

All Roles Are Not Created Equal

- Do you search the internet far and wide looking for job opportunities for your child?
- Do you feel strongly that it is your contribution to your child's career?
- Do you do this in conjunction with, or despite the help of your agent?

In the past, this business generally had a natural order of progression. Someone new to the business was going to work those jobs that were meant for someone new. As parents we had to worry about safety (in the traditional sense), schooling, and pay. As your child's career progressed, so did your understanding of the business – some of the words, the terms, the timing. No one starts off knowing everything.

However, with the advent of technology (camcorders, internet, and screen caps) we are in a different world now. It is a fact. That makes it much harder for us, as parents, to be able to be knowledgeable enough to recognize what is a normal business practice and what is not. We applaud the internet sites that allow us a glimpse into the world of casting notices that were traditionally not available to us. But it's a slippery slope. The problem is there are no regulations, no way to determine what is legitimate and what is not. In Los Angeles there are certainly sites that are mainstream – Actors Access, LA Casting (Casting Networks), and NowCasting – each with their own levels of screening process for the jobs they post. After that – it gets ugly. I know someone will write and talk about the great job they found on an alternative casting site, but that is not the point. The point is that parents have got to put into play some method of self-screening. We must always remember that we are a parent first, and a career facilitator for our child second.

The first crucial step in "self-screening" of a project starts when you find a casting notice and you decide to submit your child for that job. I'm going to just adopt the old fire routine and suggest you Stop, Drop, and Roll – Stop the email or letter you're about to send, Drop whatever is promised in the casting and Roll that role around in your head. Does it all make sense? Any red flags? Among red flags – are there terrible spelling or grammatical errors? Is there anything that hits your "Mom Radar"? Think about the end market for the project. Is there potential for exploitation either personally or financially? If so, skip it altogether or investigate further.

The next crucial step in 'self-screening' of a project is to remove all adoration, praise, attention, and "we picked you" stuff for you child. Say what? That's the good stuff, right? As parents we very much like to hear positive things about our child. It's that very thing, however, that makes parents easy targets and vulnerable. A stranger saying something good about your child CAN NOT influence your decision about working with them. This is really difficult –but absolutely critical. They can praise your child for the work they've done later, but praise out the gate – especially just from a picture, etc. you need to wonder why. Don't crave it – save it.

Thirdly, apply the same criteria to this business as you would any other. If you need a plumber at your house do you look for one in the yellow pages? Do you look for affiliations in the professional plumbing associations? Do you check better business bureau? Or do you look for a sign someone taped to a telephone pole and call them first? The business' who advertise in the traditional manner are saying they take their business seriously. There is some type of training or experience behind them. The business who stuck a sign on a pole probably doesn't have as much training or

All Roles Are Not Created Equal

experience but decided to be a plumber. It doesn't mean business B isn't a good plumber – but their business model makes them a higher risk. Now apply that to allowing a stranger (or several of them) to be around your child. Shouldn't the 'bar' be a little higher than what we would set for our plumbing?

In our world, there is no reason for someone who is legitimately offering a job opportunity to not utilize one of the more professional services. If they don't – and instead post something on Craig's List, Explore Talent, One Model Place, MySpace etc. You need to ask yourself why they did that. They made a business choice. Did they not know any better? They made a decision to purposely market their job on the internet "telephone pole". That immediately increases their risk. Remember, the telephone pole plumber might be good, but they got risky. It's the same with casting. Where you see it, where they put it, is definitely a critical factor in weighing risk.

After initially contacting someone about a job, if their 'requests' of you or your child seem odd or unreasonable to you, they probably are. Don't send specialized pictures of your child dressed the way they want. They get a professional headshot to deal with and that is it. Don't let promises of the future success of the project make you believe it is so. Talk is cheap and easy. You and your child should handle yourselves professionally and expect no less from anyone you work with.

As mentioned earlier, a few years ago you worked with someone not so professional and maybe it was a bad day, you didn't get a copy of the project, or you didn't get paid as promised. You were physically there, of course, and protected your child physically. Today, the risks that come with someone 'playing Hollywood' and advertising a project that doesn't exist, or requesting multiple photos of your child, or purporting to be someone they are not is very real. Who we allow to have access to our child, as well as images of them, is critical. The likelihood that your child will be exploited in some way is very high.

As parents, we all want to do what is best for our children. The pursuit of a career in the industry – or even just the experience of trying it regardless of the success - can be fun, rewarding, and memorable. It's important that you don't expose your child to unnecessary risks. Stop, Drop, and Roll.

If you have any questions, problems, suspicions about a project – please feel free to contact us at www.BizParentz.org, we get many emails each day. We, as an organization, contact many of these people and either offer assistance in the correct way to do it, or confront them and they magically disappear. We know like many crimes we will never completely eradicate this. But when parents stop accepting so little, the legitimate people will have to change their business model and those who had ulterior motives will know it's not as easy as it used to be. We all need to work together to protect our children from those who purposely wish to harm and exploit them.

A quick reminder about BizParentz - We are a non-profit organization founded by Mom's of child actors and we provide advocacy, business education and support for families, like us, in the industry. This Foundation was formed out of us seeing the need for parents to have some type of organization where we could educate each other about current events in the industry. We don't talk about casting or individual

All Roles Are Not Created Equal

projects, but rather the common business information (work permits, bank accounts, and taxes) that affect us all.

Almost a year ago, the pedophile presence in our industry situation landed right at our feet. Each having encountered a few unexplained problems along the way – we felt we had to really look at what was going on and why. After a year of intense research and investigation – we have done seminars, interviews, and have created many documents of information on our website (www.bizparentz.org) on this subject matter. We have been successful in getting some inappropriate behavior on eBay stopped. The state of California has a law (AB2072) in the works that pertains directly to kids in the entertainment industry and the people who work with them because this sex offender problem has gotten to be so bad. Together, we are making a dent.

Lastly, if you chose to market your child on any of the less than mainstream sites - you need to up your screening process. Of all of the questionable projects we've researched they almost 100% sought out their victims (talent) from websites like Explore, etc. It's incredibly risky to even be there. It's almost like you put your child's picture on the telephone pole. :- (It doesn't make them look professional within the industry either.