

ONE ON ONE

OPEN LINE

**A CLOSE WORKING RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN POST AND LINE PRODUCERS
BENEFITS THE QUALITY OF THE PRODUCT—AND ITS BOTTOM LINE.
SO SAY AMANDA KAY PRICE AND DANIELLE BLUMSTEIN—TWO PRODUCERS
WHO HAVE PROVEN THE VALUE OF OPEN COMMUNICATION
DURING EVERY PHASE OF PRODUCTION.**

WITH CONTRIBUTIONS BY WHITNEY FRIEDLANDER

There's a paradox about working in a medium rooted in communication. When someone is busy multitasking and thinking two steps ahead, they can become very bad at communicating. And a disconnect between production and postproduction can cost a film or TV series time, money, or worse, a missed air date.

Acknowledging this, *Produced By* sat down with postproduction producer Amanda Kay Price (Prime Video's *Daisy Jones and the Six*; Hulu's *Little Fires Everywhere*) and unit production manager and line producer Danielle Blumstein (Prime Video's *Harlem*; Netflix's *Vampires vs. the Bronx*). The two developed a symbiotic relationship while working on the Netflix horror series *Archive 81*, creator Rebecca Sonnenshine's adaptation of the supernatural podcast of the same name about an archivist tasked with reassembling "found footage" of a grad student's documentary project about an apartment building that burned down.

Blumstein and Price's kinship is especially interesting because the series was filmed during the COVID lockdown—they never met in person during the production. So that production, naturally, came with some life curveballs. But according to Price, it also taught them "how good it can be" to have the departments in sync.

"I always say that the first three people hired on a show as soon as scripts have been completed should be the showrunner or head writer, the line producer and the post producer," Price says. "Because the line producer's job is to get the show started and filmed and the post producer's job is to get it to air. Without discussion together, we don't accomplish either of those things."

In their conversation, which has been edited and condensed for clarity, Price and Blumstein talk about what makes a successful collaboration between the two worlds and whether, or how, industry-wide concerns like block shooting, budgets and AI affect their jobs.



A still from *Archive 81*, the Netflix series on which Price (post producer) and Blumstein (UPM) collaborated.

CLARIFYING ROLES

BLUMSTEIN: The line producer and the UPM are not just two sides of the same coin, but also the right hand and the left hand. They don't work without each other. They're so closely intertwined. The line producer is concerned with the broad scope of the project, and fulfilling the creative requests of the creator, showrunner, writer, and director, within the financial needs of the studio. The production manager works in tandem with the line producer. "Here's the budget. Go and talk to costumes, talk to the prop department, figure out what the technical department heads need." A lot of the day-to-day, on-the-ground issues.

Those two perspectives need each other. Your production manager needs to know what's happening: big picture, budget, what's coming down in the next episode and the next schedule—conversations that they might not be involved in. And the line producer needs the production manager to know how it's going on set and how the departments are running with their budgets.

PRICE: As a post producer, I'll tell you what I don't get seen as. I don't get seen as a department head, even though that's exactly what I am. I'm the circus wrangler. My job is the one role, besides the showrunner, that is involved with every single department. There's not a department that I don't talk to at any given moment on any given thing.

WHEN POST COMES IN

PRICE: It used to be when the director says cut, then it becomes a post thing. That is not how it is any longer. It hurts post and hurts the show when post is brought on too late. By that I mean traditionally the post producer would start two weeks before principal photography. The post producer needs to start as soon as the line producer starts, or a couple weeks after—so like six, eight, 10 weeks in—because these



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shows are so massive now. If I don't know where the bodies are buried, I can't do my job and the show will suffer.

No one thinks about post until it's too late. The way to combat that is to bring the post producer on earlier. Two weeks before production, before we start rolling

cameras, is when the production meeting happens. At the production meeting, things have already been decided.

The production meeting is not the first time we've all gotten together; it's the last time we get together before cameras roll. To bring on the post producer that late is not helpful to the prep process.

On *Archive 81*, I was brought on 10 weeks before filming. I was part of the process of looking at directors and looking at directors of photography. This is as it should be. This is all a creative decision, and we should work together as a team.

Archive 81 was a scary show on Netflix. It was a very post-heavy show, and not just in terms of VFX. What was so great about Danielle and what worked so well were conversations like, "Mandi, we have 12 song versions to choose from," or "We have this video playback." I was very much involved in this process from the beginning. As soon as they were finding out information, I was finding out information. We had an open channel communication from day one.

The ideal scenario for the production pipeline is that we start at the same time so that we're getting the information at the same time.

BLUMSTEIN: Involving Mandi in the prep process was incredibly helpful—including her in what meetings are happening, what scouts are happening, and what read-throughs are happening—so she can decide when and where it is important for her to be involved.

PRICE: I don't like meetings. But I find it incredibly beneficial that I'm sitting in them because I know what happens when I'm not there. When I'm not there, things tend to be very expensive. All of our jobs are as problem solvers, but when it comes to me too late, there's no one else to solve the problem, because production has wrapped. Things just get put on my plate.

Behind the scenes
on *Archive 81*.



I keep seeing over and over again on various shows: “If I had just been there, this million-dollar problem would have been solved in a second.” I cannot express to you how much money is saved simply by me sitting in video village, because I’m looking at something completely different than what everyone else sitting at video village is looking for.

Hello Sunshine, which produced *Daisy Jones* and *Little Fires Everywhere*, has truly embraced this mentality. The post producer understands the continuity. My role understands where this piece of the puzzle fits into the puzzle we have. Especially nowadays—everyone’s block shooting, and block shooting only helps production. It is detrimental to post.

Say you do a two-episode block and shoot two episodes at one time. You automatically have to add 15 days to the post schedule because post is not getting the final scenes of the episode until the last day of the block. Whereas when we get the whole episode in seven days,

now we’re not getting it till day 13 or 14. So now we’ve got two episodes at any given time that are not fully done. But we have to keep the editing team on the whole time, and they also can’t be doing a different episode. So that means we have to hire a third person to come in and do the next block.

BLUMSTEIN: Other than the time that’s added on to your team because you don’t have a complete episode, are there any issues and challenges to block shooting, internally in the episodes, that you find come up on the post side?

PRICE: Continuity. I’m not an actor. But I can’t imagine being in four different time periods. That’s hard for the actor, and that comes across on screen. It comes across in their performance. It’s truly the excellent ones where it really is seamless.

There are also a lot more production fixes than there ever have been

because everyone’s in a rush and you only have a certain amount of time for costume changes.

BLUMSTEIN: Sometimes, just by virtue of the location or the actor’s availability, you do the best you can to make your components work as successfully as possible.

PRICE: That’s the perfect example of why post producer and line producer need to be in communication. Some of those things the post department can help out with. Like, “Don’t worry about snow. I can VFX some snow.” That’s a day saved just in snow continuity.

To this point: Oftentimes, the art director or the production designer and post work closely together. It’s the same tandem that it is with the line producer. There are things, especially with technology these days, that I have access to—whether it’s in the color bay or whether it’s VFX—that are just cheaper.

It saves production so much time if post just handles it.

The show I'm on now is a period piece that takes place in the 1800s. Our actor has pierced ears, and at that time African American slaves did not have their ears pierced. So the solution was to add ear makeup prosthetics. That requires more time in hair and makeup for this actor. Plus, because weather and the elements affected the prosthetic, the post budget has to accumulate funds that were not planned for because the prosthetics were not consistent. A problem that was the size of an ear piercing is now hundreds of thousands of dollars more because now there are continuity issues.

BLUMSTEIN: Do you think there's a situation where technology either advances so quickly or what you're able to do changes so quickly that production teams don't know what you're able to do?

PRICE: Sometimes people think that everything in post is expensive. They're not wrong; there's always a money cost to it. But something like that is so minuscule that it took more time and energy to do it on the production end than if someone had just asked the question, "Mandi, do you think post can take care of this?"

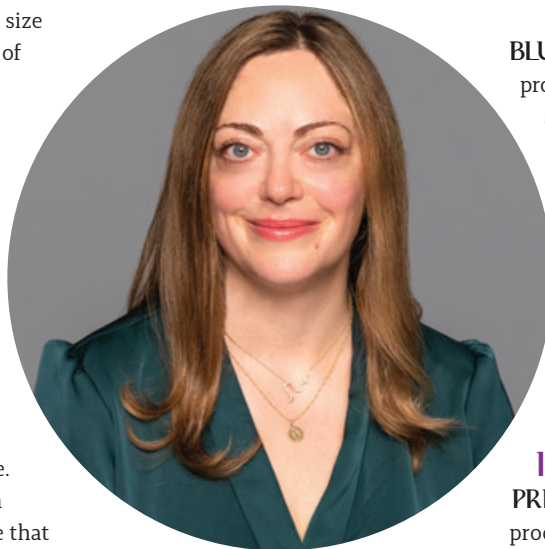
BLUMSTEIN: I remember on *Archive 81* going through the stages with that great VFX team we had and figuring out how we shoot something that's going to be manipulated. That teamwork helped solve whatever challenge was coming or that we needed to work through.

PRICE: I learned more about what a UPM and line producer does and how we can be connected from Danielle. So now that's what I look for in every show. And when I don't have that, I get frustrated, because I know what it's like to have it.

BLUMSTEIN: In our business, there's a lot of learning by experience and by doing and seeing what works.

ADDRESSING ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

PRICE: When we think of AI, we think of who it is going to replace. I don't think AI could ever replace a post producer because there's such a human element to the job. Things change in an instant due to creative decisions. I



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would love AI to take over my budget, but there's too much problem-solving that I have to do on a daily basis for AI to take over.

But I anticipate that AI is probably going to take over elements of my job. One of them is part of the prep. When I read a script, I'm doing something very different than what Danielle is doing when she's reading a script. I'm thinking, "Where are the musical elements? Where are the VFX scenes?" I can see how a computer could easily do a lot of that job.

BLUMSTEIN: I'm waiting for the AI program that can help break down a script into schedules and characters. I'm obviously not looking forward to AI taking over any positions. Film and television is such a wonderful collaborative effort. It's the spark of creativity that happens in those moments when you have people come together.

A MORE INCLUSIVE INDUSTRY

PRICE: There are about 10 Black post producers in all of Hollywood. I know that, because during the pandemic, we all met. Of those 10, six are women. We actually outnumber the male post producers. I'm 35, have been doing this job for seven years, and have only worked with older white men. Danielle was the first female UPM I've ever had in any of my shows as a post producer. *Little Fires Everywhere's* Merri Howard was the first female line producer I'd ever worked with.

BLUMSTEIN: For a long time, it was not as diverse an industry. From my experience, I feel like it has made a lot of strides. I think it continues to try and make more progress in terms of being inclusive and having diversity initiatives and mentorship programs. I've seen a lot of really positive changes that I hope will continue. ■