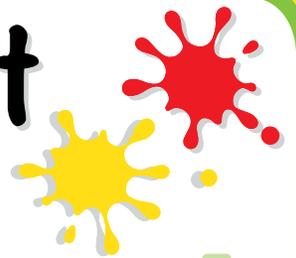




Paintertainment

e-Newsletter • April 2017 • Issue 55



Keeping A Good Agent

by Gretchen Fleener

Last month we discussed how to FIND a good agent. If you didn't read that issue, take a look back and learn what to look for in a good agent...while a bad agent can bring you tons of stress, a good one is worth their weight in gold! Now that you've hopefully found a good agent, here are some tips to keep your relationship great.

Communication

Preferred Method of Contact

An agent can't book you if they can't get ahold of you. The best way to ensure that you don't miss out on a gig is to find out your agent's preferred method of communication, and respond in that way, or at least in the way they contacted you. If they email, send an email back. If they call, call them back. I personally am terrible at keeping up with phone calls, but am quicker with texts and emails!

Check In

Check in with your agent as soon as possible after you finish a gig. It's NOT because they don't trust you or want to babysit you. It's really important for the agent to know what happened from your perspective asap, so that they can properly address any issues when they discuss how the event went with the client. This enables them to have YOUR back if a client calls with a complaint. For example, if the client claims you were too slow, it helps to have photographic evidence that twice as many kids came as they originally told you. A good agent stands up for his or her contractors while smoothing over any issues, and in order to do this, you need to keep in close communication to work as a team.

Likewise, agents would like to know if the client was especially pleasant, helpful, tipped you well, or did anything else that went above and beyond so they can properly thank them, and hopefully book YOU for the same event next year if you enjoyed it!

Sending photos with your check in is a huge plus, and for many agents, a requirement! It helps your agent to better understand the environment you were working in, and plan their discussions with the client for next year's event, should any changes need to be made to make things run more smoothly. I also request that artists who work for me send photos of several of their paintings, so I can thank the client with a photo collage of the beautiful work that was done!

Be Professional

Punctuality is a Virtue!

Perhaps one of the worst things you can do to damage your relationship with your agent is to arrive late. Whether you're stuck in traffic, got bad directions, were given the wrong address, or had the time wrong on your calendar, we have ALL been there, myself included! While it can be totally mortifying for both the artist and the agent, no matter who's fault it is, it immediately damages the reputation of the agent's company. Do whatever it takes to arrive on time, and plan to be early!

When you are stuck in one of those situations where you're running late, it is of utmost importance that you contact the agent the moment that you know you will be late. (not after the fact) This gives them the opportunity to call up the client and prepare them, making life easier for you and preventing a possible client meltdown when you arrive. Agents take care of this uncomfortable stuff so you don't have to...help them get the info they need so you can just have fun painting!

Take your Commitment Seriously

Backing out of a gig after you've signed a contract is right up there with arriving late, especially if it's at the eleventh hour. While you may be taking a to-do off your calendar, the agent is now taking on a huge list of stressful to-do's to replace you. Again, I've both done this myself, and had this done to me. We've all been there and know it's sometimes truly unavoidable. But no matter how good your reasons are, be as gracious, understanding, and accommodating as possible, and try very hard not to ever let it happen twice!

Dress Appropriately

You would think this would go without saying, but unfortunately it has to be said. If your agent hasn't given you some sort of dress code, just ask them. They may request a certain style to fit their brand, the client's preferences, or simply request a level of modesty.

Represent the Agent

Distribute the Agent's Collateral

Once you accept a gig that was booked through an agent, you are expected to act as a representative of their business, not your own. This means you distribute their business cards (unless they say otherwise), and only display their company name.

When you are the one who has put in the time and expense of advertising, earning regular clients, and maintaining that relationship, then you are free to sell yourself. Always ask your agent what their policy is when asked for a card, though this should be in their contract already. Many agents allow and even prefer you to write your name on their cards in case the client wants to request you specifically for a future gig!

If you're an artist who argues, "well I'm the one doing all the work and making THEM look good!" then you likely have not played the role of an agent yet! As an artist who also experiences first hand the sheer volume of unpleasant grunt work involved in being an agent, I have a special appreciation for this and jump at the chance to work for and represent other agents at a fraction of my own hourly rate! Regardless of your feelings on whether an agent is worth their "cut" or not, the bottom line is, you are an independent contractor. This means you are completely free to work on your own, and if you are unhappy with your agent's policies or the rate that they are paying you, simply stop taking gigs from them. That's the joy of being your own boss!

While I could go on and on, these are just a few tips on how to keep your relationship with your agent running smoothly. The biggest tip though is to simply have open and honest communication with your agent about their own particular policies so everyone is clear about what their roles are! As I mentioned, this is a series of articles on agents...next month I'll touch on the subject of becoming an agent yourself! Until then, happy painting! 🎨



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