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DIRECTING 101 - Table of Contents

Chapter 1: So, You Got Voted Into Directorship...

If you're reading this tech paper, there's a good chance that you were appointed to be one of your team's co-directors. First and foremost, congratulations! This means your team sees something in you that you may not even recognize yourself. For one reason or another, they and your faculty have decided that you have the potential to lead your crew to victory.

Or maybe you aren't a director, are interested in directing one day, or are just interested in finding out more of what goes on behind the scenes. All of which are encouraged seeing that this resource is for everyone and contains highly valuable top secret information about how to be the best director you can be.

Let's start off with covering your new responsibilities:

- Working closely with the story and overseeing the script-writing process
- Effectively relaying information to *all* appointed team leads and teammates
- Directing the camera, editing, and character actions
- Providing *honest but respectful* feedback to your teammates
- Being the communication bridge between faculty and students
- Deciding the music and tempo of the film
- Resolving conflicts amongst teammates
- Managing and updating the shotlist as changes to the camera are made
- Working with your production manager to delegate responsibilities for your teammates based on their individual strengths
- Maintaining Morale (*a happy team is a productive team*)
- Treating everyone equally despite your personal feelings toward them

It's important to remember that every director is different and has their own set of skills and strengths to bring to the table! Knowing yours and using them in your own way is what makes a great director.

Figure 1.1 The five essential leadership skills

Chapter 2: Why are *you* important?

These responsibilities are <u>absolutely crucial</u> to your film's success. Being tentative to these areas can affect your team dynamic, productivity, quality of work, and rate of happiness. But being a good director is more than just adhering to tasks. Who you are as an individual, and what you bring to the table can inspire the team to be the best they can be. Having a passionate leader in place can make a world of difference.

Something I highly recommend is asking yourself what kind of leader you want to be. What kind of leader would *you* like to work for in the future? And embody that for your team. Finding role models who are currently working in the industry and dissecting how they lead can be very helpful when it comes to finding inspiration. You have the ability to make this your own and bring your own personality to it.

Figure 2.1 Rebecca Sugar (creator, director, screenwriter)

A really good resource for this is *Behind the Curtain: Steven Universe The Movie,* which most relevantly shows Rebecca Sugar actively leading the project along with the movie's co-directors. This provides insight into an actual studio environment where you can see how Rebecca interacts and works with her crew and how she successfully creates a happy and healthy studio environment that inspires her crew to go above and beyond. This resource is completely free and can be found on youtube.

Chapter 3: Imposter Syndrome

It's likely that you will encounter some form of imposter syndrome in your time as a director.

Impostor syndrome is defined as:

"...a psychological pattern in which an individual doubts their skills, talents or accomplishments and has a persistent internalized fear of being exposed as a "fraud". Despite external evidence of their competence, those experiencing this phenomenon remain convinced that they are frauds, and do not deserve all they have achieved."

Figure 3.1 *What is imposter syndrome and how can you combat it? By Elizabeth Cox TED*

If this sounds familiar, you are not alone. Many of the world's most inspiring leaders and thinkers also suffered from the imposter phenomenon and it is completely normal. This, however, does not mean you should ignore it. These feelings of self doubt can affect your happiness and your team dynamic. It's important to remind yourself that you are here for a reason, you were chosen to lead for a reason, and you *are* the right person for the job.

The video mentioned in *figure 3.1* is available on youtube and is a good resource for explaining what imposter syndrome may feel like and how you can find ways to personally overcome it.

Chapter 4: Co-Directors and the Distribution of Responsibility

One of the most important aspects of the job is teamwork, and a harmonious relationship between you, your co-director, and production manager is the key to success.

This is a very independent program, and you three will be navigating directing this film on your own for the most part. Directors and the production manager set the deadlines for most of the film's goals, not your professors. This means that everything and anything that affects the team or production (*i.e. conflicts, technical snags, accomplishments, setbacks, etc.*) are all run by the three of you, and it's up to you to find the best solutions on behalf of the rest of the team.

➜ *It is **highly recommended** that you form a group chat between co-directors and production manager early on to ensure you have a place to communicate about all things regarding the film. You will be using this practically every day of your senior year.*

How Do You Balance All of That Responsibility?

This is where your personal strengths come into play. Knowing your strengths and finding the balance between you all will make the process and distribution of responsibilities run as smoothly as possible.

For example: One of you might be more technically savvy, analytical and plan-oriented, while the other is more detail oriented, creative, and go-with-the-flow.

When you're able to combine those traits, you can ground each other, and help the other where you excel. Delegating areas of production that you are able to focus more on individually can help distribute the workload evenly based on your individual strengths.

> **TIP**: You may encounter teammates that respond better to one of you over the other, or a situation that calls for a softer or more assertive approach, use these as opportunities to combine your minds and find the best solution.

At some point, after working together so long, the *mind meld* begins. You will start finishing each other's sentences, knowing where the other is without ever being told, and psychically communicating via telepathy.

Figure 4.1 The Mind Meld

Chapter 5: The Ultimate Communication Guide

Communication, *and I cannot stress this enough*, is the single most important aspect of teamwork hands down. As a director, you are responsible for communicating information to every member of your team, your co-director, production manager, and faculty, each of which may have different communication preferences. Part of your job is knowing your teammates' communication and learning preferences so that you can accommodate everyone and make sure you're all on the same page.

Figure 5.1 The different types of learners you may have on your team

Figuring out what type of learners are on your team will help when it comes to weekly meetings where you need to update the entire team on what they need to be working on and what deadlines need to be met. 65% of people are natural visual learners, and an even bigger percentage of artists prefer visual learning, meaning they retain information more easily when presented visually, like the graphic above.

Tips for Communicating with the Whole Team:

Covid-19 has created a somewhat interesting circumstance for our cohort that required us to have to adapt to an entirely online way of communicating. The industry is changing, however, and it's important to find new ways of doing things regardless of your circumstances. Here are some very useful ways of accommodating to communicating completely online:

Tip #1: Syncsketch.com is a really useful tool for when you need to offer your team visual notes on something that moves like a layout reel or animation. It allows you to upload their sequences, draw on their playblasts, and provide notes on exact timestamps that they can go back and reference as much as they like while they work. (*figure 5.2*)
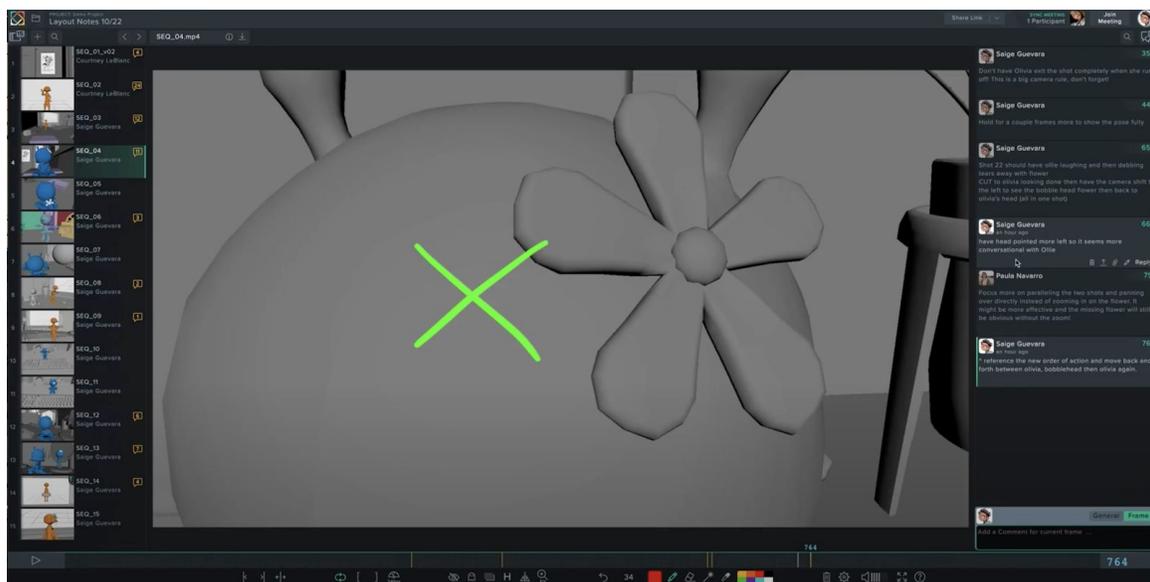

Figure 5.2 an example of how we use a website called Sync Sketch to give 3D critiques and notes

Tip #2: It is absolutely <u>crucial</u> to document and post all of the notes or critique you have for your team somewhere, especially when you are working entirely virtually. Having things written down allows your team to be able to go back and re-reference what you are asking them for while they work. Providing a side by side of what you are asking and what they submitted can really help them visualize where they went wrong and how to adjust accordingly (*figure 5.3*).
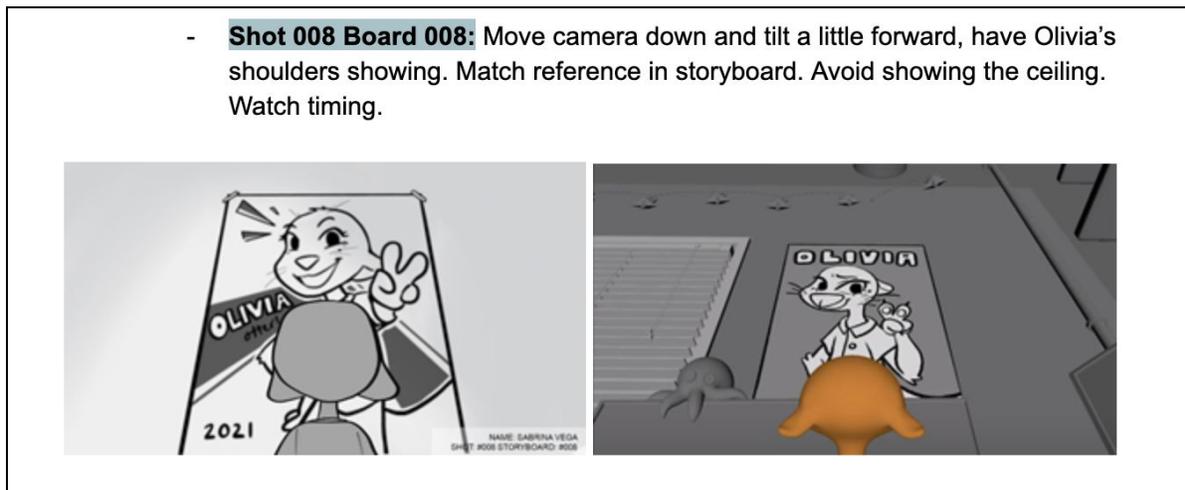

- **Shot 008 Board 008:** Move camera down and tilt a little forward, have Olivia's shoulders showing. Match reference in storyboard. Avoid showing the ceiling. Watch timing.

Figure 5.3 providing side by sides of their work and the storyboards with notes

Tip #3: It is highly recommended to meet with your co-director and production manager every weekend in order to plan your weekly meetings ahead of time. Have all deadlines, links and expectations easily accessible to the team on the day of the meeting and then share the link to them on discord afterwards so they can revisit it as needed. Highlighting the important parts will help the important information, like deadlines, stand out. *(figure 5.4)*

- **2D and 3D Animation**
  o 2D Team
    - This week 2D animators will continue to work on their first shot using the 2D Rig (rough)
      ● **Ollie Key Pose Rigs (one shot) for your assigned shot are due 12/4 (Friday) by 10pm**
      ● **Use this link below to find your assigned shot**
        o **All shots: ollie/olivia/combo - Google Sheets**
    ■ Make sure to fill out 2D checklist to keep track of your progress
      ● **Link to 2D Checklist**
        o https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1CU_SVFu1XhDEAZD
          enkVMlgRdXO608DO_Q2To3dOjbXU/edit#gid=306398392

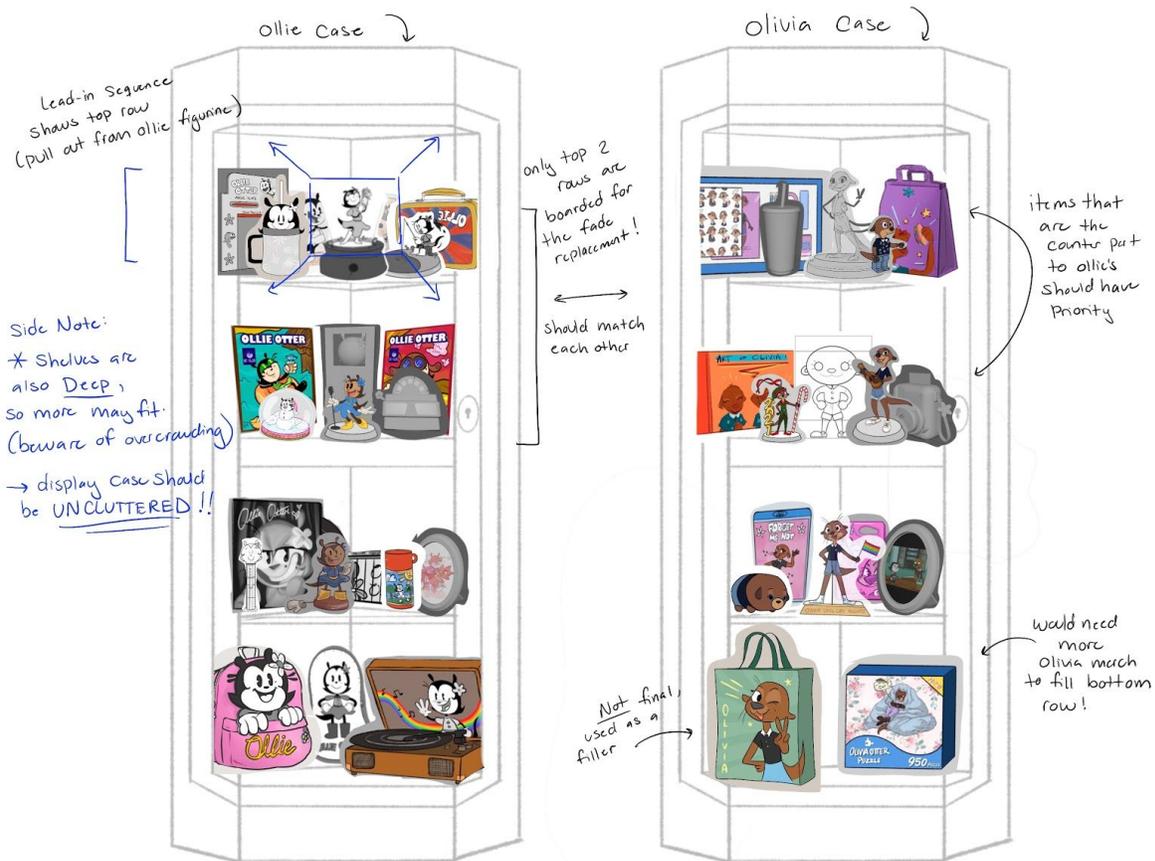*Figure 5.4 example of a portion of our weekly meeting notes*

Figure 5.5 an example of a rough concept made for set dressing

Tip #4: Creating rough sketches or concepts of something visual can help your team better understand your vision and have a visual reference to work off of that will save time. (*figure 5.5*)

Tip #5: If there is a specific process you want all of your teammates to follow, try screen recording a demo of yourself *or s*omebody else in your team explaining how to do it so that the team can pause it and follow along as they go. This is actually a super helpful learning tool when it comes to things as tedious and precise as MAYA and other programs which you all may not be as familiar with early-on.

Tips for Communicating on the Individual Level:

Every person is different and has different needs in a group environment. It is your job as a leader to accommodate your teammates' communication needs when approached by them.

Platforms of communication include:

- Discord
- Voice calls

- Text messaging
- E-mail

- Face-to-face
- Zoom

Tip #1: Try asking your teammates their preferred platform of communication and learning style early-on and make a note of them to reference later. Some people won't respond to certain forms and this will save you time and emotional effort.

Tip #2: Get comfortable with discord and zoom. These will probably be the two most used platforms during your time here.

Tip #3: Think of your teammates as friends before workers. They have emotional needs as well and talking to them as a friend instead of a director makes for a much safer environment for them to open up about issues they are having. Be what your team needs from you when called for. There is a time and place for both sides of the coin.

Tip #4: Make sure to communicate everything and everything with your co-director and production manager. You all need to be on the same page about everything as it happens, even when one of you isn't there.

Tip #5: Try not to speak over your teammates, especially on zoom. It's already hard enough as it is to be heard, be respectful of everyone's say. Ideas and creative freedom should be encouraged with your team and you should definitely listen to feedback. You are not all-knowing and it is perfectly acceptable for an idea to fail and a better one to replace it! Collaboration is a huge part of this industry and you need to know the balance.

Chapter 6: Conflict Resolution

Like in any relationship, working so closely with people will inevitably result in some conflict and clashing personalities. There will always be people you do and don't get along with, as there will be in the industry after this.

In my research, I have found that there is one common element at the center of most conflict:

Some important things to keep in mind:

- You are *all* students who are learning, you will make plenty of mistakes.
- The feedback you receive is not personal. It is intended to help you improve.
- You are all equals with equally important things to bring to the table.
- Do not be afraid to ask for help. Collaboration is your greatest strength.
- You do not have to like everyone, but you do have to respect them.
- There will be some people who won't agree with your vision and choices.
- Your worth is not measured by what you can physically produce.
- This is a student film with limited production time and resources, do not be so hard on yourself or your team.

Tip #1: No matter what somebody does, be mindful of your words and actions. Things can come back to bite if you aren't careful. You may work with some of your teammates again in the industry, so be respectful.

Tip #2: Trust your judgment when it comes to how to respond to specific people. People respond differently to different things and there is no universal right way for how to resolve all conflicts. Some situations may require you to put your foot down whereas others may not.

Tip #3: Try to resolve conflicts with teammates on your own before involving the professors. If this approach is not working, then you can reach out to your faculty advisors for advice or intervention depending on the severity of the case.

Tip #4: Some things are out of your hands and some personal conflicts between teammates cannot be resolved. If this is the case then all you can do is focus on the things that you do have control over, like how you let it affect you. The show must go on and you must be professional despite your personal feelings.

Tip #5: Check yourself every morning and make sure you put your ego aside before entering the work environment. Think of you and the rest of your team as equals, without hierarchy. Nobody wants to work with an arrogant director, it will only reflect poorly on you.
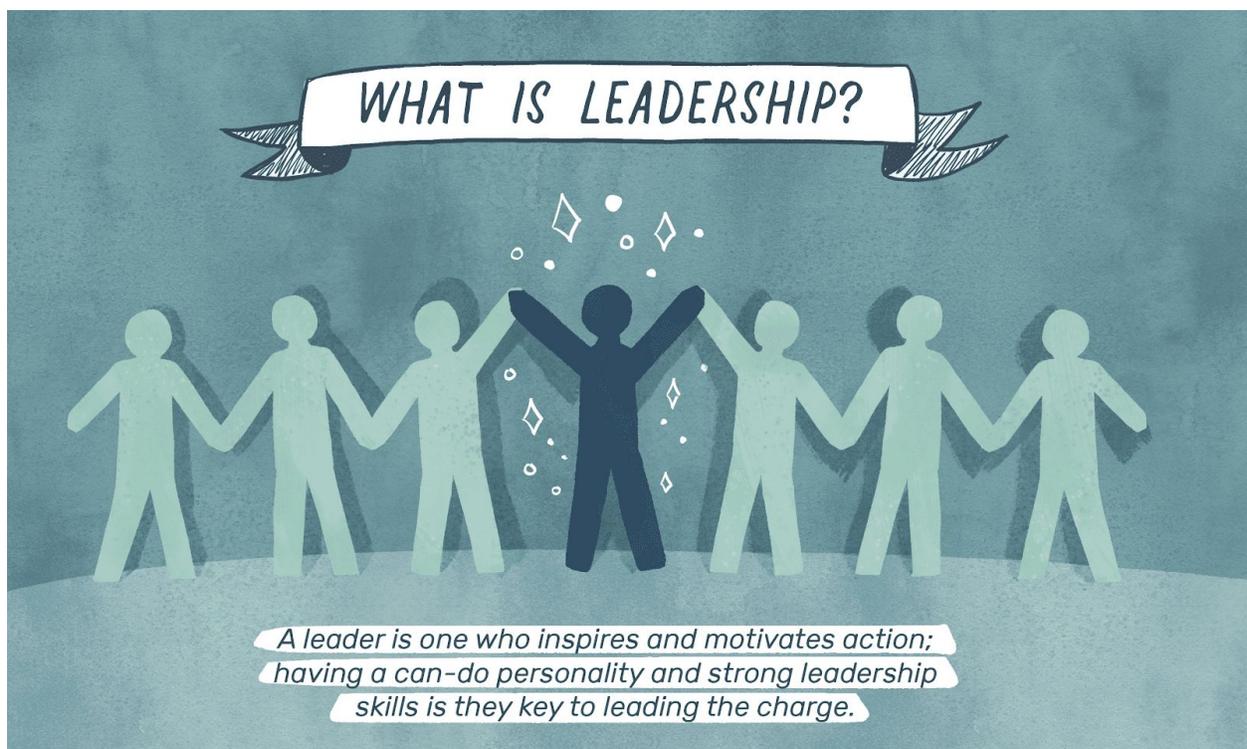
Chapter 7: Team Morale (Keeping it Together When The World is Falling Apart)

There are small things you can do to lift your team's spirits and try to keep the work environment as fun as possible. For the covid-cohort, trying to keep the mood light was a lot easier said than done. If you are finding yourself in a similar situation, here are some things that have worked for me.

- Playing music or youtube videos before team meetings
- Hosting game nights/movie nights every once in a while
- Inviting someone who is having a rough time to play video games or hang out
- Encouraging jokes to make for a less serious and mundane work environment
- Acknowledging their hard work and praising teammates when they do a good job

Basically, making sure everyone feels comfortable enough to let loose and enjoy themselves in the midst of the chaos, *and there will be chaos*. Otherwise this will be a very hard and long year for you all.

This is actually one of the hardest and most taxing parts of directing, and a lot of emotional effort will be put into making sure that everyone is staying as positive as possible despite your circumstances. Even when you are having a bad day, you may need to put that aside and be there for others when needed, which can be exhausting. Make sure to take some time for yourself outside of school to recuperate.

WHAT IS LEADERSHIP?

A leader is one who inspires and motivates action; having a can-do personality and strong leadership skills is they key to leading the charge.

Taking Initiative

Having a can-do personality is more than just staying positive in the face of adversity, it also means taking charge of situations when called for, tackling problems when they arise, and adhering to the areas of production that need your attention without being asked.

Chapter 8: Time Management and Burnout

Directors have a lot of things they need to be keeping track of at one time, and oftentimes you will be floating around and helping out different areas of production. All of these tasks can easily become overwhelming or be forgotten unless you find a system that works for you!

Tip #1: Keep a to-do list in your sight at all times! If you're easily forgetful like me, this will be a lifesaver when it comes to remembering what you have and have not done yet!
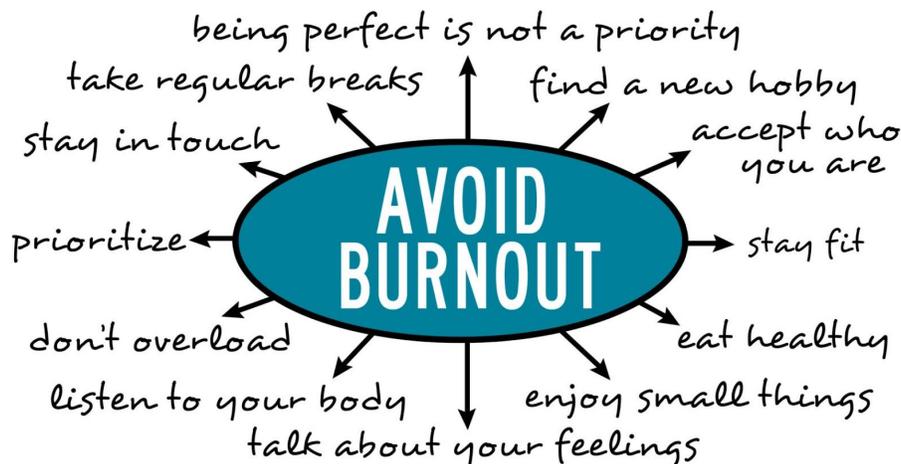
Tip #2: Prioritize tasks that are more important to your deadlines and team and do them before the others.

Tip #3: Be aware of your pipeline! Oftentimes all of your work will need to be passed down to another team later and it's important to meet deadlines to avoid putting other teams behind.

Tip #4: As a director, you won't have much for your portfolio after graduation since you most likely won't be as specialized as your other teammates. This means that you should dedicate some of your own free time to building up your own portfolio outside of class.

Tip #5: ALWAYS reserve some time for yourself and the things you love to do outside of school, if you can. Working hard is fine, but it's not worth burning out over.

Burnout is a very serious problem that affects too many students. It can be easy to fall into if you don't take the steps to ensure your own happiness. NOTHING is worth losing your passion over. Do what you need to to remind yourself and team of this as you step into your role.

Chapter 9 : Representing Your Film

As a director you are essentially the voice of your film and team. When you apply for film festivals, it will be you and your co-director's pictures and names appearing underneath the submissions. Because of this, it is important that you represent your film well.

- Be aware of what you post online, who you associate yourself with, and what your online image is. (*this applies to both the films' account and your personal account*)
- Take the opportunity to network with others, promote your film, and be vigilant of opportunities that may arise both for you, and your teammates.

There are many ways to do this, but being prepared for when opportunity knocks and advocating for your teammates whenever possible is always important. Making sure you are representing yourself well online can make all of the difference when it comes to promotion, fund raising, and networking!

Chapter 10 : Not All Heroes Wear Capes

In conclusion, being a director is not easy, but it can be an incredibly rewarding and educational experience. Taking the appropriate measures to be aware of yourself and evolve as you make mistakes takes resilience and the courage to admit when you're wrong.

When things get dire, keep this in mind:

- Your team looks to you for guidance because you *are* good at what you do.
- You are worth more than your contribution to the film.
- Making mistakes is natural, nobody expects you to be perfect.

I hope this resource is helpful for any current or aspiring directors! Feel free to reach out to me on discord at any time for advice or help with anything in the future, I am open to talking any time!

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