



Levin at the 2010 AFI Lifetime Achievement Awards with Michelle Harrison and Renannah Weinstein.

PHOTO BY JAMILLERS

## ORCHESTRATING POST

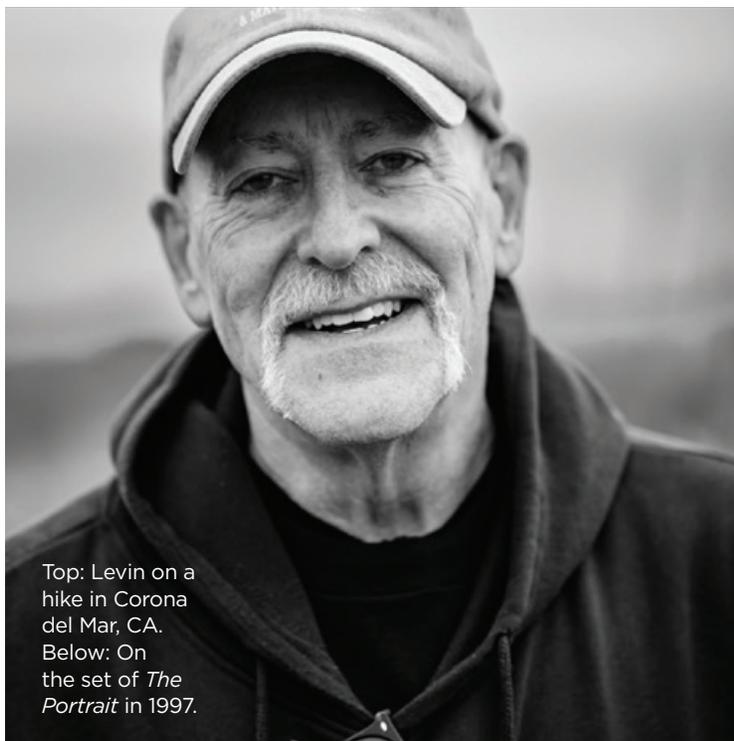
**VETERAN POSTPRODUCTION SUPERVISOR PAUL A. LEVIN SKILLFULLY TOGGLES CREATIVITY AND MANAGEMENT SKILLS AS HE WORKS WITH A CAST OF CREATIVE CHARACTERS TO DELIVER FILMS ON TIME AND ON BUDGET.**

INTRO BY KERI LEE

Starting as a production assistant on made-for-TV movies at CBS, Paul A. Levin explored every stage of production—from research during development to becoming the set PA during production, to the final phase, postproduction, where he thrived.

“In post, it was just the producer and me,” says Levin. “That’s where I learned everything, from editing to scheduling to music, titles, sound mix, ADR and VFX work.”

His hustle earned him respect. He was quickly bumped up to associate producer, with a growing reputation that led to a pivotal call from Orion Pictures. The caller was seeking a postproduction supervisor on a film, and Levin took the job. Five more films for Orion followed, laying the foundation for a rewarding career with credits such as *Sleepless in Seattle*, *The Sixth Sense*, *The Departed*, *Julie & Julia*, *Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom*, and *Rustin*.



Top: Levin on a hike in Corona del Mar, CA.  
Below: On the set of *The Portrait* in 1997.



PHOTOS BY HILLEL SACKSTEIN AND MICHELLE SOUZA



The postproduction crew of *The Fan* with director Tony Scott.

Today, from an office in New York City and various production facilities nearby, Levin orchestrates the myriad tasks and personalities involved in each phase of post to ensure that everything syncs up and ultimately delivers a film.

“It’s creative, and it’s managing,” Levin says. “And, sometimes, it’s being a psychologist, too.”

### Morning

Each day is unique. The first thing I do when I get up in the morning is check all the emails that came in overnight. I live outside of New York City and commute via train each day. On the train, I begin to organize the day ahead.

A typical day could start with talking to the studio in the morning, updating them on our schedule. Or checking in with the picture editorial staff to see what they need. If we are scoring or mixing, I will pop over to the stage on my way in to make sure the day is going as planned. No day is ever the same. It is always an adventure waiting to happen.

When I’m starting a project, one of my first tasks is to create a post schedule. This requires some creativity. It’s a puzzle that needs to be put together correctly. I make deals for sound, color timing, and visual effects, calculating costs and timelines. I need to account for all departments working together toward the same goal: finishing the project on time.

When I publish schedules, I always say, “These are measuring sticks.” Most times, they work out as planned; however, sometimes problems arise. There may be differences of opinion regarding cuts, visual effects or music cues. This all can have a domino effect. But I’ve always held the philosophy that we can make it work. We will figure it out, and we will get it done.

There’s also the cast of characters I deal with daily—the director, editor, editorial staff, producers, post accountants, composers, the sound and music crews, visual effects team and, of course, the studio executives. These are the players who take the film and mold and shape it into the finished project. This team of individuals becomes family by the end of each film. And each film and family is always unique and special in their own way.

### Afternoon

The exchange of creative ideas is most likely to fall into afternoon work. When you consider how many people there are in postproduction, it's not just coordinating among all these roles; it's coordinating with people in many locations.

I'm constantly checking in on the process and the overall progress. Creative changes can come up at any time, and when they do, I work with the director, editor and staff to incorporate them into our schedule and budget. My goal is to make sure this happens with little or no impact on our schedule.

Afternoons are when I do Zooms to check in with the studio and department heads. I am also on the phone daily with post accounting to go over cost reports and make sure the project is on budget. Additionally, I do a lot of in-person face time with the director and editorial staff to see how they are doing and find out if anything is needed or if there are any problems to solve.

If we have a mix going on, I visit the facility to see how it's progressing. I check in to make sure it's on schedule and that the music and sound teams have everything they need. I find it's best to be in the room together. I'm a people person, and that's what I like to do. Sometimes just giving the director and the editor a break from cutting to sit and talk about the process is good for everyone's mental state, and also benefits the project.

### Evening

I usually leave the office at a reasonable hour. I do a little decompression on the train. However, there's often still work to be done. I'll spend this time answering and sending emails, checking bids and deals from vendors, reviewing main and end title credits, reading a script, and fielding phone calls from the West Coast due to the time difference.

These conversations can cover any topic, from scheduling concerns to learning that there are additional notes from the studio that editorial will need to address immediately, to the biggest of them all: the release/drop date has changed.

In conclusion, when I decide to work on a film, it is because I have fallen in love with the script. If it's a great story, I want to be part of it. The passion I feel fuels the desire to get the movie made and finished.

Advances in technology have brought changes to the industry. In some cases, things have gotten easier, and in other cases, more complex. I still enjoy the work. No matter what the technology may be, the process hasn't changed—and it's still a good process for telling a story. ■



Levin on the red carpet at the New York members reception for the Academy Awards.



Levin working at his desk in New York.