

# QUIET FLAME

**FILM. STUNTS. MARTIAL ARTS.**

One of the ways that Quiet Flame sets itself apart from other similar organizations (and one of the reasons that those who train with us have more career success) is because over the years we have established a personal code of conduct.

While we want all of our members to feel free to be themselves and to express themselves honestly, film sets are very hierarchical. They are filled with unspoken rules; especially Hollywood sets. From the moment you step on set, everything you do is quietly being observed by those around you. Regardless of how talented you are, breaking these rules can result in your not getting callbacks. Knowing and respecting these rules, on the other hand, will do wonders to earn you credibility among everyone on set, even when your experience may be light or your performance may not be at its best.

Physical training and camera training aside, a huge part of what we do at QF is teach these rules. You will be expected to read this document and to answer a short quiz to make sure that you understand the content. This will give you a basis for how the world of stunts works, and the nature of these rules and the rest will be taught to you in our classes as we go.

Our code of conduct is designed to guide you through 3 things:

- 1) While we are training
- 2) While you are on set
- 3) While you are building your career

## **I. WHILE WE ARE TRAINING**

The following rules are designed to help our own training sessions run smoother and be more effective. Keep in mind however that half of your career success is going to come from learning how to network with the industry power-players, and, for things like stunts and fight choreography, a lot of your work will come from the people that you train with. Stunt jobs will almost always come via direct contact with a stunt coordinator (or via an introduction to a stunt coordinator via another stunt performer). That is actually how I got into my first Hollywood film.

Following these rules of conduct during training will do wonders to help impress the right people.

### **RESPECTING OTHERS**

- QF has a zero tolerance policy on matters of any kind of sexual harassment. Of course

when we are doing fight choreography some form of touching is inevitable; but anything that we deem inappropriate (to male or female members) will result in dismissal from our program with no refund.

- In holding to our ideals of QF being a safe and welcoming program for everyone, we also have a zero tolerance policy on discrimination by race, sex, gender identity, sexual preference and political orientation. Commentary on politics in the training space is strictly prohibited. It's fine to have a political opinion on things, but those opinions need to be left at the door. We are all here to train, support each other, and grow together, not tear each other down.

### SHOW UP AND SHUT UP

In line with Hollywood set protocols, and those of the United Stuntmen's Association's International Stunt School, QF training follows an informal code of conduct called "Show Up and Shut up". While this phrase may seem rude, it's important in a lot of ways.

1) **When you come to train, leave your opinions at the door, and come with an open-mind and empty cup.** Of course, we want to maintain a friendly environment, but excessive talking means you are cutting into both you and your partner's training time. Skill largely comes from repetition. The more time you are talking, the less time you or your partner are putting in that repetition. If you have something you want to explain to another member in-depth, wait till a break or after class. In class, keep conversation to a minimum and focused on the goals we are trying to accomplish for the day.

2) **DO NOT give your partners tips in class.** Leave that to instructors and/or legacy members, who have been at QF for at least 1 year or more. Getting advice from someone whose experience is only around the same level as your own often comes across more as condescending than helpful. And worse, if you are inexperienced, it could also be incorrect.

This is particularly the case when it comes to fight choreography as martial artists are usually very opinionated. (Which is one reason stunt coordinators don't like to hire them; they prefer gymnasts partially because they have no opinions on the matter and will simply do as they are told).

Previous martial arts experience can be helpful in learning fight choreography, but what is correct in one martial art may be incorrect in another. What's worse, if you are relatively new to fight choreography, advice on how to move martially may be counterproductive for fight choreography. Talking while running sets may irritate your partner and also takes time away from your partners' training. Come with only an empty cup.

3) **DO NOT encourage someone to do a stunt if they seem unsure of their ability to do it.** They need to make the decision that they are ready to try the stunt on their own. Pushing them before they are ready--even with good intention--could cause them to get seriously hurt or even killed. This is especially true for things like big wrecks or high falls. If they decide to go for it, clap afterwards. If they choose not to because they don't feel ready, clap for that too because they made the right decision.

## II. WHILE ON SET

The same mentality that we apply to training also works on set. When we train, we train as a team; and when we are on set, we work as a team. A film production is the ultimate team environment. Lighting is a team, Stunts is a team, Make-up is a team, Costume is a team, etc. The more of a team player you can be, the more you will get noticed. The rule of "show up and

shut up” applies the most strongly while you are on film sets.

1) **Master the skill of staying quiet on set.** It will do wonders for impressing the director and stunt coordinator and get you call-backs again and again. Excessive and/or loud talking on set only shows that you are inexperienced and/or unprofessional. In contrast with Japanese sets, Hollywood sets are generally pin-drop silent because every second on set costs tens of thousands of dollars. Applying this mentality to Japanese or even low-budget sets will do wonders for getting you noticed as a professional and getting you callbacks. Remember that a call back or a job introduction can come from absolutely anyone on set, and it’s your job to impress EVERYONE. My first job as a stunt coordinator came via a lighting guy.

When working on an NHK drama once, I was playing a character who was serious in nature and full of worry. In order to play that well on camera, I quietly kept to myself, and avoided the other actors so that a light or funny conversation wouldn’t pull me out of that mental space. Of course, I was polite and friendly to everyone who spoke to me, but I kept to myself, and just quietly worked on my character, while everyone else was laughing and joking. The director pulled me aside before we started shooting and asked me “You’re a professional at this, aren’t you?”. I responded “Yes, I am.” That night, he arranged a taxi home for me at the end of the shoot. As far as I know, I was the only one who had their own taxi at the end of the day. Of course, you can network and make friends, but do so quietly. And when the camera starts rolling, never make a sound unless it’s your job to.

2) **When you are on set, be where you are supposed to be, when you are supposed to be there.** It doesn’t matter if they don’t actually use you or not. You are being paid to be there and ready to go at a moment’s notice. That’s your job. Don’t EVER assume it’s okay to walk away from where you are asked to be. If you need to, check with your coordinator.

I had a friend who was hired as part of a stunt crew in a Chinese movie. He had been told to wait in a certain area. After a while, he got tired of waiting and left the area to go take a nap. A minute after he was gone Stunts was called in and they had to go find him. He didn’t just damage the credibility of the stunt coordinator for hiring someone who is unprofessional, he slowed down the production (i.e. it cost unnecessary money). I had the opportunity to speak to the stunt coordinator later and despite the fact that the stunt performer’s performance was good, the coordinator expressed doubt that he would hire the guy again. Remember, you do not just represent yourself, you represent all of us, and if it’s stunt work, the stunt coordinator as well.

3) **NEVER “correct” a fight choreographer or stunt coordinator.** EVER. When a coordinator has choreographed a fight, they have had to consider:

- safety
- the narrative of that fight
- the narrative of the overall story
- the camera angles,
- the lenses and camera it’s being shot on,
- the lighting and coloration
- or even the background scenery as the fight plays out

These are just to name a few. As such, there are things that go into their decision-making that you will be unaware of. In trying to be helpful you are more likely to be distracting or annoying, showing off your inexperience. If they ask what your skills are, then you can make a suggestion, or if you have a skill that seems useful you can say, “If you like, instead of \_\_\_ I can do \_\_\_.” (Ex, instead of a spinning kick, I can do a 720.) But other than that, the rule is always the same: Show up, shut up, do what you are told, and do it exceptionally well.

Even if you can do action or stunts, but you are hired as an actor, don't ask if you can do stunt work that day. That isn't your job on that particular day. Focus on the job you were brought in to do, and doing it well. If there is a chance to see the coordinator during down time, and away from set, you can always let them know you are a stunt or action person then, and ask if you can show them your reel for future work. i But under no circumstances should you try and do this while they are working or on set. you can always approach the coordinator (if he doesn't look busy) and say,

4) **DO NOT touch the items of other teams.** Even if you are trying to be helpful. Only stunt people touch Stunts' gear. PERIOD. The same goes for lighting, sound, costume, etc. If something seems wrong, go and get someone from that department and ask them to take a look. DO NOT try to fix it or touch it yourself.

5) **Treat prop weapons as if they are real.** ALWAYS treat prop weapons as if they are real, loaded, or dangerous. Even when it's obvious they are fake. This is a matter of adhering to set etiquette and showing that you are serious. Playing with prop weapons, or not taking them seriously is the sign of an amateur and someone with no experience. Beyond that, there have been times where people have been seriously injured or even killed by prop weapons before so they must always be treated with respect. It isn't just about set etiquette, it's also a matter of safety.

6) **When approaching the make-up room or trailer, knock first and say "stepping up".** Especially in a trailer, this can be important, because the make-up artist could be doing very precise work around someone's eyes, and if you suddenly step on the stairs, it could not just damage the artists' work, it could injure the eyes of the actor. Even if it's a room, follow the rule of etiquette and everyone will know you are a professional and not a newbie.

7) **Always be the person who folds up or returns your costume neatly.** It's a small thing, but it's a big thing. Costumes works very hard. They usually show up way before stunts or actors and they leave even later. It's just a matter of respect, and they notice if you do. Again, callbacks can come from anywhere.

### **III. IN YOUR CAREER**

In addition to how you carry yourself in your job, how you carry yourself in your career makes a huge difference in how far you can get. Here are some of the important points when it comes to stunts and action:

1) **DO NOT "fake it till you make it."** The rule of "fake it until you make it" may get you hired for a job, but it may also get you fired just as quickly. Especially when it comes to stunts.

Stunts are dangerous. And while good coordinators take every possible precaution, mistakes can mean the difference between life and death. Pretending to have more experience than you do, or saying that you can do something that you can't, can put you in a position to seriously hurt yourself or your other stunt players. I knew someone in the states who took a high fall job that they weren't ready for. When they jumped, they misstepped, missed the bag and died. It was their first job.

In Japan, a stunt man I work with had to do a fight scene with an inexperienced actor who said he "can do action". The actor said he knew the choreo well, so they could go full speed without much practice. During the fight, he punched the stuntman in the side of his head. The stuntman instantly lost sight in his left eye, and it never returned. This kind of accident can

happen within a stunt team too. This is the reason stunt people generally only want to work with people they know extremely well, why they form teams, and why they don't trust people who bounce around from team to team a lot.

**2) Be honest about your level of experience.** Stunt coordinators carry people's lives in their hands, and in the states there are only two ways someone earns the title of coordinator:

- They put in 500 days of experience as a stunt performer
- A well-known and respected coordinator whom they have worked with for a long time passes a coordinating job to them.

Despite this, it only takes one mistake for their career (or someone's life) to be over. As such, coordinators are generally risk averse, and very slow to trust people. A true stunt coordinator has years and years of experience, and no matter what you tell them, they will see how good you really are as soon as you move. If you come across as arrogant or overly confident (particularly when you don't have much experience), they will view you as high-risk and avoid using you. In the past, we have had people come to QF and after only a few lessons try to up-sell themselves as serious stunt performers, or worse, left our training calling themselves coordinators. This only ruins their credibility and damages ours as well, particularly since all the local stunt coordinators came up as stunt performers together and have known each other for decades. If you are a problem for one stunt coordinator, they will let the other stunt coordinators know. Furthermore if you say you are a coordinator yourself and they've never seen or heard of you as a stunt performer, that is usually a red flag to them.

Always simply be honest about your level of experience. If you still move well enough, and are easy to work with, they will use you. If you do a good job, you can earn their trust and they will respect you enough to call you back again. However, if you lie to them you are ending your relationship with them before it even starts.

**3) Don't give yourself fancy titles before you earn them.** As aforementioned, within any local area, be it Tokyo, New York, LA, and to a degree, internationally, all of the stunt coordinators all know each other. The reason for this is because they have all worked together as stunt performers for years or even decades before becoming coordinators. As such, the last thing you want to do is to give yourself the title of "Stunt Coordinator" or "Action Director" before you have really earned it. While no one would say so directly, most coordinators would distance themselves from someone who gives themselves titles with very little actual experience to back it up, again, because it's dangerous.

About 5 years into my career, I thought it would be cool to start moving towards being an action director, so I decided to make business cards that said that I was one. Not too long after that, I ran into a stunt coordinator whom I was working with regularly at the time, and I handed him my new card. He looked at me, looked at the card, handed it back and never called me again.

In another instance, a graduate of the ISS in the states, had started calling himself a coordinator after only about two years of local work; and another coordinator in the area, called the ISS to complain about him even though it had been years since he graduated. Even though I have been a Stunt Coordinator multiple times myself, I still just use the title "Stunt Performer". If someone asks me to coordinate stunts, and I am confident that I can do so safely, I will. But I don't sell myself that way. If you can design and create awesome fights and stunts once you have experience, people will notice and will hire you for that. Let your work speak for itself. Don't try to brand yourself with a fancy title before you've really earned it.

### **CONCLUSION:**

While all of these rules seem like a lot to remember, at the end of the day, they are all expressions of the same simple ideas. Be a team player. Be a good person. Be modest and easy to work with. If you can remember to do those 3 things, then you will be light-years ahead of all of the people who don't, regardless of whether they may be more physically talented or not.

Good luck, and I hope you enjoy your training at QF. While we all have our goals, hopes, and dreams to continually look forward to, the most important thing is that you always enjoy the process. The journey is what life is really all about, and oftentimes, happiness doesn't just come from looking back on goals you have achieved. The greatest happiness comes when you are in the thick of the fight... but you know you are winning.

Looking forward to training with you.  
Chuck Johnson