



## TALENT AGENT JOBS AND HOW TO BECOME A TALENT AGENT

The worst part is listening to the stories agents told us. And told us. Everyone seems to have an "I got screwed by an agent" story and the hostility that agents face is not trivial. In reality, an agent has very little power to make or break any deal. An agent is a representative who advises her client in a certain area of expertise. Agents represent athletes, writers, models, actors, producers, performers and other celebrities. They help make their clients' successes happen. If the client doesn't do well, the agent doesn't survive. But there's a significant paycheck for those whose clients strike it rich; if a major football player signs a \$35 million contract to play football for the Dallas Cowboys. His agent (assuming a standard 15 percent commission) stands to make \$5.2 million dollars from that one deal. These kinds of payday can make that uncertainty of income palatable.

An agent spends most of the day on the telephone: Arranging meetings, discussing prospects, networking connections, and keeping in touch with the industry trends and deals. Nearly one-third of all phone time is spent with clients, explaining what the agent is doing on their behalf and strategizing. Face-to-face meetings are also important. Negotiating skills are the agent's bread and butter. Some believe that "you never get killed in a negotiation--you only get a little less than you want." An agent has to be willing to find creative compromises and live with them. Those who are successful must have tenacity, the willingness to fight for their clients, and the ability to sell ideas effectively and communicate clearly. Agents must have access to those able to make deals to be effective for their clients, so cocktail conversational skills and power-lunch political savvy are important as well.

It is important to know that other agents will not necessarily welcome prospective agents with open arms. Other agents will acknowledge you; they will even discuss their work with you, but they will not offer you their contacts and they will not tell you any of their secrets. Much of the difficulty of being a successful agent is developing your own contacts, your own strategies, and your own techniques. Despite this arms-length relationship, agents record high levels of respect for each other.

### How to Become a Talent Agent

No specific academic requirements exist to become an agent, although most agencies say that a college degree is "preferred." College major is unimportant (although marketing and statistical analysis are looked upon favorably), but the candidate must show a knowledge of the field, an ability to work under pressured and difficult circumstances, and an ability to relate to her clients. Specialization happens early on, as representation in different areas (film, literature, sports) requires a different set of contacts and skills. Often beginning in smaller, more hands-on firms provides many agents with their first jobs and exposure to the duties associated with agents. Jobs are marked by low wages (often with incentives), long hours, and significant "face time," when agents must entertain clients, reassure them of their advocacy, and keep in touch with their clients' needs.

### Associated Careers in the Talent Agent Industry

The connections agents make in their careers come in handy if they decide to leave. Many enter the field their clients are in, such as producing, editing, publishing, and in rare cases, writing and directing.

### The Career Prospects for Being a Talent Agent

Representation and negotiation by a third party has existed ever since people began to communicate with each other. In merry old England the official job of 'facilitator' would, for a fee, match up people who wanted audiences with important officials or royalty with those officials or royalty. In the United States, the profit-centric efforts of large, monopolistic movie studios in the early 1930s and 1940s demanded the rise of agents to protect the interests of stars. For example, in 1937 and 1938, Mickey Rooney's films outsold those of Clark Gable and any other Hollywood icon; he was paid (through a non-agent-negotiated deal) \$2,000 a week. While good money at the time, the studios made nearly \$240,000 a week from his films.

While the Michael Ovitzes of this industry are still powerful players, they no longer control the flow of talent as they once did. Some think the migration of established stars will expand the market to allow smaller agencies who are hungrier and more attentive to their clients' needs to thrive. Others feel that these small agencies will rise initially, and then fall as they become large enough for the major agencies to notice, then crush them. In either case, the role of the agent is secure.

### The Quality of Life of Being a Talent Agent

#### Two Years Out

Administrative duties fill the first two years of aspiring agents' lives as they learn the stock-and-trade of the agenting business. New agents familiarize themselves with contracts, the pace of negotiations, client interaction, and the means of pursuing new clients. Many new agents aggressively pursue unknown talent, taking risks that later would be unthinkable. A large number of agents (30 percent by some measures) leave the profession because of dissatisfaction with the lack of glamour, the pace of progress, and the menial responsibilities the job offers. Hours are long, and pay is low.

#### Five Years Out

Client contact has increased considerably, and those who began at large firms either become "senior agents" or leave to start their own firms (a solid 18 percent). Most agents who found their own firms do so within four to nine years after beginning in the profession. Satisfaction at this stage in the career depends on the person's suitability to their chosen field and their success in their chosen area of specialization. Fifteen percent leave, lured by promotional, publicity, or public relations departments, and their siren song of consistent and solid paychecks. Hours have increased, but pay has as well.

#### Ten Years Out

Many agents go independent by this point (35 percent); those who remain at larger firms guide less experienced agents. Mentoring was cited by a majority of ten-year survivors as important to the sense of satisfaction. Agents now have scads of direct client contact, and head up campaigns to recruit new clients. Interpersonal skills are supplanted by financial and directional decision-making abilities as the primary concern of ten-year-vets.

### Professional Profile

# of people in profession	12,950
% male:	55
% female:	45
average hours per week:	50

### Professionals Read

Sporting News  
Variety  
Vogue  
Backstage

### Books, Films and TV Shows Featuring the Profession

*The Player*  
*The Fan*  
*The Famous Teddy Z*  
*The Agent*

### Major Employers

Columbia Artist Management	International Creative Management	International Management Group
165 West 57th Street	40 West 57th Street	One Erieview Plaza
New York, NY 10019	New York, NY 10019	Suite 1300
		Cleveland, OH 44114

### You'll Have Contact With Attorneys

Producers  
Publicists  
Publishers

**Major Associations**

Professional Arts Management Institute	Association of Authors' Representatives
110 Riverside Drive	10 Astor Place
Suite 4E	3rd Floor
New York, NY 10024	New York, NY 10003
Tel: 212-245-3850	Tel: 212-353-3709

<https://blog.granted.com/>