

# ZEN AND THE ART OF BEING PREPARED

**MERRI D. HOWARD'S NEEDS AREN'T FANCY, BUT THEY ARE HIGHLY SPECIFIC AND ABSOLUTELY ESSENTIAL.**

Merri D. Howard has spent the better part of her career working on appointment television, from *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (line producer) and its spinoffs—*Star Trek Voyager* (producer) and *Star Trek Enterprise* (supervising producer)—to such Shonda Rhimes signature shows as *Scandal* and *For the People* (co-executive producer).

And during the pandemic lockdown, two shows that Howard co-executive produced—*Little Fires Everywhere* and *The Morning Show* (season 2)—kept viewers enthralled in their living rooms for weeks on end.

Overall, Howard describes her producer role as “the ship’s engineer overseeing everything production-related and assisting in the creative—interfacing with the studio and production team, cast, publicity, marketing and whatever else comes in play. My job is to keep the wheels turning, and the ship moving forward, no matter how rough the seas. Except these days, instead of an oil can and a wrench, for me it’s a cell phone in one hand, the schedule and budget in the other.”

Howard’s dance card as a co-executive producer continues to be full, with the romantic comedy *Your Place or Mine*, starring Reese Witherspoon, due out next year from Netflix; and season 1 of *The Last Thing He Told Me*, based on the best-selling novel by Laura Dave, also slated to air in 2023, on Apple TV+.

Howard approaches her job with the precision of a dentist, and likens her tool kit to a novelist’s writing tools, “all assembled properly to craft a tale.” She says that over the years her needs “have grown in specificity, to the point where I’m approaching a sort of Zen perfection. And what I need and like isn’t just desired, it’s required.”

## THE BASICS

- Moleskin Lined Paper Notebooks, freshly embossed for each show.
- Mechanical pencils
- 1 black ballpoint pen
- 1 red ballpoint pen



### WHY GO OLD-SCHOOL WITH PEN & PAPER?

"It's what I'm comfortable using. It's physical. It feels good in the hand. I like to touch and feel the paper, have one show's notes all in the same place, crossing off and cross-referencing. They look good, come in great colors, fit in my bag, and I can personalize."

### OTHER ITEMS OF NOTE

- Colored, coated paperclips to hold:
  - › One line schedule of timelines
  - › Staff & crew list
  - › Call sheet of the day
- Plastic sleeves for each episode, including:
  - › Script
  - › Budget
- Mini black binder clips
- iPhone on a bandolier ("so I never have to search for a missing cell phone")
- Laptop Mac with Movie Magic Scheduling and Zoom
- Wet Ones
- Purell
- Evolvetogether brand black face masks or blue surgical mask
- Water bottle
- Lip gloss
- Hand lotion
- A spacious backpack to hold it all

### WHY MOVIE MAGIC?

"Simply, it's the industry standard, allowing me to do different versions of the schedule, making our work very efficient."

### PICK-ME-UPS

- Healthy fruit snacks in the morning
- Chocolate in the afternoon
- Coffee with Sweet'N Low and half & half ("prepared for me at 4 p.m. daily by our well-trained craft service crew")

### DRESSED FOR SUCCESS

Lululemon joggers  
Adidas tennis shoes

### LIFELINE

"And a speed dial with those who matter most in my life." ■

