



The Mailroom: Hollywood History from the Bottom Up

David Rensin

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From veteran Hollywood writer David Rensin comes this one-of-a-kind account of what goes on inside Hollywood's secret training camp: the mailroom. Featuring personal accounts from legends such as David Geffen, Barry Diller, Bernie Brillstein, and Mike Ovitz among others, readers are taken on a trip through glamour and humiliation, lousy pay and incredible perks, killer egos and a kill-or-be-killed ethos, in which mailroom trainees at top talent agencies do anything they can to get ahead. The kids in The Mailroom have done it all: from hanging out with Elvis to delivering a senior agent's urine sample to the doctor; from crashing the Academy Awards ceremony to hoping to deliver more than just the mail to sexy actresses' homes. Full of revealing stories and delicious dish, The Mailroom is not only a non-stop engrossing read, but a crash course taught by experts on how to succeed in Hollywood through hard work, shrewd manipulation, and a hell of a lot of nerve. David Rensin travels behind the scenes and through sixty-five years of show-business history to tell the real stories of the marvelous careers that began, and in some cases ended, in the mailroom. Anyone who believes in the merit of hard work and wants to get ahead in business will want to read this book.

The Mailroom: Hollywood History from the Bottom Up Details

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From Reader Review The Mailroom: Hollywood History from the Bottom Up for online ebook

Marcus Gorman says

Repetitive, self-serving, and not nearly as fascinating as the interviewed agents think their stories are. I'm not sure why I'm surprised.

Edit: I picked this up again and read the second half, and am promoting my ratings from 2 to 3 stars. Once the self-congratulation parade ends, it becomes a much better and funnier book about the horrors hoisted upon the members of the mailroom. But it's still very repetitive.

Susan Williams says

Funlll

What made Ivy League educated young people want to slave in the mail room for ungodly hours for barely sustainable wages, be screamed at constantly, cater to the whims of some very eccentric people, make deliveries in all hours of the day and sometimes night, run demeaning errands and in their spare time, read and "cover" scripts for the powers that be? Well, for the chance to be entertainment agents, to make piles of money and hobnob with the stars. This is the story as told by the successful ones like David Geffen and Mike Orvitz about what it took and really why you had to start there. It was a postgraduate course in how to be a winner in Hollywood and New York. The book covers it all from the early days to post 2000 with entertaining vignettes based on many many interviews. This seems to have been a labor of love by the author and it shows. You will laugh at some of the antics and learn some great tips about how to get ahead in this industry and perhaps anywhere.

Aimee Von arx says

Really fun. I recommend this book to anyone who wants to learn about how the industry works because the book gives insight about the beginning of entertainment from the point of view of people such as Lou Weiss, David Geffen, Bernie Brillstein etc. with very identifiable, personable, real-life tales. It's fun for anyone. You can skim through it too because it gets kind of redundant. There are some "gold" stories in this book.

Sergio GRANDE says

Do not be too quick to turn over to the first page. You'll be missing the cover which is probably the most interesting part of this book. The rest is slow and often boring.

Nobody cares about the recollections of a guy who was a mid-level agent at William Morris in the '70s and left to become a literary agent elsewhere. And there's too many of those stories.

Nate says

A nice little anthropology of stories from the time people spent in the mailroom at all different agencies in all different decades. Paints kind of a somber view of the industry in terms of the rampant sexism, and at times feels like an episode of Mad Men. People really lie, cheat and steal their way to the top. Incredible. Could never get away with half this stuff today.

Stephen- Craig says

At age 20, having failed out of school, I tore out the pages designated "Music Publishers" from the Yellow Pages book in the phone booth at the corner of Sunset and Doheny and ended up in the mailroom at Warner Bros. Music for less than "minimum wage"! Because of my tenacity, in six months got on the Professional Staff (song pluggers), and in three years became the general manager, for the next 9+ years....Opening up my world to the fantasy of meeting and working with every major recording artist, songwriter, and "mover and shaker" of the 60's through the 90's and onward.....! I loved this book....It was like going back through "memory lane", but with a tour guide. I recognized and knew many of them...often laughed out loud...and many I still do business with today. But now I know where they "really came from" ..And in many cases this is our "common cord"....LOL ! If you are interested in being in the entertainment industry, I highly recommend this book.....A touch of the "stories behind" the successes we see today in this industry. It also emphasizes how important it truly is and has been to learn a business "from the bottom up". Few in the entertainment biz have had the luxury of this experience. Many today are graduates from colleges that taught "music business" or "entertainment business".....The problems in the business today are systemic of this anomaly....You can't teach the entertainment/music business. It comes from your heart...you are born to do it and it takes over your life and becomes your life, or you are in the wrong place ! I do feel that though David's book is "insightful" and enlightening, and many time down right "funny", I felt it could have gone farther....Or maybe it was only my experiences that were as crazy and outlandish, as they were....Definitely a "Good Read" !

Joanna says

Anecdotes are amusing if not all too believable (e.g. someone gets hired for being a non-Jew since all the Jews in the mailroom are out for the holidays). Entertaining read for those who enjoyed the film "The Devil Wear's Prada" and/or those who have worked at the bottom of the food chain in Corporate America. It's fun to be a slave to the powerful and be hazed by bottom feeders a la Greek system.

Danielle says

(3.4/5)

Alex says

I picked up this book on a trip down the rabbit hole that began with Jerry Weintraub's memoir. Since then, I've been fascinated with Hollywood history, and with the mailroom being the base of it all, it only made sense to read about the history from its origin. Although this book is a long one, and it took me FOREVER to finish, it's super interesting and filled with insight and lessons.

mikeramirez03 says

This book was my bible while I was working in the Mailroom at UTA.

Kara Martin says

Really interesting - hard to keep up though -

I gained an understanding of the entertainment industry and reasons why 'Left Coast' people are so different from us.

People in LA would recognize the names more than I but overall a good book to digest for anyone who even remotely deals with movies and entertainment.

Rebecca says

This book was a tomb. It detailed the history of the mailroom program that most Hollywood agencies use today in filling employment opportunities as agents, etc. It was told in first person and quite interesting. Even though I work in "the industry" I don't know much about this program as I don't know much about that side. I do behind the scenes stuff, but more on the actual film side and not on the actor side. It was interesting to see all the changes in people, how it changed from a person on the street to a real "you gotta know someone" club and their move from NYC to LA as well. A definite read for all those interested in any aspect of the industry, just to get a more well rounded knowledge of it all.

Natasha874 says

Since I work in a talent agency here in NYC, I just had to read this book. It is the perfect book to read if you are in the entertainment industry or trying to get into. It's choke full of interviews of current and past employee's experience of working at William Morris Agency. You can basically open up the book anywhere and start reading. Some of the stories are laugh out loud funny. Definitely recommend!

Allison says

Very inspirational book with a lot of fantastic stories. Many were funny, some were intimidating, and some

were a little scary - can people really be so vicious and hold grudges? But it was a great glimpse into how hard the truly-driven people work to get to the top, and it affected me greatly.

There were many memorable stories, but my favorite quote came from Sam Haskell: "I believe, philosophywise, in the following: We spend the first couple of decades of our lives trying to figure out who the hell we are. Some people never find out. They keep searching and searching and searching. Or they'll be different people with everyone. Never any consistent presentation of who they are. But if we can realize by our mid-twenties who we are, we have to ask ourselves this question: Do we *like* who we are? If the answer is yes, then we should spend the rest of our lives maintaining who we are."

Chris says

This book is the epitome of what Hollywood work life is all about. It's about guts, risk-taking, and in-your-face action. The Mailroom is about all those who went through the trainee programs at the top talent agencies in America. The joke about the trainee program is that people have passed up going to Harvard, Ivy Leagues or Law/MBA school just to be in the program. Most people who don't know anything about the industry would say that that is the stupidest thing a person can do, but then again, those people don't know anything about the entertainment industry, and it shows by their comment. The chance to work in any mailroom for a talent agency is so small that for anyone given the opportunity, they should take it, and if they survive (because it is 100 times harder than any Ivy League or Law/MBA program out there) there are untold riches that lie ahead. Now the word rich might mean money to most but I use it to mean that you will have access to so many opportunities, which most of the time you create for yourself, because you are now at the top of the program.

To give you a background on the author of this review, I have worked in the Film and TV industry in all different aspects and have even considered applying to a trainee program. I already know how hard it is to just work in the industry. It seems that this is really the only solid way of getting into the system. All other routes are a hit and miss type thing. I was amazed at how easy it is to make a deal, but you have to know how to talk with people and connect with them. But more importantly, you have to have the guts to be able to walk up or call anyone and get what you want. That is how Hollywood really works. It's that in-your-face action that you need to have in order to make it in the business. So anytime you see a celebrity on the red carpet, try looking for their assistant off to the side; you can only imagine the hell they have been through in just that day in getting their boss there.

For anyone who wants to work in the industry, read this book; for anyone wanting to know what the industry is like, read this book; for anyone wanting to know why it is so hard to break into this industry, read this book. What Mr. Rensin has done here is complied interviews with hundreds of people who have gone through the mailroom program at various agency and written it in a way that shows a progression of the program over time and what it was like. The work that a trainee had to do in the 1970s was probably more work than one today, but that doesn't mean the work is any easier. What an agent has to do today is probably harder in terms of finding talent worth representing than 20 years ago, all because of the internet, social media, YouTube, and blogs. This book will explain what a normal day is like for a trainee, what are some of the issues and hassles you have to put up with day-in and day-out.

The reason this program is harder than going to Law school or graduate school is that in graduate or law school, your professor isn't always yelling at you and trying to break you down all the time. It's both a mental and physically challenging experience and the reason for that is, if you cannot handle the pressure of just

pushing paper and delivering mail and taking calls, how the hell are you suppose to manage people's careers? And that is what makes this one of the hardest programs to get into and survive in. No graduate school, undergrad, Law school, MBA school will be able to teach close to what a trainee program can. And just to give you perspective, most people who do apply to get in, majority of them already have Law, Ivy league, Masters, and MBA degrees and so if you plan to apply, that is who you are competing with.

The mailroom is a psychological game, and movies like "Swimming with Sharks," add some humor and visual look to the experience, but not every trainee program is like that. "Jerry Maguire" comes close to what an agency is like. Yes, you may get a boss that tells you on your first day that their job is to break you down any chance they get, and they do that because if you are an agent in a meeting and a person is trying to play mind games with you and you're not able to pick up on it, you might cost your talent a whole lot of money, or you might end up losing money for your agency. It's all about power plays in Hollywood and the only people who are able to do that all day long are people who can handle the mind games, the power plays, the constant meetings with studios and clients. If you break down every time or feel hurt because someone yelled at you, then you are not cut out for this industry.

So why do people put themselves through this kind of nightmarish hell? Because the rewards are immense. The road of the trainee usually goes something like this

-Trainee Program (Mailroom)

-Assistant

-Junior Assistant

-Junior Agent

-Agent

-Anywhere in Hollywood (most go on to run major studios, run their own talent agency, become producers/writers or become major studio executives calling all the shots after that). Understand though that each level is at best a 2 year stint, but again, it's Hollywood, some have been able to jump the ladder and go from trainee to Junior Agent in less than a year all because they were great with people and could handle the pressure from their boss and the industry.

After you've made agent and learned the industry enough to know that everyone knows your name, you can do anything you want. By this time if you racked up a high profile client list, your making in the millions on each of your clients, so if you have 20 to 30 high profile clients (aka. celebrities) your bank account is at least 7 figures all the time because agents make 10 to 15% of what their clients make, not to mention speaking engagements, special appearances, etc.

So this is all good and well but what is the life of a trainee really like? Here is where it gets even more interesting. You come in around 7, 5 if you want to get a head start on things, sort the mail and deliver it (most agents like having their mail on their desk before they walk in, and most get there around 7 or 8), if you're an assistant you're already there before your boss sorting the voicemail messages, email, and setting up all the conference room meetings with food and agendas, and you do this all day long, talking to celebrities, clients, and studios. Most don't leave until 8 or sometimes 11 or 12, depending on if there is an important package that needs to be delivered right away. If you are one who gets to leave early like 7 or 8, then you go out to any party that you can attend (which as a trainee, assistant, or junior agent that is all you are trying to get yourself into after work because your job is your life and vice versa). This helps to get your name out there and to find talent worth representing in the future. Then after you get home from any party you've been to which is usually around 2 or 3, sometimes 4, you back in the office by 7 or 8 ready to do it all over again.

So in the scope of all things, getting a Law or MBA degree is nothing compared to what the mailroom has in

store for you but if you should make it, and only a few do (understand that thousands apply to all the different mailroom programs out there every year, if not, every month), then you can go on to run Hollywood and decide what movies/TV shows people get to watch. In my opinion, read this book with care and study it. Even if you don't plan on getting into Hollywood, the wisdom that comes out of this book about how to deal with people and understand the system can help you in any profession.

For those that do work in a talent agency, even if it's a small one, the tips and tricks that this book has will save you in your job. You will be referencing what someone did to help you get ahead. It will show what agents are looking for and what you need to do to get yourself ahead from everyone else. Even if you think that what some people did in his book are mean, it's just what it takes to get ahead of this industry. This is why most people don't make it because it is VERY competitive and just when you think your friends with someone, they will be happy to sell you out if it means getting promoted. If you feel mad or sad or angry about that and you think that is unfair or not right, then this industry is not for you. You wouldn't last one day, as some people in this book explained. Yes, it's that hard.

So, you still think you got what it takes to be an agent now? If you said yes, go and apply to all the agencies right now and read this book while your waiting for a response, because at least one or two WILL call you back. Good Luck! You'll need it.
