creates new visions and versions of community.

You can sharpen your producing skills when you know who's who, and who does what the best. You can follow the trends in television and new media, and research who's financing them and in what ways the projects are financially viable. When you keep on top of media industry news, follow the smart blogs, and observe the ebb and flow of current trends, you are stockpiling your own clout.

**Control: Business Skills**

You have a vision and it deserves to thrive. Your job is to protect it. You can research the legal requirements like copyrights, contracts, deal memos, and other forms of negotiation (see Chapter 5) that can protect your idea and the whole project that revolves around it.

You can master the numbers when you fine-tune your skills in breaking down a script, in budgeting, costing out, rough estimates, daily costs, and so on. Research budgeting software, and research online sources for shortcuts and hints on budgeting.

You also want to understand and know your audience, both domestic and global. What are their interests and their demographics such as age, income, ethnicity, and education? Who are the media companies that reach out to those audiences, and how can you form a relationship with them?

In this era of technological revolution, research the changing equipment in production and postproduction—they're both vital to your project. Although the delivery systems that include broadcast television, mobile phones, cable, the Internet, and video gaming systems are increasing exponentially, they all need content to go out to the viewer—as a producer, that's where you come into the picture.

**IV. PRODUCERS' TITLES AND JOB DESCRIPTIONS**

Unlike other areas in television, such as writing, directing, or acting, the producer doesn’t fall under the protection of a union in the same way that a writer, director, and/or actor does because the producer is generally in charge of the project, rather than at the mercy of higher ups. The producer determines and maintains the budget, negotiates with these unions, and adheres to their guidelines.

Although the Producers Guild of America (PGA) offers benefits to producers with varying titles and levels of experience, their contractual and legal parameters aren’t currently comparable to those in the traditional unions such as WGA, DGA, and SAG.

Producing historically has attracted the entrepreneurs and the rebels, people who tend to be risk takers and self-directed, along with a few control freaks here and there. Most producers are genuine—hard-working and passionate. And there are also the wanna-bes—those who crave the title but don’t do the work that goes along with it.

This title of “producer” becomes a negotiating tool, and often is given out freely as a reward. It’s not uncommon for a so-called producer to know very little about the intricacies of producing. Instead, he may be a major investor—or a minor con artist—who wants to flaunt his credits without doing the hard work. Because there is no official governing union that controls the assignment of the producer title, a network or production company can bestow it on actors, agents, managers, or anyone else who has had some
part in putting the deal together. However, the PGA has taken on the watchdog role over the allocation of producing credits; the desired outcome is a more stringent control over who gets what credit and title.

Producers' Titles
In both nonscripted and scripted television, and in new media, producers can also be writers and/or directors. From show to show and genre to genre, producers' titles and their job descriptions can vary considerably.

Author's Note: As is often the case when it comes to producing, the rules change on a regular basis. These titles can vary from show to show, but generally fall under the following definitions.

Following is just a taste of producers' titles.

Executive Producer
This is the murkiest of all producers' titles because it covers the gamut of descriptions. It generally designates the person who makes the deals, finds the finances, and/or puts the package of writer, director, actors, and/or crew together. Usually she sets up and controls the budget. She may hire various crew and cast, and can be in charge of other producers for one or more projects. There may be several executive producers and co-executive producers on a single project. For example, one may be the liaison between the network and the press, another deals directly with talent and creative, a third with budgets and business planning.

On a financial level, the executive producer might have single-handedly financed the project, even mortgaged her house to develop it, or she may have had just one brief meeting with an investor who said yes. She may be actively on the set and in the office every day, or may show up only at the wrap party. The lead actress could demand the executive producer credit as part of her contract, and so could her husband or manager.

The Top 10 Things you Need to Be a Good Executive Producer
1. Loyalty to the host and show that borders on insanity
2. A long fuse
3. A small ego
4. Attention to detail
5. Organizational ability
6. Ability to make a split-second decision
7. Learn to take a joke
8. Pick your battles
9. Good listening skills
10. Snappy dresser

Barbara Gaines, The Late Show with David Letterman, excerpt from interview in Chapter 11

Showrunner
The term showrunner is informal, and not credited as such. The showrunner is responsible for the overall creative direction of a series, and often he may have the title of executive producer. The showrunner may be the original creator of the show and/or the
CHAPTER 1 What Does a TV Producer Really Do?

writer of the show’s storyline overview, “the bible.” He is usually the primary writer, and/or manages and guides other writers in creating the scripts; he often may rewrite scripts and make sure they’re delivered on schedule.

The showrunner on a reality show, talk show, news, specials, and so on may not always be as involved in the writing, and may be more involved with generating, selling, and/or managing ideas. He may also be very involved in pitching a new show idea to a network, casting the actors, and staying on top of a very long list of elements needed to produce a weekly show. Most important, the showrunner maintains the essential vision of the show. A showrunner can be a writer, a producer, or both, and has the power to hire or fire, shouldering the burden of the show’s success or failure.

**Producer (Senior Producer, Supervising Producer)**

She can be an entrepreneurial producer or a producer commissioned to come in at any stage to work on the project. Either way, she starts the ball rolling, usually from concept to broadcast, by initiating ideas and hiring and coordinating crews. She can also be the writer and/or the director, or hires them; casts the talent; and supervises and controls the budget and the technical and administrative aspects throughout the project. This producer oversees contracts and negotiations, and may receive a percentage of the final profits, if any, as well as a regular salary.

**Integrated Producer**

The integrated producer is a new breed of producer who has a decidedly interactive focus. He can create and manage interactive content for the web, gaming, mobile, and newer systems, and is equally adept at directing teams of producers and designers. He is able to draft project goals, schedules, and budgets, has mastered most software programs, can shoot live action, and deals easily with both vendors and clients.

**Associate Producer**

Also called the co-producer or assistant producer, she is the producer’s right hand and does specific jobs that the producer assigns. Her work can be on the creative side, such as helping to set up interviews on a talk show, and can also lean toward administrative tasks, such as making production schedules, allotting budgets to departments, booking talent and/or crew, research, interviewing talent, finding locations, and more.

**Line Producer (Production Manager, Unit Production Manager, Producer, or Co-Producer)**

The nuts and bolts of producers, the line producer is most involved in the day-to-day operation from the beginning to the end of the project. He keeps budgets on track and compares estimated costs to actual expenditures. The line producer represents the administrative side of television, and turns ideas into reality by figuring out the logistics of a project. He keeps the production on schedule (set constructions, props, wardrobes, talent releases, etc.), breaks down the script into a storyboard and its components for production, and decides the sequence of shooting that’s most cost-effective. He works closely with the producer(s) in various aspects of location scouting, transportation and lodging, and dozens of production details. It’s a vital job—the line producer helps the executive producer, producer, and director do their jobs much more smoothly.

**Staff Producer**

Generally hired on a permanent or per-project basis, the staff producer works in a network or production company as an employee with benefits. Her job usually involves
producing an ongoing aspect of the show that’s assigned to her—it could be her task to interview potential guests, research stories, track down licensing information, secure locations, and more.

**Segment Producer**

In magazine format shows, news broadcasts, talk shows, and reality-based programming, he is assigned to one of several stories aired within the program and may produce his own segment. Some shows may have several teams comprised of a producer, PAs, a camera operator, and an editor who work together on their segment. He may also be one of a growing group of producers—the producer-editor, or *preditor*—who research, shoot, and edit their own pieces.

**Independent Producer**

Also called *independent contractors or freelancers*, she may own her own company with a capable infrastructure, and work on projects for a network, another production company, or a variety of clients. She might have a complete staff, or hire on an as-needed basis. She usually pays her own insurance, benefits, taxes, and other expenses like overhead and equipment.

**Field Producer**

This area of producing refers to a producer who is “in the field” or at a location some distance away from the primary producer. Many companies in New York or Los Angeles, for example, have a roster of field producers who are located around the country or abroad. He can be on the scene faster and less expensively, and can work flexibly in a variety of fields like sports, entertainment, and news.

**Session Producer**

Often a producer is needed to supervise and produce a recording session, an interview, a voice-over recording, a satellite feed, or other producing necessities. She keeps it on track, is aware of the time used, the length of a shoot or recording take, and generally maintains close quality control.

**Postproduction Supervisor**

As a producer in the postproduction stage, he is familiar with the footage to be edited, and keeps logs of where the footage is and on what reel numbers. He may create a paper cut or storyboard of the editing order of the shots, with their time code and reel locations. He keeps track of the graphic and audio elements; supervises all edit, graphic, and audio sessions; and works closely with the editor and later, with the sound designer throughout the final stages of postproduction.

**V. THE NEED FOR PEOPLE SKILLS**

Balance? I’ve heard of that... It comes and goes. There are times in television when you’re completely overwhelmed. You’ve got to pump it out every eight days, and it’s not always great. You get scripts thrown back at you by the networks sometimes. You get a ton of notes at all times. You’re having to please a lot of different people, and you have fights, but you have to pick your battles.

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Scott A. Williams, excerpt from interview in Chapter 11
CHAPTER 1  What Does a TV Producer Really Do?

A producer’s creative and business skills are essential to the success of a project. And so are vital people skills—they are an equally compelling facet of a strong producer’s approach to the job. It can’t be emphasized enough: A producer can do nothing without a team. The producer builds his team on the talents of writers, directors, crew, actors, editors, composers, and so many more. Without these people to actualize the project, a producer is useless. He needs people skills not only to attract qualified people to the project, but to keep them motivated and collaborative.

A strong producer relies on the following skills while working with dozens of people involved in bringing a project to life:

**Collaboration.** A strong producer embraces collaboration and encourages teamwork by supporting each member of the team, and encouraging open discussion.

**Communication skills.** These skills are vital for effective relationships. Without them, you risk misunderstandings, even chaos in your project. Communication is either *verbal* (the choice of words as well as the tone and volume of our voice) or *nonverbal* (facial expressions, body language, gestures).

**Verbal.** Is what you said the same thing as how you said it? You say you’re not mad but your tone of voice says otherwise. Say what you mean.

**Nonverbal.** Do you look at people as you talk or listen, or are you distracted? Does your body language say that you are nervous or inattentive, or calm and in control?

**Conflict management.** Conflicts happen all the time, especially in the high-stress world of media. No matter how hard we try to solve them, some conflicts are inevitable and can’t be resolved. But most conflicts can be managed effectively if you can grasp the cause of the conflict and deal with it. As the producer, you are also the peacemaker. Not everyone has to like one another, but they’re professionals, who have a job to do. Sometimes it’s up to you to mediate.

**Emotional intelligence (EQ).** In this growing field, initially developed by Daniel Goleman, a person’s emotional strengths are considered as important as his or her intellectual abilities. A high EQ is measured by a producer’s ability to show genuine empathy, respect, positive leadership skills, and sincerity for the team.

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**IN THE TRENCHES…**

A large production company in New York brought me into a project that required building six interior locations, a host for each location, a specific color palette, props from the 1940s, among other details. Plus, I researched and wrote the script and scheduled the shoot. It was great fun, we hit very few brick walls, and it involved the hiring of a lot of people for a range of jobs. Busy, busy, each day, with fires to put out and quick decisions at every turn. At a lunch break in our third week, one of the gaffers came up to me, rather shyly. “Sorry to interrupt, but…were you ever a kindergarten teacher?” I hooted out loud, but I could see he genuinely meant this question. “No, but why do you ask?” He took a deep breath, then he said something like this: “Well, you always make sure people eat their lunch, and the snacks and meals are totally cool. You let us do our jobs and you don’t interrupt us to ask what we’re doing. When you’re listening to us, you kind of bend over to hear us better. You like to hear our stories. You say please and thank you. And you’re funny.” To this day, years later, it’s maybe the best compliment I’ve ever gotten. Totally true story.

—C. Kellison
Learning styles. We are seeing impressive research over the last few years that focuses on how we learn, both cognitively and emotionally. Researchers have identified over 20 different ways that people absorb information and learn. They’re all effective. When you can understand the different ways in which each member of your team learns, you can strengthen the bonds of communication.

Most of us have one predominate way in which we absorb information:

**Visual.** This person learns best by reading or looking at information, and then creates a mental picture from the data.

**Auditory.** In this case, a person absorbs information better when it comes through hearing the spoken word or audio. The auditory learner generally has strong listening skills and verbal abilities.

**Kinesthetic.** To the kinesthetic learner, information is best conveyed through ways that are physical, spatial, or sensory, such as charts and 3-D modeling.

Each of us tends to be either one or the other:

**Analytical learner.** The analytical learner understands information best when it’s presented as sequential, linear, organized, and delivered one step at a time.

**Global learner.** The opposite of the analytical learner, this person sees the big picture first, then breaks it down into smaller and more manageable details.

Here, too, we tend to fall into one of two categories:

**Goal-oriented.** This type of person tends to stick with a task, with no breaks or lulls, with an almost single-minded focus until the job is done.

**Process-oriented.** Here, the process and the journey of reaching the goal can be as engaging as the goal itself.

**Multiple intelligences.** This originally was researched and revealed by distinguished Harvard professor, Dr. Howard Gardner. His research reveals at least a dozen distinct predominant intelligences that each of us can claim, such as a strong musical, mathematical, spatial, or athletic intelligence.

**Listening skills.** The ability to simply listen to another person is a real skill that can work wonders. Being attentive, not interrupting, and acknowledging that we hear the other person can be a real challenge for some people. As we suspend our own need to talk and control, we can genuinely listen, and make people feel truly valued.

**Leadership skills.** As the team’s leader, the producer recognizes that the team is made of individuals. Each member of the team has his or her own emotional needs, learning styles, problem-solving strategies, communication approaches, and personal issues that can influence professional function. Leadership comes with the producer’s territory, so treat the position with respect for those you’re leading.

Leadership has a harder job to do than just choose sides. It must bring sides together.

**Jesse Jackson**

The producer benefits—as do the team members—when the needs of the team are taken into consideration. With a goal of creating harmony, the producer models behaviors and viewpoints that set a tone for the project and all its stages of production.

Some of the essential leadership skills and ideals that the producer can embody are:

**Commitment.** If you don’t believe in your project, don’t expect anyone else to. Stand firmly behind it.
CHAPTER 1 What Does a TV Producer Really Do?

**Credibility.** Though you want people to respect you, don’t let your need to be liked get in the way of getting things done.

**Delegation.** Hire the best people you can find, and learn what they do. Then, leave them alone to do their job. Check in regularly to confirm that the project’s vision remains intact.

**Motivation.** Producers don’t expect praise (and seldom get it), but they know how to lavish it on their team when it’s genuinely earned. Find ways to show your thanks.

**Ethics.** The value of ethics in producing is more about strength of character than a spiritual or religious mandate. A producer who assesses his or her own ethical framework is more likely to create a project that’s under control, stimulating, and a positive experience.

**Accountability.** Because you’re in charge, you’re accountable to your team. It’s their project too. Keeping up with changes in technology, creative trends, and the business of the TV industry is also part of your job.

**Honesty.** Your word is solid enough to build your reputation upon it.

**Objectivity.** You can listen to criticism without taking it personally, and can hear all sides of an issue.

**Patience.** Respect the fact that people work at different rhythms with varying working styles.

**Personal balance.** The demands of the job can take over your “other” life. With the right perspective and determination, you can have a professional and a personal life.

**Will power.** Stress during production can result in producer burnout caused by too many long hours, too little sleep, a diet of junk food, and the temptations of smoking, alcohol, drugs, and negative relationships. Save your energy.

**Relationships.** You can cultivate new friends who share your passion for producing while staying close to your most important supporters: friends and family.

**Daydreaming.** Occasionally, make the time to take a walk, a mental break, and a few deep breaths. Find a source of peace: meditation, painting, yoga, laughing.

I’ve found in life that when you refuse to settle for anything but the best, you very often get it.

_W. Somerset Maugham_

**ON A HUMAN LEVEL . . .**

As the producer, you are at the core of a project. You encourage collaboration and provide strong and balanced leadership. You know when to step back and let people do their job. You model patience, humor, and a clear vision of the project, supplying creative direction while balancing the pressures of the budget. You are generous with your flexibility and encouragement, while staying connected to the realities of the budget and time constraints. In spite of the long hours and often grueling situations, you’re focused and relaxed—or at least appearing to be.

**SUMMARY**

A good producer knows about the elements of producing. He or she might also be talented as a writer, director, or editor. As a storyteller, an entrepreneur, a risk taker, a producer has strong leadership skills and works well with a team. Another sure sign of a skilled producer is an understanding of the larger context of television and its offshoots, including its past history, current status, and future potential. You’ll learn about all three in the following chapter.
REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How do producers in TV and new media differ from film producers?

2. List three important skills and traits of a good producer. Explain why each is helpful.

3. List one role the producer plays in each of the five stages of a project’s development.


5. What does the line producer do? How is this job different from other producing titles?

6. List two reasons why “owning” your emotions can help in managing conflicts.

7. What areas of producing might be impacted by a failure of leadership? A failure of ethics?

8. Define three learning styles outlined in the Learning Styles section that best describe your own, and give examples.

9. How can delegation skills contribute to the execution of a project?

10. What have you learned so far about being a producer? Has it affected your interest in producing?