



## ETIQUETTE: **Work Holds**

By Jonathan Melamed

In the world of freelance, nothing is guaranteed. Sometimes, one job ends and thus the scramble for another gig begins. And sometimes, as they say, "When it rains it pours," and you have calls coming from two or more people looking to book you at the same time. It's nice to be desired, and if you are a dynamo on set and a brilliant networker, you can work more hours and make more money than a "9 to 5er". A producer or department head may contact you with what could seem as a fairly informal phone call, "Hey, are you around toward the end of next week?" However enigmatic this may sound, if they utter the word "hold," you are to consider yourself "on deck" to be hired and should schedule yourself accordingly, perhaps lightly penciling it in your appointment book. If you receive a phone call, or even something as unceremonious as a text message, stating that you are in fact "confirmed," then it is official: you are making loot. Although the meanings of "on hold" and "confirmed" are easy enough to understand, it only sounds good on paper. There is a vast and nebulous gray area with which everyone from the producer to the caterer must wrestle. How much work does one put into a job before they are confirmed? What if you receive another job offer while on hold or confirmed? The caterer has prepared dozens of tin foil trays of Chicken Marsala, which are left to slowly fester under long extinguished sternos with nobody around to eat them. Who is going to pay? How much do they owe you?

**NEVER:**

Be afraid to request a kill fee, especially if you turned down other jobs while on hold. It is money lost, and you are entitled to at least half of your initially determined day rate.

Cancel via email or text message. A phone call suggests that you respect your crew and that you are truly sorry about the inconvenience, ensuring people will return your call the next time you crew up.

Forget that it is your duty to at least recommend somebody to replace you if you need to break a hold. Make sure it is somebody good, but not too good. You don't want him or her outshining you on set and taking your clients in the future.

Start spending money before telling the client. Light research and compiling of reference images show that you are a go-getter during the non-confirmed, incipient stages of the job, but avoid any out of pocket purchases before being sure that you will be reimbursed.

Forget to tell everyone you hired that the job has been canned or pushed ASAP. The sooner they know, the less money they spend and the less time they waste prepping for a gig that will never come to fruition.

**ALWAYS:**

Remember that a first offer takes precedence. So you got offered that sick job, the one where maybe your biggest duty will be to buff out the smudge spot left by a nude model on a piece of furniture. If you are already confirmed for another job, no matter how shitty or underpaid, it behooves you to stick to the first offer.

Get it in writing. It's okay for freelance assistants to operate under the vague formalities of verbal holds and confirmations, but producers and department heads should try to get official documentation to protect them, especially when large sums of money and labor hours are at stake. It doesn't have to be a full-on purchase order: a simple email is a legal document.

Keep a detailed work calendar. You may get a phone call from an unrecognizable number at the most inopportune time, say in the midst of pinning a model's underwear or while enjoying happy hour on a day off. You better answer that phone: everybody knows that a phone call is always potential for employment. Pick up or call back ASAP and make sure you make a note of the days you are put on hold. Otherwise, it can become a scheduling nightmare, and, if you are that desirable, you might accidentally double book yourself.

Pay full fee and reimburse all expenses if the job is cancelled within less than twenty-four hours notice. Producers should pay department heads full day rates, assistant labor fees and incurred expenses, and department heads should pay their assistants in full for all confirmed days.

Keep your crew abreast of what is going on with the job. It's hard to ascertain if a job is a definite go or not, but letting your assistants know how likely it is to be confirmed allows everybody to plan ahead, and maybe not get screwed over on any other potential gigs.

Celebrate a good kill fee for no work. It's a free day, have a cocktail before noon!