

New Thoughts For Actors

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Section 1: THE POWER OF THOUGHT

ACTOR AFFIRMATIONS

My personal favorites for right before an audition or performance:

- I release and destroy my need to get this job.
- I am going to take it *from where I am*. However I'm feeling and however prepared I am is a fine place to begin this scene.
- I release and destroy my need to control this scene. I know that I am not strong enough to control it, and therefore ask my higher power to lovingly guide me through it.
- I am going to approach this scene as if it's the ninth take (like an improv).
- I release and destroy my need to be an "Actor". Let the other people here be the "Actors" and have all the responsibilities that come with it. I am just here to be myself and enjoy playing in the circumstances.
- (For Comedy) I release and destroy my need to be funny. I am just here to tickle *myself* with my own genuine human behavior.
- (For Drama) I release and destroy my need to *make* choices, but more importantly I will allow choices to *happen to me*.
- I release and destroy my need to impress them. I give myself permission to hate them. Fuck them.

Daily affirmations:

- I am grateful for all the good in my life. I am worthy of all the good in my life.
- All is well in my world. I am one with the universe and have more than I need.
- I am relaxed, trusting in a higher plan that is unfolding for me.
- I release and destroy my attachment to results. I am here to enjoy the journey.

- I release and destroy my need to feel unworthy. I know that I am worthy of all the good in life and now lovingly allow myself to accept it. As I repeat this affirmation, my outer effect of procrastination fades away and I no longer feel the need to delay my own good.
- This, or something greater, for my highest good, and the highest good of all concerned.
- I forgive myself, unconditionally.

I put these affirmations here, at the very beginning, to stress their importance. If you didn't read another word I've written, you could still benefit greatly from these affirmations.

A friend of mine shared them with Sutton Foster, who was at the time playing the lead in the Broadway musical "Thoroughly Modern Millie", and she wrote to me describing her experience:

"During the long run of 'Millie' I was struggling so hard with the eight show a week and all of my demons and insecurities were getting the better of me. Seth shared with me your affirmations and I would read them every night before I went out on stage and remind myself of them while I was on stage. I hung the affirmations on my mirror at 'Little Women' as well, and they are now a permanent part of my dressing room collection. They got me through many 'rough and doubtful' times. So thank you."

– Sutton Foster ("Bunheads", "Anything Goes" (Tony Award), "The Drowsy Chaperone" (Tony nominated), "Little Women" (Tony nominated), "Thoroughly Modern Millie" (Tony Award))

I gave them to a friend of mine who works constantly, and she wrote me the following testimonial:

"Ever since Jack Plotnick rescued me from the depths of audition despondence by introducing me to his affirmations, not an audition or stage performance goes by without me calling upon those wise and freeing words. Jack helped me remember that how we think about our work is just as important as the work itself."

- Carrie Preston ("True Blood", "The Good Wife" (Emmy Award))

Enjoy them. They can change your life.

THE VULTURE/EGO

A lot of people go around just letting their brain think whatever it likes. They don't question the thoughts in their head. To them, the thoughts are there, and therefore must be the truth.

For instance, when you audition, you might think-
"I'm not a good enough actor to get this part."
 You hear this thought in your head, and you take it as truth.
 What you may not realize is that YOU put that thought there.

Actually you have TWO voices in your head.
 There is your *ego voice*, which is anything that is **fear** based,
 and you have your *true voice*, which is anything based in **love**.

Everyone has an ego.
 Your ego is the *half of you that wants you to fail*. And will say whatever it can think of to get you to listen to it.

Now, it just so happens that the *ego voice* is much stronger, simply because it gets more exercise.
 Don't blame yourself, for it is human nature to think from the ego's point of view. You have been making the choice to think from your ego for so long that it has become a habit, something you do without even thinking. Therefore, it seems to be the only voice.

Your *true voice* is much quieter.
 It doesn't get out much and when it does it is usually quickly silenced by your ego.

Many people go their whole lives without realizing that they have self-identified strictly with their ego. But, by simply listening to your negative thoughts and self-talk, and acknowledging them as such, you create "the real you"; i.e. the one who is listening....the TRUE you.

I'd like you to imagine moving that negative, fear-based and result-oriented *ego voice* out of your head, and see it instead as a vulture on your shoulder, squawking its nonsense in your ear.

You don't ignore the vulture or pretend it's not there. That would be like throwing a blanket over it, trying to pretend you don't have one, with a desperate smile on your face saying-
"Everything's great! Doesn't it look like everything's great?!"
 -all the while walking around with a big vulture shaped blanket hump on your shoulder!
 Everyone has a vulture, so learn how to deal with him. Let him know that although you hear him, you are not interested in what he has to say.

So, let's try some things:

Let's imagine your vulture says, "*You're not a good actor.*"

So you say, "Shut up, I'm not listening to you."

...Momentary silence.

You've done it! The vulture shut up.

But, hold on, the brain can't stand not having a thought in it, and because your *true voice* is so weakened it's just sitting there in the corner, muted.

So, once again, the vulture squawks, "*You're a terrible actor!*"

So you think, "I'll just tell it that he's wrong."

And so you say to the vulture, "I am a terrific actor."

The vulture replies, "*No, you're a terrible actor!*"

"Terrific actor!"

"*Terrible actor!*"

...And this could go on for hours.

Boy, do you look silly arguing with a vulture! And it is impossible to act if you are doing so.

If even a part of you doesn't believe that you are a "terrific actor" then you will perceive that sentence as a lie. You cannot lie to your vulture, even if a part of you believes it to be true.

Your vulture (ego) is a part of you. So, it is just as smart as you. And because it is human nature to want to be "right", that vulture will argue his points.

So you try something new:

Your vulture says, "*You're not a good actor.*"

You reply, "I release my need to be a good actor."

The vulture replies, "*Well, you're not a good ac-*"

...He is dumbfounded. You're not arguing anymore.

He tries again "*You're not a good actor.*"

You say, "I release and destroy my need to be a good actor. I am not an 'actor'. I'm just here to be me and enjoy playing in the circumstances."

...Silence.

He's sitting there in complete submission.

He realizes that you're not interested in playing his *fear* game.

And when he is silent, that *pressure* to be a good actor comes off your shoulders.

You won! ...for now.

And what do you feel?

Free.

Free to be whatever kind of actor you are, which at this moment is a *much better* one than usual, without all that self-doubt plaguing you!

"I release and destroy my need to get this job."

This statement is called an "affirmation".

Affirmations are the language your “true self” speaks in. They are loving thoughts. They are always true statements, meaning to “affirm” something that is already true.

Some people misunderstand, and incorrectly think that affirmations are *lies* we tell ourselves to make us feel better.

These people get confused and think they can just “lie” to their ego. They say to themselves-

“Everything is wonderful! I’m perfect!”

But that’s just like pouring pink paint all over an ugly surface, or delicious frosting on a crappy cake. Your ego is far too smart to fall for that. It knows you don’t truly believe what you are saying, therefore it is experienced as a “lie”.

You might think the affirmation, “I release my need to get this job.” isn’t true for you. You think-

“I DON’T release my need to get this job. I want to book this job!”

Beware, that is your ego talking. It’s trying to trick you.

In order to talk to your vulture you must understand the difference between “want” and “need”.

“Want” is a good thing. You should want things; want them with all your heart.

“Need” is fear based. It means, “I’m no good without this” or “I know what’s best for me” ...and you don’t.

That is why it’s TRUE to say you “release your need to get the job”. You’re not saying you “don’t want it”; you’re saying you “don’t *need* it”.

And when you release your need to get the job, the pressure to get the job comes off your shoulders, you are joyful again, and then...you book the job!

By releasing your need for what you want...that’s how to get it!

Your vulture is just as smart as you are, it will come up with fantastic arguments to win its case, the case for “fear”.

You must argue the vulture down all his points to truly silence him.

Here’s a typical, *successful*, conversation:

Vulture: *“You don’t deserve to be at this audition.”*

You: “I release my need to deserve to be here.”

Vulture: *“They’re going to hate you.”*

You: “I release and destroy my need to impress these people.”

Vulture: *“You’re not going to get the job.”*

You: “I release and destroy my need to get this job.”

Vulture: *“Your agents are going to drop you if you don’t do well.”*

You: “I release my need to keep my agents. If they drop me, I wasn’t meant to be with them, and I’ll find someone who believes in me.”

...Hopefully, after this, your vulture will be exhausted, and get the point that you’re not interested in what it has to say.

I was speaking with a friend, who had seen some success with affirmations, but was still feeling stuck. Some part of her could not let go of her fearful thinking.

I questioned her about it, and finally she admitted that she didn't really *believe* herself when she said the affirmations.

So while she was saying, for instance, "I release my need to be talented"

-she wasn't truly believing it, because her vulture was using a small voice in her head to say-

"But, I DO want to be talented."

This created a "credibility gap" inside her. She felt the affirmation was a lie, and therefore was not making any progress.

Make no mistake; this was just her ego continuing the fight. Wanting to live in the fear.

I told her she had to get rid of this "gap" or "lie". And here's how to do that:

There is one other aspect of this "vulture/ego" vs. "true voice" relationship. There is one more "you" present.

It is your *highest self*. And it looks down at this conversation between your "true voice" and your "vulture/ego" from above.

Your highest self knows that by releasing your need for something, you actually stand a better chance of getting it! It knows that by not needing to do a good job, you actually stand a better chance of doing a good job. It knows that by releasing your need to book the job, you stand a much better chance of booking it!

So, as your true voice says to the vulture, "I release and destroy my need to get this job", it shares a little wink with your highest self above, joyful in the knowledge that this all leads to your greater good; it leads to you booking the job.

Once you see it this way, you no longer need to feel that you are lying to your vulture. There is no more "credibility gap".

So, to reiterate, in the debate between your "true voice" and your "vulture/ego" there is also a highest singular you who is watching from above. And she knows that by releasing your need for something, that is how to get it!

And why is that? Because when you *need* something you are coming from a place of fear. Fear that you won't get that which you need.

When you truly release your need for something you let go of anxiety, you shine, and your true personality comes through. And because we are spiritually all one person, I can assure you that your true personality is attractive and charming because it is honest. Therefore you will stand a better chance of attracting that which you desire.

For years, I was in the habit of having the thought-
"I need this job."

I found that this thought actually kept me from getting jobs, because it made me feel unhappy and uptight. Like cigarette smoking, habitual thought patterns can be very hard to break.

So I created a new habit-

When I would go to an audition I would think no other thought but, "I release and destroy my need to get this job."

Literally, as I was walking into the audition room (*"I release my need to get this job"*), as I was shaking the casting director's hand (*"I release my need to get this job"*), as I was sitting down and taking out the sides (*"I release my need to get this job"*). Even as I was doing the scene, during moments when I was not speaking (*"I release my need to get this job"*).

And every time I said it, I felt myself let go of something that was weighing me down. I felt lighter and freer.

I continued this for some time. And at each audition the vulture's need to "get the job" became weaker. Eventually it quit fighting altogether.

Now, I don't have to consciously put the loving thought there. It naturally pops into my head.

My old habit is broken, and I created a new one!

You can use this technique for any issue you have. Just listen closely to what your vulture is saying, and create an affirmation to combat, release and destroy it.

The affirmations you create will be as powerful as you make them. The more focus you give them, the more power they will have in your life.

I used to write mine many times over in the mornings. Sometimes, I would make posters of my favorites, and hang them by my bed, or on my refrigerator.

Memorize them. Honor your affirmations, for they are the truth, and they will change your life.

Until now, you have let the negative voice of your ego run free in your mind. You have entertained these negative thoughts so much, that like a muscle, they have grown stronger. They have become a habit. They are an automatic reaction to a specific situation. Your negative thoughts seem to come into your head without you being aware that you are the one putting them there. You have been mistaking them for the truth. It's time you took back control of your thoughts! There is only one thing you can control in your life, and that is your thoughts.

The negative thoughts will always be there. Everyone has a vulture on their shoulder. It is how you react to those fearful thoughts that will dictate how you experience your life.

THE JOURNEY TO SELF-AWARENESS

Working on your “issues”, meaning your personal problems or difficulties, is one of the most important things an actor can do for himself. “Issues” can cause an actor to be self-defeating, self-destructive and severely limited in their abilities.

As an actor, you are an artist. Your tool to create your art is “you”. Because of this, I feel it is of the utmost importance to work on “yourself”.

As artists we all have the potential to be “limitless”. The walls that constrict us are always self-created.

So, how do we learn to release our negative thoughts, mental blocks, and emotional issues?

My journey to self-realization, self-actualization, and self-awareness began when a cast mate of mine suggested that I read a self-help book. He was able to see something in me that I was unable to see. He saw that I had “issues” that might be influencing me in a negative way.

The problem was that I didn’t see it. People go around thinking that the way they see, feel and experience things is the same way everyone else does. This is called “projection”, which means you are projecting your way of thinking onto other people. When you do this, you feel that your experience of things is the only truthful way to see things. This makes even the most negative way of thinking feel completely normal. Thinking that everyone else sees things exactly as you do couldn’t be farther from the truth. We are each highly affected by our specific childhoods, upbringings and experiences. And when your specific journey has caused a thought pattern that affects you adversely, that is called an “issue”.

Once I read the book he had suggested (“The Way of the Peaceful Warrior”), I was hooked! I hadn’t even realized that there was another way to look at life. It was thrilling to realize that there was help out there for me.

Other people have come before you and had the same problems you might be dealing with. They spent a lifetime figuring out how to grow and recover from their issues and then they wrote down how they did it. Why not take advantage of the hard won wisdom they are sharing with you?

If you bought a fancy new camera, wouldn’t you read the instruction book to find out how it works, so you can get the most out of it?

Well, you are at least as complicated and full of potential as a camera!

So why don’t more people want to learn how their mind works?

The answer is “fear”.

People are fearful to confront their issues. Although it is our issues that most often hold us back, we are comfortable in our ways, and “change” is scary.

If we change, it means that we must become something new. And what that will be, we do not know. So staying the same offers the illusion of safety from the unknown.

Change can also be sad. If, for instance, you are no longer seeing things the negative way your family see things, you may feel as though you are alone, separated from your family. But YOU are the most important thing in your life. And having healthy attitudes towards things is more important than the illusion of oneness with your family.

I'd like to share my favorite self-help book with you:

It is the book I consider to be my bible, and it is where I learned about the "ego/vulture". I've read it so many times that I practically have it memorized.

It's called "**You Can't Afford the Luxury of a Negative Thought**", by Peter McWilliams, and you can buy it online!

While some self-help books can be long winded, dry, or just plain confusing, this book is so easy to read, understand and apply. Each chapter is only about two pages long. You can read it in any order. A couple chapters a day is enough to ruminate on. It is full of tools to use that help you focus on the positive.

Other writers who have greatly influenced me are:

Marianne Williamson (I used to listen to her audiotapes everyday in the car!)

Louise L. Hay ("You Can Heal Your Life")

Andrew Mathews ("Being Happy!")

Eckhart Tolle ("The Power of Now: A Guide to Spiritual Enlightenment")

Diana Kirschner ("Opening Love's Door")

Once you have decided to use the affirmations and to examine your issues, here are some pitfalls you might encounter:

Once someone realizes that they could benefit by taking control of their thoughts, they will often say something like, "I need to set aside some time to work on this."

That is the wrong way to look at it.

Changing thought patterns is a full time job. You are engaged in it at all times. You must become aware of your negative thoughts and adjust them *in the moment*.

After all these years I still *consciously* place loving affirmations in my head all day long.

They are in response to the negative self-talk that never goes away. Everyone has negative thoughts, it's how you deal with them that decides your life experience.

Years ago, my brother ran into a rough patch in his life, so we had long discussions about affirmations and the power of thought. He had taken many notes on what we discussed. After he worked with them for a time he saw a GREAT improvement in his life!

Later, after a few months had gone by, he found himself down in the dumps again.

I asked him if he had been saying his affirmations, and he admitted that he hadn't. He didn't even have them memorized! I asked him where the notes he had taken were, and he said that they were "in a pile" in his room-

I responded, "You must **apply** - not *pile up*!"

None of this does any good if you're not actively using it, in the moments you need it, all the time!

Other people will make a terrific discovery about an issue that is having a negative impact on their life. Then they'll say, "Now, I just have to figure out how to get this discovery to affect a positive change in my life."

They feel that they have to figure out how to apply this newfound insight or how to "make it work."

That is the wrong way to look at it.

The change it will have on your life is instant! Becoming aware of the issue is all you need. You've done the hard part. Now just have FAITH that it will affect change in your life. The change can be instant if you believe it can be.

However, if you create a reality wherein you need to "figure out" how to allow your discoveries to affect your life, then that will remain your reality until you change your mind about it.

Most of us go around thinking that not only are the thoughts in our head the truth, but that everyone else has the same thoughts, and holds the same things to be true.

This is exactly why people go to therapy. It is to find the things that we take as "truth", that other people don't.

As soon as we realize that other people don't necessarily feel the same way, we are freed from the constraints of that old belief.

For instance, if someone grew up with parents who didn't get along, that person might have a belief that marriage leads to unhappiness. That person may not even be aware that he believes this, it is so deep rooted in his subconscious.

For ten years I read self-help books, but I still had some issues that were more difficult to let go of. A friend of mine had been urging me to see a therapist for years, but I was resistant. I felt that I was a happy person, and that seeing a therapist would mean that I have "real problems". I felt ashamed to admit I needed any outside help.

Seeing a therapist has improved my life hugely. I have since found that most everyone I know has seen one for a time.

There is a general misunderstanding as to what a therapist does.

What they don't do is lecture you on how to live your life.

A therapist LISTENS.

By allowing me a safe place to speak my mind each week, I was able to become keenly aware of my own thoughts and feelings towards different aspects of my life. Once I became aware of my opinions on things I was able to ask myself "Is this really true for me anymore? Is it really true for other people?"

Therapy helps us to discover that the things we hold as "truths" may not be true for other people. And, therefore, they no longer need to be true for us.

I was able to let go of old, useless, and harmful beliefs that I had been holding onto for years.

Since graduating college, I have not taken a single acting class. And yet, I feel as though my abilities have grown tremendously. Part of this is may be due to life experience, but I think a large part is the tremendous amount of work I have put into releasing my negative thoughts, mental blocks, and emotional issues.

FOCUS ON THE POSITIVE

Your thoughts create your reality.

Reality is “subjective”, which means that it is different for each person.

Therefore, there are many realities for you to choose from.

At any moment in your life there are 50 things around you that are terrible (the paint is peeling; your backaches, and the bills need to be paid).

At the same time there are 50 wonderful things around you (the sun is shining, that piece of artwork you just bought, your friends are meeting you for lunch).

Your life is truly “the glass is half full and half empty”. When you think about the good things, you feel lighter and happier. When you think about the bad things, you feel heavier and sadder.

It is therefore up to you what you want to focus on. This is what we call “focusing on the positive”.

Some people are turned off by this way of looking at things, because they misunderstand and think I am saying to “think positively”.

These people feel that the truth is that there are terrible things around, and to pretend they're not there is infantile and stupid. They imagine that I am saying to walk around pretending that everything is perfect.

I'm definitely not saying you should deny the reality that the world is imperfect; there will always be things you would wish to change. But it is your choice where you want to put your focus.

One thing I have learned is - “That which you focus your thoughts and energy upon, grows stronger.”

Thoughts are creative. What you think becomes stronger and manifests in your life.

I've heard it said that for every truth there is an opposite statement that is also true. So, there are two realities happening at all times. In one you are focused on love and are happy. In the other, you are focused on fear and are miserable.

Here's a story to help illuminate this:

One day, a grandfather was talking to his grandson.

“There are two wolves living inside my head”, he told the boy.

Naturally, the boy was alarmed to hear this.

The grandfather explained that, “One wolf is angry, vicious and full of fear, while the other one is loving, sweet and playful. And they are at war.”

Fearfully, the boy asked, “Which one will win?”

To which the wise grandfather replied, “The one I feed.”

We all have two wolves in our head.

We all have an ego/vulture and our true voice.

The negative or the positive; which one will you feed?

ABOUT YOUR HIGHER POWER

I believe it is of the utmost importance that artists have some understanding of a higher power in their life.

In my opinion, it's very simple:
Higher power = God = Love

Your higher power is what some people call "God", and as they say, "God is love."
Your higher power is the power of love in your life. It is the energy and lightness you feel when you are actively involved in what you love. It is the source of creation, the muse of inspiration, the ONE knowledge we all can access if we desire to.

In my opinion, it is this loving feeling and well of knowledge that people are talking about when they use the term "God".

Imagine yourself as a lamp, and your higher power is the electricity. Your higher power is always present, just waiting for you to plug yourself in.

If you allow it, your higher power will lovingly guide you through your art.

We are so lucky that as actors, we need only do our craft in order to commune with our higher power. Other, less creative people have to scale a mountain, or run a marathon to achieve a feeling that they have touched something bigger than themselves. We have the opportunity to do it every time we perform.

It is a mistake to think that only the priest can communicate with a higher power, and that it must be done in a church.

We are all able to communicate with our higher power. It is communicating with you now, if you choose to listen.

I grew up, as many of us do, thinking that God was an old man that lived in the sky. That he had a white beard and looked like Ariel's father in "Little Mermaid". The only time we would talk about him was at temple, in long, boring services that tested my childhood attention span beyond its limits. And when we went home he wasn't mentioned again.

The whole thing seemed so ludicrous, that as a discerning teenager I tossed the whole concept of "God" away, along with the Easter Bunny and Tooth Fairy.

And it remained that way for a long time. But in my 20's, as I began to read self-help books, I started to understand that there was an order of things; a power larger than me at work in my life. The books talked of ways of thinking and behaving that could lead to happiness and abundance. And when I put these theories into practice, I found that they affected positive changes in my life.

There need be no debate in your mind as to whether there is a God or not. It simply is a fact that there is love in the world. Love has power. Your love of acting caused you to read what I've written. And, hopefully, my words will make you feel better or enlighten you in some way. Therefore "love" brought something into your life that affected you in a positive way. THAT'S your higher power working. It needn't get any more "religious" than that!

A HIGHER PLAN

Do you think you know better than the universe what is best for you?
If you do, then you are setting yourself up for heartbreak.

You cannot control the outcome of your life. You simply can't get everything you want. So if you feel you need a certain outcome in order to be happy, you will consistently be disappointed.

Why not just take disappointment out of the equation...

There is an affirmation that goes:

"I am relaxed, trusting in a higher plan that is unfolding for me."

What this means is that everything that happens to you was meant to happen, and is for your greatest good.

And I can prove it - !

You're reading this!

If you weren't *meant* to be reading this right now, you *wouldn't* be.

And because you *are* reading this right now, you're not running across a busy intersection.

Did you know that if you were running across a busy intersection right now you might have gotten hit by a bus and died?!

SO, because you are reading this right now...*you are ALIVE!*

Do you realize how lucky you are? Everyday people get hit by a bus. But today you're not one of them!

The universe has brought you to this moment alive. And, because you are alive, you are in a place of infinite possibility. Think of the millions of souls that aren't so lucky, and would give anything to trade places with you and be alive again! It's such a better way to look at life. Living happily is about focusing on the positive. The negative things will always be there, but why focus on them?

Along with the concept that there is a higher plan, you must accept that *you don't know what's best for you.*

I learned this lesson early in my career thankfully.

I had wanted to get the national tour of "Grease" so bad I could taste it. I worked very hard on my audition and got invited to the final round of callbacks.

Well, I didn't get the part, and I was crushed.

But, while that show was out on tour, I got an audition for "The Conan O'Brien Show".

They were looking for someone to play a silly character, and I booked the job. I ended up making 13 appearances on the show!

A writer I met on “Conan” thought I’d be perfect for a pilot he was writing for HBO, and I booked that job! That pilot brought me to Los Angeles and led to all the other film and TV work I’ve done.

So you see, all the terrific blessings in my life can be traced back to me NOT getting that role in “Grease”. I am so thankful that I didn’t get what I thought I had wanted.

When I do badly at an audition (which you will do at times; it’s an art and not a science), I leave that audition and I say “Thank you!” to the universe.

I thank the universe for saving me from that job, because if I had gotten that role, I would have died in a car crash on the way to the set! So by not booking that job, my life has been saved.

Or, even if the car wouldn’t have crashed, my life course would’ve been altered in such a way that would’ve kept me from that wonderful thing that’s right around the corner (meeting your soul mate, booking an even better job, winning the lottery, etc.)

I think of David Strickland, the actor from the TV show “Suddenly Susan”. I’m sure when he booked that job he was thrilled. If he had known that three years later it would lead to his suicide, he may have felt differently.

Or how about Aaliyah? Her plane crashed as she returned from shooting a music video in the Bahamas.

And I once heard about a young couple that got married and at least twenty of the wedding guests died when the dance floor collapsed.

I’m sorry, I know it’s morbid, but it’s so important to impress upon you that **YOU CANNOT KNOW WHAT IS BEST FOR YOU.**

You might say, “Yes, I understand I can’t get every job I want, but I gotta get a job SOMETIME, or else I’m a failure.” That’s not true. The universe may just have another plan for you, an even more fulfilling plan.

When I first moved to Los Angeles, I had done very well with booking jobs. My streak of good luck continued for some time, culminating with me booking a series regular role on a FOX TV show. I thought I knew what the universe’s plan was for me. In my mind, I was going to continue auditioning and getting terrific jobs. But the show was cancelled after the first season, and I went quite a long time without getting any work. I got depressed, and I mean really depressed, and moped for quite awhile.

I got so bored not working, that I finally was forced to get active.

I got reconnected to my creative side and started performing more.

One of the characters I used to do in my sketch show was an old washed up actress that I named “Evie”. I volunteered to host an AIDS benefit as the character. A friend and I made a short film to show at the benefit. The film came out well, so we decided to take it up a notch and film it on a nicer digital camera, and this time we enlisted the help of a TV writer friend of mine, who gave us a bunch of funny jokes. We had it professionally edited, and it came out great, was nominated for an internet short film award, and went to some film festivals.

My TV writer friend was so thrilled with it that he decided to write a feature film starring my character, which I executive produced. The film, "Girls Will Be Girls", won many awards, had a theatrical release and is now out on video by MGM.

And all this because I wasn't getting any work!

If my show hadn't been cancelled, I wouldn't have been forced to explore the creative side of myself.

And if I hadn't produced "Girls", I very much doubt that I would have co-written and directed my very own feature film "Space Station 76" which was bought by Sony Pictures!

I believe I am here on earth to do more than just act, and my series being cancelled was an important step in my fulfilling my true destiny. When all is said and done, creating, writing, producing and directing projects of my own are the things in my life that I am most proud of. Much more proud than I am of having been on that TV show.

And what happens when someone with the core belief that they need a certain career in order to be happy, actually attains that career? Well, sometimes, sadly, it's a case of "careful what you wish for".

In college, I always thought doing musical theater would make me happy. I believed that certainly everyone performing on Broadway must be elated. But, once I got to New York, I found that this wasn't always true.

Some of the musical theater performers I met, who were currently in Broadway shows, seemed very unhappy, and acted out with alcohol.

There's a meltdown that happens when you achieve what you think is your dream, only to find that it isn't making you truly happy. Perhaps these people weren't happy to begin with. Or perhaps they were happy, but the eight show a week ritual wasn't truly fulfilling them as artists. A lot of people go into the theater because they are very creative, and performing the same show eight times a week for years can be stifling for someone like that.

I love the saying, "Rejection is God's protection".

Trust that you can't know what's best for you. When you don't get something you thought you wanted, the universe may be protecting you from something, and leading you to an even greater destination.

In the acting business, you can't ever know what's coming around the corner. But if you're putting good stuff out there, then good things will come your way.

Your concern should be working on your craft and going for what you want, but not getting hung up on whether you get it or not. It's all about timing and chance, and these are things you cannot control.

So have faith that the universe is leading you somewhere wonderful! And you can trust that it's true, because as long as you're alive, you are somewhere WONDERFUL.

Section 2: TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF

WHAT IS YOUR JOB

Many actors start out their careers much the same way they approached their education:

They think, "If I play by the rules, and be a good little soldier, I'll move up in the world. I'll get an agent, audition for jobs, and get my first Oscar by the time I'm twenty-five." Sure, it happens that way for some lucky souls, but it simply can't fall so easily into place for all of us.

Some young actors are not going to get work immediately. When these actors find that things aren't working out the way they had envisioned, they can get disheartened, and quit acting altogether.

A couple of years after I moved to Los Angeles I got a call from a dear friend I went to high school with. She was a very pretty girl, who had excelled in theater in our hometown. Not only was she involved in our high school's theater program, but she would also get big roles at the amateur theaters in our town. She went on to get a theater degree from a fantastic program, and now, she was calling me to say she was moving to Los Angeles to follow her dream to make it in film.

Once she arrived, she got settled into an apartment, and got a job waiting tables.

Only a couple of months later I received another call from her. She said, "I'm leaving Los Angeles. I don't want to be an actress anymore. It doesn't make me happy."

I was shocked. I replied, "Well, what have you done since you got here?"

"I've sent my picture everywhere and gone on every audition I could find in the paper," she said.

And within a week she was gone, never to pursue acting again.

So, what happened?

Her words echoed in my ears-

"I don't want to be an actor anymore. It doesn't make me happy."

Well, of course she wasn't happy. She hadn't BEEN acting.

She got "acting" confused with "trying to get a job." Since she arrived she had been behaving as a "professional resume sender-outer". And I guarantee you, that is not what she was put here on earth to do.

Of course she wasn't happy; she had forgotten that what she wanted to do was to act, not to try to book jobs. Booking jobs was something her ego was interested in.

Perhaps her ego wanted to prove to her family that she had made the right choice in being an actress. Or perhaps she needed to prove it to herself.

She didn't realize that she had much more power than she was aware of. No one can keep you from doing what you love.

Do you need to have an acting job to be an actor?

No.

If you want to act, then act.

There are many ways to do it. You can get a group of friends together and read plays aloud in your apartment. You could even rent a space and put up a production.

I have found that by doing something, you create more of it in your life. So when you go out and just "do it", you start a ball rolling, and things begin to happen for you.

No one can keep you from doing what you are here on earth to do.

So what are you here on earth to do? What is your "purpose"?

Because this is meant to be read by actors, chances are good that it's something connected with the art of creating and performing.

If you're not sure exactly how to put it into words, here's a good hint: You've been doing it all along. Practically since childhood, you've been actively involved in your purpose.

It is simple to know what your purpose is. It is what makes you happy, and when you are actively involved in it, you are energized and joyful.

For me, I label my purpose as "A Joyful Creator." Acting fits into that category, as does writing, directing, etc.

Well, no one can keep me from being "a joyful creator".

Isn't that terrific news! You can do what you are here on earth to do, which is what brings you joy, for the rest of your life!

You may not make a living doing it. But here's some good news-

If you are truly doing what you are meant to be doing, and you work on it (doing what you love never really feels like work) chances are extremely high that you will be able to make a living off it eventually.

And if that doesn't happen right away, the universe does not frown upon you getting a side job to fund your true pursuit. The universe respects that. You are doing what you need to do in order to follow your dream.

People get so caught up in needing "the job". They think, "I need an acting job, because my finances are low." So get a part-time job at a grocery store. You're never going to starve. You may not be able to buy all the things you think you want, but you're not going to starve.

Which brings up the question, do I want to live an artist's life?

Some people eventually realize that they want a life with more structure, and a job with more dependability. They don't want to be "chasing rainbows". I get that.

My hometown friend, the actress who left L.A., ended up going back to school and is now a bona fide lawyer! She's doing very well.

A lot of people will say, "If there's another profession besides acting that you could be happy doing, do it!" Maybe that's true. Only you know for sure.

However, if you know in your heart that acting is what you want, then keep at it.

I know an actor who had been trying for years to get work, and still had trouble even getting an audition.

So you know what he did? He just bypassed the whole entire system and created his own work.

He had begun selling Tupperware in drag in order to pay his bills. This certainly doesn't sound like something one would necessarily think could help an actor's career.

Nonetheless, he enjoyed it, and was passionate about it. He was good at it, and he became very popular due to his funny and fresh approach.

He wrote a one-man show about his experience called "Dixie's Tupperware Party", and that show was eventually produced Off-Broadway to rave reviews! And he now tours the country to sold out houses.

Look at that. There's more than one way to get somewhere.

The industry is full of stories like this one.

So SCREW the rules...Just do it!

It brings to mind a story by Dale Dauten, from his book "Taking Chances". Here is an abbreviated version:

There once was a young man who went out into the world to seek his fortune.

He wandered for many days, until he saw in the distance a grand mansion upon a hill, with a long line of people waiting to get in.

So he got in line and waited.

The young man waited and waited but the line did not seem to move.

"What do you do here to pass the time?" asked the young man.

"Worry," replied the woman in front of him.

Time passed, and at last the young man could wait no longer and his legs carried him away.

He noticed that as he moved forward along the line, the people were older and older.

He saw some birds flying and, with nothing else to do, he followed in their direction, walking along a fence.

He had been walking awhile when he saw the end of the fence come into view. It stopped near the back door of the mansion. There he found the door open. His heart leaping into his throat, he walked inside.

"Welcome!" a dozen voices said in unison. "Come in, come in," they were all saying.

He sat. "Welcome home!" one said, squeezing the young man's hand.

"I can stay?" he asked.

"Of course. You've arrived."

"But what about those in line?"

"They will wait."

WHEN SOMEONE DOESN'T LIKE YOU

When someone doesn't like you, is it about you, or them?

The answer is "them".

At auditions, many actors worry whether or not the casting people will like them. They are concerned whether the casting people will be impressed with their abilities.

While it is a good thing to WANT people to like you, these actors NEED people to like them. If they leave an audition feeling unliked, or if they don't get a callback, it affects how they feel about themselves. It affects how they feel about their talent. They think, "It's true, I'm no good."

Wouldn't you rather go to an audition simply to have a good time getting to play a scene? Don't you think you'd do a better job if that were your only interest?

You can achieve a mind space where you do not take another person's judgment of you, or your talent, personally. You just have to wrap your head around the following concept:

"What we like and don't like is a very personal and individual impulse."

Let me explain it using "romance" as an example-

Have you had a friend point someone out as "hot", only to have you reply, "Not my type". Does the fact that you are not attracted to the person, make that person less attractive?

Everyone has their type. Some people are only attracted to tall girls, while others like them shorter. Some people only like thin guys, while others like them muscle-bound. So now you see that it's foolish to need to be desired by everyone. It is simply impossible.

Now let's talk about getting what you want.

Concerning "romance", why is it that so many people have difficulties meeting people whom they desire? Why do they freeze up at the thought of introducing themselves? The answer is that they are afraid of *rejection*. They have an internal belief that they are unworthy of love, and therefore, are terrified that someone will confirm it by saying "Get away from me, you are ugly."

How could you ever go up and meet a guy/girl you are attracted to if their response told you whether or not you were worthy of love? You couldn't (and many people don't).

You would be frozen with fear.

And so it is with acting jobs.

When someone does not cast you in a project, it is not about you. It is about what that person is looking for, and attracted to.

Casting people say there are many "right" people for a job, it's up to the whims of the producer.

Every great actress in Hollywood auditioned for Glenn Close's role in "Fatal Attraction", but she got it. Does that mean the other actresses didn't do a good job? I'm sure they did. And so it is with every project. Every actor can shine in the audition, and the one who is meant to get it, will.

A commercial casting director told me this story:

The casting director found a terrific blonde actress for a role in a commercial she was casting. She was perfect for it, and everyone agreed. However, when an agency writes a commercial for a company, they will usually also draw storyboards, or pictures of how the commercial will look. Well, the storyboard artist drew the woman in the commercial with red hair. This was, of course, before they had auditioned anyone. But the people from the company got used to the idea of the character having red hair, and so the blonde actress didn't get the part.

As with dating, you mustn't walk into an audition room unsure of whether you are worthy of being liked. If you are looking for validation that you deserve to be acting, you are setting yourself up to be hurt.

When you don't get a role, it is just as easy to figure that the producer's cousin got it, then it is to imagine that you were awful in the audition. And which one is going to make you feel better inside?

At this point, some of you may be thinking-

"But if I had done better, then they would've liked me."

This is your ego talking. Your vulture. That kind of thought does not come from love. If you'd like, you could convince yourself that it is your fault when people don't like you. But does that help your life? Does that make life easier to live?

No. It leads to unhappiness. So why go down that road.

Remember, while you debate with the vulture, there is a higher "you" looking down from above, and watching the argument. Your true self shares a wink with your higher self. They both know that there are different ways to look at the situation, but if you choose the "loving" version, you will be happier.

Imagine it this way-

You are at an ice cream shop with your friends. There are 25 delicious flavors of ice cream, to pick from. You all pick different flavors. One of your friends has picked mint. Ugh, you hate mint! Well, your friend doesn't, he really likes mint. In all this mint hasn't changed. It remains uniquely itself, unconcerned with who chooses to eat it.

So joyfully be your own flavor of ice cream, and the people who are meant to like you, will.

And to hell with those who don't!

FINDING YOUR INNER CHILD

Try this exercise:

Imagine yourself as a small child, maybe 4 or 5, back at a time when you were still completely innocent and blameless.

See the child standing in front of you, looking up at you with big, curious eyes. The child is smiling, happy and carefree.

This is your inner child.

Take the child's hand.

Now, imagine that your parents are calmly standing opposite you. They are gently smiling.

You tell them, "I am leaving you now. I thank you for raising me, and forgive you for any mistakes you made, because I know they were made on you."

"But I must go now," you say, "I can no longer live your life for you."

Hand in hand with your inner child you begin walking away. You turn back to see your parents smiling and waving goodbye. Farther and farther you walk till they begin to disappear in the distance. You turn a corner and they are gone.

You pick up your inner child, hold him close, and say, "You are safe. I love you, and I accept you exactly as you are. I am here with you now, and always will be."

You then place the child in your heart and that is where he lives.

You are now the parent to your inner child.

I look at it like this: When you become an adult, your parents are no longer your "parents". Instead, they are people to whom you show polite respect and appreciation for raising you. Even if they made mistakes, you forgive them because you know that their mistakes were based upon the mistakes their parents made with them. (In a way you are THEIR parent, accepting them as they are, even though they may be unable to do that for you. You don't try to change them, just as you would have them not try to change you. You treat them with kind patience.)

Everyone has an inner child, and the question is: How do you treat yours?

It is up to you to monitor how you treat your inner child. If you are cruel to that child you are being a bad parent. If you neglect that child you are being a lazy parent.

Let me give you an example of being a bad parent to your inner child.

Often a person's inner child will hold onto a past hurt. For instance, if you were an overweight child, you may have been teased at school by the other children. If so, your inner child might still hear those voices teasing him, calling him "fat", "lazy" or "no good". But those children who teased him are gone.

So whose negative voice is it that the child hears? It's yours.

You are abusing your inner child just as those kids did so long ago. Those kids may have given you the ball but you are the one who is still holding it.

Why not show your inner child the love and acceptance that he should have been shown in the first place? You can create a new reality for your inner child, thereby healing a past wound.

When you see a person who is still reacting to a wound in their past, it's as if their inner child is not in the safe company of an adult. Although that child lives in the heart of the adult, if the adult is unaware of the child, and isn't tending to the child's needs, that child may as well be all alone.

One of my students, a very fine actress, was having some difficulty with a sitcom scene. I had noticed she had no problem with dramatic scenes as long as the scene only called for her to be subtle and self-contained. But when a scene demanded that she make bigger choices with higher stakes, she wasn't able to "behave as if it was really happening". She admitted that she felt resistant to, and anxious with, a "broader, more high-energy scene".

I asked her what this feeling of hesitancy reminded her of from her past.

She explained that she had grown up surrounded by many siblings. So many, in fact, that she had felt she had to be small and self-contained.

So even though she was now an adult and free in the world, inside her heart was her inner child, still living by the old rules she had learned in the past. Although the conditions of her youth were gone, she had not yet given her inner child the permission to live life differently.

I explained to her that it was not fair for a child to be so confined. A child should have all the room to play that her heart desires.

I asked her to imagine her inner child cramped and surrounded on all sides. I then told her that she should lead her inner child to a secret door. That when her inner child walked through that door, it opened up to a beautiful farm on acres of land. I asked her to envision her inner child skipping through a field of flowers, spinning, throwing her head back and laughing uncontrollably.

She was deeply moved by this image. Seeing her inner child so carefree actually healed this past wound.

Like Dorothy, in her red slippers, she had the power to accomplish this all along. She finally chose to use it. And her acting freed up immediately.

Be aware that when you allow your vulture to squawk unchecked, it is your inner child he is yelling at. It's as if he's punching or kicking your inner child with his fear-based cruelty.

The *affirmations* are the way you champion your inner child. Choosing to replace a negative thought with a loving thought is how you love and protect your inner child.

Be a good parent to your inner child. Listen to his needs, and treat him the way you wish you had been treated, with love and complete acceptance.

You can learn more about this subject in John Bradshaw's book, "Homecoming: Reclaiming and Championing Your Inner Child".

IF IT'S HYSTERICAL, IT'S HISTORICAL

One of my students was having difficulty with auditions.

A very good actor, he had no problem playing a scene. However, when I would give him a note or adjustment, he would shut down. If I asked him to try a scene again another way he would get stuck, confused, rattled and would be no longer able to “behave as if it was really happening”. He said this was always the case when someone would give him an acting note.

I asked him what getting a note felt like to him, and he said that it felt like he had “been bad”. ...Not that he had done a bad job, but that he had “been bad”.

So I asked him what that reminded him of from his past, and who from his past might have told him that he had “been bad”, and he replied, “nuns”. He had been raised in the Catholic School system, and was often harshly scolded by the nuns.

So, whenever someone in the present would give him a note, it would bring back painful memories from his past. *He was not reacting to the situation in the present moment, but instead his inner child was reacting to a past experience.*

I explained to him the theory: “If it’s hysterical, then it’s historical.”

In other words, if your reaction to something is bigger and more emotional than the situation really calls for (“hysterical”), then you are not really reacting to the present situation, but to some situation in your past (“historical”).

Getting a note, something that most actors don’t mind at all, brought up a big emotional response from him, so it was clearly not “getting a note” that he was reacting to, but instead his harsh and unfair treatment by the nuns in his past.

Once he realized this, he was able to free himself from that issue. When the hysterical feeling came again, his self-awareness was able to immediately see it for the illusion it was, thus taking away all its power over him.

All he needed to do was to consistently remind himself at auditions that the people watching him “are not the nuns I grew up with.” And, with that, the illusion that he is still living in his past falls away, and he’s allowed to have a healthy amount of concern about the people in the room.

Let me give you an example of how I applied “If it’s Hysterical”, “Your Inner Child” and “Affirmations” to an issue in my life-

I used to be plagued with a fear of doing something “stupid”. And if I ever felt I had done or said something “stupid” I would feel AWFUL about it.

I was always sure that the people around me thought I was “stupid”.

It was so bad that I used to begin every day with a litany of all the “stupid” things I had done the day before going through my head. The second I awoke, all this guilt would come flooding over me. I would lie awake, thinking, “I can’t believe I said that”, “How stupid of me to forget that” etc. I was miserable.

IF IT'S HYSTERICAL, IT'S HISTORICAL

My “hysterical” reaction to doing something I felt was “stupid” showed me that what I was really upset about was something “historical” from my past.

As a child I was the youngest in my family. Developmentally I was several years behind my older siblings. So, of course I wasn't as "smart" as them. While they played hide and seek, or kick the can, I would just run around, not understanding the rules and looking like the town idiot. I was quickly labeled as less smart and it stuck for the rest of my life. It didn't matter how good my grades were (National Honor Society, thank you). And being an artist at heart certainly didn't help matters, as I was surrounded by a family of future businesspeople. I was always being teased with names like "dummy" and "airhead". And I bought into it.

INNER CHILD

So, even though I was now an adult, my inner child was still terribly insecure about being "stupid". No matter how many times I proved to myself that I wasn't, I just couldn't get rid of the notion.

A voice in my head was calling me "stupid", and I accepted it, with no questions, as the truth.

The voice in my head was my family's voice, or at least what I, as a child, imagined they thought of me. Even though my family wasn't saying this to me anymore, I had continued. I picked up where they left off. They had handed me the baton, but I was running with it.

It was my ego/vulture that was saying it. It wasn't the truth.

I was being a bad parent to my inner child. I wasn't treating my inner child with loving acceptance.

My first step in rectifying this was to remind myself wherever I went that the people around me "aren't my family". It was in this way that I was able to stop projecting my past on the people around me in my present.

AFFIRMATIONS

Once I realized that the voice was coming from my own ego/vulture, I was able to question it's validity, and put a new, more loving thought in its place. I realized that I had the power to stop it.

So I created a new habit. The second that my vulture would squawk about something "stupid" I had done, I would think the following affirmation-

"I forgive myself unconditionally."

How liberating to think that I had the power to forgive myself, unconditionally!

But, this old belief was a very powerful habit to break. When I would awake, I would lie in bed repeating the affirmation over a hundred times, all the while drowning out the vulture's list of my stupidities. And eventually the vulture got the point. He learned that I wasn't interested in his blame game.

I am a good person. Do good people make mistakes sometimes? Yes. Does that change the fact that they are good people? No.

To this day, that affirmation is the first thought I have in the morning. Forgiveness. It is my new habit. What a beautiful way to start the day.

So next time you find yourself having an overly emotional response to something, ask yourself if you are truly responding to what you think you're responding to. Most probably you can take away it's power by exposing it for what it really is: a past set of circumstances which no longer need to have an affect on your life.

ABOUT DEPRESSION

When you are depressed you feel lost. Lost to the world, and yourself.

Imagine your life as a road you're going along.

When you are depressed it feels as though your car is off that road, bumping around through dark trees and brush. You look back at that road, getting farther away, and say, "No, this is not where I am supposed to be. That is my road over there. I was supposed to be over there!"

Well I have good news. You CANNOT leave the road of your life. It is impossible. There is a higher plan. You are always exactly where you're supposed to be, and I can prove it:

If you were meant to be somewhere else, you'd be there.

You are here, so you were meant to be here.

It's simple, but true.

It is an illusion to think that you can leave the correct path of your life. This illusion was created by your ego, and it brings anxiety, grief and remorse. Choose to see your life in a way that will bring you comfort.

It is in our darkest moments of depression that we feel our higher power has left us. We feel that Love has left us.

"Oh God why have you forsaken me", we cry.

We feel as though we've been left all alone in the dark.

The truth is your higher power did not leave; you just turned your head away from it.

Your higher power is still right in front of you, waiting for you to turn back to it.

It is dark simply because you turned away from the light, the light of Love. You've turned away from yourself.

When this happens, you are focusing on your fear and worry. Your regret and anger.

You are looking to the side at the vulture on your shoulder, and believing every word he says.

The path out of depression and to joy is not a difficult one.

...It is as simple as turning your head slightly.

So how do you snap out of it?

GRATITUDE!

Being grateful is a HUGE secret to being happy.

Be grateful that you are alive which means there are still infinite possibilities left open to you.

Be grateful you have two arms. And if you have one arm, be grateful you have that.

When something occurs in my life that upsets me, I like to say to myself-
"I chose this."

Meaning that although I may not like my current circumstances, in some way I *chose* them. My higher power chose these circumstances for me, for my highest growth and development. I may not currently understand at this time the reason why, but it will become evident to me in the future.

The important thing is that whatever it was that happened to you...you survived it!
 You lived to *learn* from it.

If, for instance, someone steals a thousand dollars from you, then perhaps the universe *chose* that to happen in order to teach you to watch your money more closely, so that next year when someone tries to steal ten thousand dollars from you, you will stop them!

Imagine that you are floating above it all, looking down at your situation and seeing it from a higher perspective.

In times of trouble many people will pray. They will ask the universe to give them what they think they need to be happy again.

They will say-

"Dear Lord, please give me what I don't have. Please give me back what I lost."

In my opinion, that is not how the universe works. If it did, that would mean that you *need* something in order to be happy. And if you need some set of circumstances in order to be happy, you may never be.

I believe that prayer is meant to make us happy *immediately*.

Prayer makes us happy because we are thanking our higher power for what it has already given us. That is prayer. We pray to remember the good in our life. And we have faith that everything happens for a reason.

When you feel as if your life is off course, say the following affirmations-

"I am grateful for all the good in my life. I am worthy of all the good in my life."

"I am relaxed, trusting a higher plan that is unfolding for me."

"I forgive myself unconditionally."

"All is well in my world. I am one with the universe and have more than I need."

These statements are the truth, and they will bring you back to a more joyful understanding of your life.

Whenever I have a friend who is feeling depressed and/or frustrated with their career, I like to share a certain song with them. It's called "Help Is On the Way", written by David Freidman and recorded by Nancy LaMott.

I have sung it to myself countless times, and it always lifts my spirits.

You can find it on YouTube! Here are the lyrics:

Help Is On The Way

Don't give up the ship, even when you feel it's sinking,
and you don't know what to do.

Don't give up your dream, even though you may be thinking
it never will come true.

Life has it's own idea of how things come about,
and if you just hang in there, life is gonna work it out.

Help is on the way, from places you don't know about today.

From friends you may not have met yet,
believe me when I say, help is on the way.

You don't have to know where the path you're on is leading,
you just have to walk along.

Dreaming as you go, asking for the things you're needing,
you never can go wrong.

If you have faith that things are happening as they should,
and just believe each step you take is leading you to something good.

Help is on the way, from places you don't know about today.

From friends you may not have met,

Yet, believe me when I say, I know help is on the way.

So open your heart, open your mind,

No matter how you've tried and failed,

tomorrow you could turn and find

that help is on the way, from places you don't know about today.

From friends you may not have met yet,

believe me when I say, I know help is on the way.

Section 3: SECRETS TO SUCCESS

NEEDING THE JOB

When I first moved to LA, I had a friend who, at the time, was married to Megan Mulally (of “Will and Grace”), and we would all hang out together on occasion.

One night we were talking before a movie, and Megan was describing a friend of hers who “books jobs all the time. Practically every job she auditions for, she books!”

I remember an alarm went off in my head. I knew I was about to hear something that could really help me.

I asked Megan what her friend’s secret was, and Megan replied-
“She doesn’t need the job.”

I instantly knew this was true, and very important!

But had no idea how to manifest that in my life. So it became my goal to figure out how I could feel the same way.

This was not how my mind worked. So I would need to learn how to control my thoughts.

This led me to discovering my “vulture” and how to talk to it so it would shut up.

Eventually I discovered the power of this simple affirmation:

“I release and destroy my need to get this job.”

Once you say this to your vulture, it’s as simple as listening carefully to his response, and responding appropriately.

As you know, we’ve all had that audition for a job we wanted so bad we could taste it!

So, you coach with several coaches, memorize the entire script, and spend a huge amount of time “preparing”. Then you go to the audition...and you suck.

On the other hand, you’ve had that audition for that job you don’t really want, don’t feel like auditioning for, and do very little work on. Then you go to the audition and it feels like something else takes over...and you book the job!

You can create a reality where you have that experience at every audition!

You’re not going to book every job you go out for; you’re not meant to.

But just think how much more you will book, and how much more you are going to enjoy doing your craft!

WANT VS. NEED

I am about to describe one of the BIG secrets to being happy:
Want vs. Need.

There is a big difference between *wanting* things and *needing* things.
For instance, when it comes to auditioning, there's a big difference between "wanting" the job" and "needing" the job.
The universe wants you to want things, with all your heart, and then to do everything in your power to get it.
Where people make the mistake is when they *need* it.

It is important to *want* things.

The only way to get the brass ring is to reach out for it. The only way to achieve your goals is to have them in the first place. That is the act of "wanting".
Wanting something inspires you to action, and spurs you to joyfully take the steps that are necessary to achieve what you desire.

But the amazing thing is that by simply clarifying what you want, putting your desires out there and voicing them to the universe, has great creative power on its own. I like to put my desires in writing. Several times in my life I have looked back at my journal, and found that something I expressed a desire for in writing actually came true for me fairly soon after.

Jim Carrey tells a story that before he became famous he sat beside the Hollywood sign looking out over Los Angeles, and told himself over and over, "I want this. I want this." I believe the size of your success can be attributed in part by the size of your desire. Thoughts are creative, and the thought of what you want starts the ball rolling in that direction.

The trick is *not getting married to the exact outcome you desire.*

You mustn't NEED that which you want.

"Need" is fear-based. It says, "I am not happy without this," or "I know what's best for me".

Some actors wrongly think-

"I need this job to be happy. I need this to be complete. I need this to prove to my family I deserve to be acting."

It is a great myth for one to think, "If I get this, THEN I'll be happy."

It never works out that way.

And why is that? Because that statement has an unspoken first half, which is, "I am not happy right now." It says, "I am not enough. My life is not enough. Without this I am unhappy."

You must come to a place where you are happy “as you are”, for that is an attractive energy in the universe. Nothing outside you can really make you happy. Happiness comes from within. It is a personal choice.

So get good with yourself “as is”, because as they say “Wherever you are, there you are.”

Besides, you can't know what will make you happy in the long run. (see the chapter “A Higher Plan”)

It's the same with finding a lover. If you walk around feeling like half a person, wishing you had a boyfriend/girlfriend to make you happy, that almost never gets results. People smell your desperation. Yet, don't you find that as soon as you're dating someone, all of a sudden all these people come out of the woodwork to flirt with you? They sense that you don't NEED them, and that's attractive. You are shining from within, instead of having a needy energy that's shooting outward at everyone.

And so it is with a job.

You may want something, work hard to achieve it, and in your process achieve something even greater than your original goal. So don't get married to what you imagine is the result of your pursuit; just be involved in the pursuit.

Besides, you already have a job. Your job is to be a joyful artist. No one can take that away from you.

HOW TO BUILD A CAREER

Many actors wonder what is the best way to proceed when trying to achieve a successful career. They wonder, "Should I take a networking class? Go to a branding seminar? Hire a career coach and learn how to send out eye-catching postcards?"

This chapter discusses the universal concept-

Form Meets Structure

-which I feel is the healthiest way to approach growing your career.

For my purposes, let me be clear what I mean when I say "form" and "structure" -

In the case of a **building**, "structure" is everything inside the building, for example, the framework, beams, and bricks, i.e., anything supporting and holding it up.

And "form" is the outside appearance of the building; for example, whether it is big or small, sleek or run down.

In the case of an **actor**, "structure" is the work he puts into his craft, for example, performing on a regular basis with a theater company or improv troupe, creating live shows, comedy acts and web series. All which help him to grow as an artist.

While "form" is the kind of jobs that he has attracts.

With a building, if you build a big, tall, sturdy *structure*, the form of a skyscraper will come to it.

However, if you merely lean three logs together, the form of a teepee will come to it.

And so it is with your career-

If you put your energy and focus on your craft ("structure"), then you will grow as an artist, create terrific partnerships, and you will attract fantastic jobs ("form") into your life!

However, if your focus is mainly on the result of getting jobs ("form"), it tends to cause dissatisfaction, stagnation, and the jobs seem to recede into the distance.

Some actors would like to skip the "work on their craft" part and go right to the "fame". But, as with a building, if too much form comes to meet a structure that is not ready for it, the building collapses.

There are too many stories of young actors who achieved great success early in life, only to downward spiral into drugs or even suicide. Their internal structure was not ready for the form that came to meet it.

Maybe they felt like a fraud, or maybe after their initial success they expected more terrific jobs to come, but didn't have the talent to get them, or maybe they just had a personality disorder that hadn't been worked out yet. For whatever reason, they didn't have the inner strength and/or talent to retain the jobs they wanted.

I want your career to be sturdy and have longevity.

Many people get too involved in worrying about the “form” of their life. You may want to be a working actor, but instead are currently employed as a waiter. There are two ways you could respond to that:

1) You could worry and fret, causing yourself anxiety and unhappiness.

or

2) You could trust that there is a higher plan at work in your life, stay focused on your goal, and have that positive energy translate into growth.

So, you might ask, “Without an acting job, how can I do what I want to do?”

And I say, “Just do it”. Get involved in it some way.

The best thing to do is to find your community. Those are the artists who are at, or just above, your level, and are actively involved in what you would like to be doing. Surround yourself with them. Work with them, learn from them, and grow one step at a time.

People want to skip steps. They think, “If I could just make friends with the right celebrities, start hanging out with some movie stars, then I’d be famous too.”

I promise you, it rarely, if ever, works that way. It is a recipe for time wasting and trouble.

Some actors think if they could just get introduced to a big time agent at some Hollywood Hills party, then they might be on the fast track to stardom. But if you’re not prepared for that meeting, nothing much can come from it. What have you got to show him?

If you want to be a film actor, going to a movie isn’t going to help. Go see some live shows. Find a theater group whose work you respect. Become a “fan”.

There is a power in “partnership”. You don’t have to do it alone. When you join forces with other actors, their “breaks” become yours as well.

When I first got to Los Angeles, I didn’t know anyone. I just knew I was interested in being involved in the world of comedy.

I could’ve sat at home, waiting for an invitation to get involved, but that would never have come.

I found a group of performers, who were doing live shows at a run down coffeehouse. I thought they were terrific, so I went every week and soon they got to know me. Next thing I knew, I was being invited to perform, and soon I became one of the many performers in this small community of comics.

Over the next few years, I performed alongside these comics, in coffeehouses, bookstores, and dumpy clubs. And I got better at what I do. I saw all of them grow as performers.

And now most all of these comedians, who were just doing what they love for nothing, are all working actors and writers. Some are on series, others created their own TV shows.

And all of this from a run down coffeehouse!

The Universe pays off to people who put it out there.
 If you take two steps towards what you want, the universe will give you two more.
 Action creates action.

Do not fall into the trap that teachers have set when they say “A good actor is always studying”.

That is not true! (Of course *they* would say that! They want your money!)
 I believe that a good actor is always *ACTING!*

Why *pay* someone to do what you love? And why set up a dichotomy in which you know nothing and someone else has all the answers?
 Better to take that money and spend it on renting a theater and cast yourself in your dream role. Find an outlet that excites you and be doing what you love all the time, with other artists whom you respect. And by acting all the time, you grow as an artist, and you meet other actors who haven't given their power away to a teacher.

And good news: Working on your structure is FUN! You're getting to do what you love, and become better at it, as opposed to just worrying about the form of your life, which you have no control over.

Follow your bliss. In other words, “Do that which makes your heart happy.” Because when you do something, it creates more of it in your life.

Therefore “studying acting” simply creates more “studying acting”. And I promise you, that person whom you're hoping will “discover you”, is not going to see you performing in a classroom. They're going to see your play, or web series, or comedy show, etc.

Early in my career, an agent of mine explained to me that acting was an “ethereal” profession. What she meant was that you cannot control it, so don't sweat it if you're not currently working the kind of jobs you desire. If you are talented you *WILL* get work. Therefore, the best thing is to simply keep doing it, and keep growing as an artist. There are many hugely successful actors who didn't hit it big till they were in their thirties or forties. I guarantee you that they were working on their craft all along. They were doing their real job, which is to focus on their structure as an artist. You must never stop acting and growing.

Worst-case scenario, you'll never be quite as famous as you had dreamed. But you got to spend a lifetime doing what you love. Not too bad!

LET THE UNIVERSE CONTROL

We've all heard the following cliché:

Upon receiving a compliment from an audience member, the overly dramatic actress says:

(a la "Norma Desmond")

"I am not responsible for my performance. I am just...

(pause for dramatic effect)

-the vessel."

Makes your skin crawl, doesn't it?

But why is that? Does it sound like the person is full of herself? Does it make you want to sarcastically say, "Oh, so YOU'VE got a direct communication with GOD, who I guess has taken an interest in theatrical presentations now?"

...Well, maybe he has.

Many great artists describe the act of creating their art as something they're involved in, but not in control of. They say that they don't necessarily know what the final outcome of a piece of art will be, but instead are more interested in the process of allowing it to happen.

Thomas Harris, who wrote "Silence of the Lambs", and many other terrific novels, describes it like this, "The story already existed and always has. All I do is be open to it, and write it all down."

When asked how he writes music, Michael Jackson said, "Artists seem to get in the way of the music. Get out of the way of the music. Don't write the music. *Let the music write itself.*"

When I used to go into an audition I thought I had to be "perfect".

I thought that the actor, who does the most "perfect" audition, would be the one who books the job.

But how do we create "perfection"? The answer is WE can't.

It's impossible to "control" a scene to perfection. Any kind of result-oriented "need" an actor has while performing will keep that actor from being able to "behave as if it's really happening" (the definition of "acting").

There is an alternative to you controlling your performance, and that is allowing the universe to control it.

Before auditions, I say the following affirmation-

"I release and destroy my need to control this audition. I know that I am not strong enough to control it. I've tried and it never works. I therefore ask my higher power to lovingly guide me through it."

You see, a person can draw a picture of a flower, and it will only look as good as a human can make it look.

But, on the other hand, the Universe can make a *real* flower; beautiful in all its intricacies and details. Even its flaws are sublime. Not even Monet could create a flower as beautiful as the ones found in nature.

Therefore it is not up to us to control a performance. If we do, it will only ever be about a 5 out of 10. But if we let the universe create it, it at least has the opportunity to be a 10 out of 10!

When you release your control of a scene, you will stop “watching” your performance. You will stop being concerned with how your performance is being judged by the audience. Instead, you will trust that if you jump into the scene, with your only interest being to allow things to happen, then the universe will take care to make sure everything falls into place.

There is no ONE correct way for a scene to look. It should look different every time you do it (depending on where exactly your whim takes you that day). And it should look different on every actor who does it. So there’s, like, a million ways it could look.

But some people might respond, “I’m not willing to let a scene just unfold as it may. What if unfolds poorly.”

To that I say, “Then it was meant to”. They say, “Rejection is God’s protection”. It may be a stroke of luck that you didn’t “nail that audition”. Doing that job may have led you down the road to ruin. It helps to trust that everything is happening for your greatest good.

You may be afraid to let go of your control, out of fear of what may happen if you don’t control your performance. But what are you so afraid will happen if you let go of your control? You’re not going to pull your pants down and start shouting obscenities. And why is that? *Because it’s not in the circumstances of the scene.*

So, what is the worst that can happen if you release your control? The scene won’t “take off”, or be “fun” for you. That’s the worst thing. But at least it has a shot of taking off. If you control it, it will never be any fun for you.

There is a well-known quote that goes-

“The freedom to make mistakes provides the best environment for creativity.”

There is magic in a piece of paper that has a scene on it. The power is in the words; the writing.

I like to envision it this way:

When you take out a piece of paper that contains a scene, something magical happens, which is that the scene already exists in the air around you. The magic of that scene is all around you, and is just waiting for some honest vessel to appear, and allow the scene to filter through it into the real world.

And in order to be an honest vessel for the scene you only need three things:

1. To be free of anxiety for the most part (meaning that your vulture isn't squawking).
2. To understand the literal, obvious circumstances of the scene.
3. To not have made a bunch of result-oriented choices about how you are going to enact the performance.

You should think of a performance/audition as the act of jumping off a diving board. Your preparation beforehand (memorizing and scene comprehension) is the stepping up the ladder and out onto the board. But then all that's left to do is dive. That's the fun part.

You jump out into the air and let whatever happens, happen. You don't control it. There's a saying that goes, "Jump and the net will catch you." The universe will always be there to catch you when you take a joyful risk. This can be applied to scene work as well. Trust that you can let go of your control, and have faith that something bigger than you will be there to help you out.

Imagine the heavy weight on your shoulders if you had the thought just before stepping in front of an audience, "Okay, it's up to me to make this happen. I've got to make this perfect". That's no fun.

And on top of that, your negative ego tells you that you're not going to be able to pull it off.

But, if you choose to let the universe control the scene... Ah! The weight has been lifted. It is no longer your responsibility. Ugh. Who wants responsibilities?

You are now free to play again!

"What is an artist? He's a man who has antennae, who knows how to hook up to the currents which are in atmosphere, in the cosmos.

An artist earns the right to call himself a creator only when he admits to himself that he is but an instrument."

-Henry Miller, Author

"I don't even consider that I wrote it when I got done.... The song was there before me, before I came along. I just sorta came down and just sorta took it down with a pencil, but it was all there before I came around."

- Bob Dylan

"I did not write it. God wrote it. I merely did his dictation."

- Harriet Beecher Stowe, author of "Uncle Tom's Cabin"

"The creative process takes its own course. If it did otherwise, it would not be creative."

- P.W. Martin, Author

STORY OF THE CATERPILLAR

Years ago I came across what appeared to be a children's book at a bookstore. It was a simple story about a caterpillar, filled with colorful illustrations. However, upon reading it, I realized that there was more to it than I had expected.

For a long time, I regretted not having bought the book that day, but I couldn't remember the title.

I have put the story into my own words below...

(I recently found out that the book is called "Hope for the Flowers" by Trina Paulus, so if you like the message, you can read it in her own words which are probably a lot better than mine!)

Once upon a time there was a little caterpillar. He was finally on his own and wanted to make something of his life, but he didn't know where to start. He sat on a rock, to think about how he might be able to achieve his dreams.

Soon a group of caterpillars hurried by. He called out to them, but they were in too big a rush to notice him.

"Gosh", thought the little caterpillar, "they look like they know where they're going! I'll follow them."

And follow them he did. More and more caterpillars joined the group.

Eventually, they came to a huge gathering of caterpillars, and the little caterpillar saw something he couldn't believe. Ahead of him was a huge column of caterpillars, all climbing on top of one another, creating a tower of caterpillars that stretched upwards as far as the eye could see.

The little caterpillar stopped in his tracks, looking up in awe. All the other caterpillars were rushing to the base of the tower.

"What am I supposed to do?" asked the little caterpillar.

Another caterpillar paused just long enough to shout over his shoulder, "Don't you know?! You must climb up the tower. Success lies at the top." And then he hopped into the crawling mass of caterpillars, and was gone.

The little caterpillar gulped nervously, and then plunged into the column.

It was cramped beyond belief with caterpillars fighting to climb upwards. One caterpillar even stepped on the little caterpillar's head in order to push himself up.

"So that's how it is," thought the little caterpillar.

And with that, he took a deep breath, and fought with all his might. He pushed and squirmed and fought and climbed higher and higher and higher. He soon became the fastest climber around. Once he even stepped on another caterpillar's head, but he was determined to reach the top. He knew that if he could make it to the top he would find success, and all his dreams would come true.

He soon lost all track of time, but he felt as though he had been climbing for weeks and weeks. Then one day, he did it. He broke through to the top!

He was breathless in anticipation for what he would find. He looked around and saw-

...There was nothing. Just air. He frantically scanned the horizon searching for something...anything. Then he noticed something unsettling. In the distance, he saw that there were many other caterpillar towers. All packed with thousands of caterpillars pushing their way to the top. Pushing their way to... nothing. The towers just climbed upwards, and then ended. The caterpillars at the top were no better off. They were no closer to achieving their dreams than the ones at the bottom.

The caterpillar sat there for a few moments, letting it sink in.

And then he just dove down, back into the column.

“What are you doing?!” asked a confused caterpillar as the little caterpillar passed him.

“Are you crazy? You’re going the wrong way!” shouted another caterpillar.

But the little caterpillar ignored them and continued downwards until he finally found himself back on the ground. He looked once more up at the tower, turned on his heels, and walked away. He may not have known where he was going, but he knew the answers didn’t lie here.

He walked aimlessly for some time, and he soon grew bored.

Before his big trek to the towers, one of his favorite things to do was to spin silk. He never thought it would amount to much so he had given it up. Now, he spun silk with joyful abandon. He got better and better at it, and soon he was able to spin it into beautiful shapes. He spun a lovely silk button that was so strong he was able to hang from it. He was so tired from all the spinning that he decided to take a nice long nap.

He had no idea how long he had slept, but when he awoke he found that he was inside a chrysalis. Once he had pushed his way out, he realized that something was very different.

His body had changed, and he was no longer a caterpillar. He had undergone a metamorphosis. He now had two, beautiful, brightly colored wings. He had become a **butterfly!**

He flapped his wings and took off into the sky. He was flying! He flew off in exhilaration, over the hills, over the caterpillar towers and beyond, into his wildest dreams.

Following the rules and doing things the way they’re “supposed to be done” isn’t always the answer.

There are many ways to get to where you want to be. If you live in New York and want to get to California you could travel to the West. But you could also travel to the East and get there as well; it just might take a little longer. And on your journey, you just might find a new destination that’s so much better than the one you had intended!

TENACITY

“Tenacity”

Definition - *not easily dispelled or discouraged; persisting in existence or in a course of action.*

Several years ago, someone told me I was “tenacious”, and my first response was to be insulted.

I wanted to believe that things come easy for me. I thought being “tenacious” meant that I wasn’t talented enough to get work easily.

But after giving it some thought, I realized that “tenacity” may just be what it takes to have a career as an artist.

It’s not shameful to be tenacious, in fact it’s to be respected. It is necessary.

There are plenty of talented people who are not pursuing their art. But, you can’t be an artist unless you participate in your craft.

I graduated from a highly respected undergraduate acting program, and at the end of the four years we did a showcase in New York City for agents and casting directors. You might be shocked to hear that a lot of the kids who got the biggest responses from agents, one of whom even immediately landed a role on a soap opera, are no longer even acting.

Therefore, it is not talent alone that decides whether you will have a career as an actor. You must also have persistence, determination, strength of purpose, and resolve.

In other words, you must have *tenacity*.

Now, let me tell you the story of another girl I went to high school with, named Rachel Harris.

She was a very good actress, but her theater experience was strictly of the high school variety. She went to an “okay” theater school, and then moved to New York City to pursue an acting career.

She struggled on and on in New York, and later in Los Angeles, to get acting work, but little came. Some people would have given up after seeing so little success over the years. But, clearly, there was something inside her that kept her going and made her believe that she could do it.

In Los Angeles, she began taking classes at The Groundlings Theater, a well-respected school for improvisational theater. I had never thought of her as a comedian, but she knew that she had the capacity for it.

She worked her way through the program, a total of four years of training, and actually made it into the Groundling’s Main Company. An honorable feat!

Because she had focused so well on creating her “structure”, jobs began coming.

Christopher Guest saw her in one of the Groundlings shows, and began putting her in his films. She became a highly recognizable personality on VH1, and then got her big breakout role in “The Hangover”. All of this while still in her 30’s.

Currently, there is hardly ever a moment that she is not either a series regular on a TV show or working on a feature. Now this is what I call a success story! And she accomplished it all because she was “tenacious”.

Obviously you gotta have the chops to be a working actor, but it’s not enough to just be talented. You have to be actively involved in your craft in order to be a successful actor. So many actors just wait around for the next audition to come. And when it doesn’t, as it is bound to do once and awhile, they can become disheartened and appear more and more desperate at auditions which assures them of even less work.

You must remember that when you feel defeated, the jury is still out as to whether you actually are. It remains to be seen. So many actors who don’t see immediate success, will let that stop them from growing, or just throw in the towel altogether.

But you can still be a “success story” at any age.

If a drug addict was able to kick the habit, and remain sober for the rest of their life, wouldn’t that be considered a success story? It doesn’t matter what failures you’ve had on your journey. What matters is how you overcome them.

There is a screenwriter who wrote a female buddy flick. It was turned down wherever she went, but she believed in the script enough to not give up on it. Eventually she got the movie made. That movie was “Thelma & Louise”. I’m told the writer now has a framed copy of the script hanging above her desk, and on the front of that script, in big red letters, is an agency’s stamp which reads, “Rejected”. She got the last laugh.

It’s like that Cy Coleman song-
“It’s Not Where You Start, It’s Where You Finish.”

WISH EVERYONE WHITE LIGHT

I used to look at auditions as a “competition”.

This seemed to be such an obvious truth to me. As actors, we were all “competing” to get the job. And I wanted to “win”. In my mind, the other actors auditioning were simply obstacles to my “winning”.

This was a deeply rooted way to see things. I had grown up with years of kickball, baseball, and Miss America Pageants, all reinforcing the notion that winning is great and losing sucks.

One day a friend recommended to me that I wish everyone at an audition “white light”. In other words, to hope everyone is safe and protected and able to do their absolute best.

This immediately sounded like such a good idea, and when I did it, I felt like a much kinder person. I liked myself more. And I felt a lot less anxiety.

I hadn’t even realized that I had been wishing my fellow actors ill will at auditions. But essentially, by resenting the other actors, and not wishing for them to do their best, that was exactly what I was doing.

It doesn’t matter that the negativity only existed in my thoughts and not in action. The thought is as real an experience to me as the action would’ve been.

In a spiritual sense, we are all the same person. We are all one. So when you wish ill on others you are also wishing it on yourself.

If you hope someone fails in the audition, when your turn comes you will feel as though someone is hoping you do badly.

This way of thinking has its roots in the “law of karma”, which can be described in the following ways:

- “If you wish bad things upon others bad things will happen to you.”
- “For every cause there is an effect. For every action a reaction.”
- “If we sow goodness, we will reap goodness; if we sow evil, we will reap evil.”

But if that’s a little too ethereal for you, you can look at it like this:

When you have a destructive thought towards someone else, you will most likely feel guilty about it, at least in some small way.

Guilt is actually anger turned inwards at yourself. Therefore, you will be mad at yourself for having the thought.

When you are mad at yourself you cannot perform to your best ability. You will, therefore, not allow yourself to flourish, accidents will happen, and things will not go well. So it is in your best interests to only think loving thoughts about others.

By letting other people shine, you are also giving yourself permission to shine. We can all be winners. After all, isn't being happy the best way to be a "winner". So why base your happiness on whether or not you get this job or that, when you can't possibly book every job. There are plenty of jobs to go around.

Auditions are more about creating a good relationship with the casting director, so that he will call you back again and again. If a casting director believes in you, even if you're not quite right for this role, he will keep bringing you in until he finds the right role for you.

And remember, you don't know that this job is what's best for you. Getting this job could actually keep you from getting the wonderful job you were truly meant to get.

Try to see it this way: When you go to an audition, you are not there to get the job. You already have the job. Your job is to do what you love. You are a joyful actor. And by sharing your love of what you do with others, you inspire them by reminding of what "love" is.

A nice way to look at it is that when you go to an audition, you are an angel in disguise. To the casting people, you just look like any another actor trying out for the role. But you know better. They see you in pants and a tie, but you are really wearing white flowing robes. You were sent by the universe to experience love in front of them. Therefore reminding them what love is.

The following is a quote from Marianne Williamson's, "A Return To Love"-

"We were born to make manifest the glory of God (or "love") that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we subconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we're liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others."

Section 4: APPROACHING YOUR ART

THE STUDENT/SOLDIER

Remember when you would play “pretend” as a small child.

Maybe you tied a towel around your neck and pretended you were a superhero. Or, maybe you would turn the curtains into a veil, and pretend you were a bride on her wedding day. (I, personally, will admit to doing both.)

You did it because it was fun. It’s fun to get to experience something new. It’s fun to live someone else’s life.

There was magic in pretending. If you said, “I’m only an inch tall”, then that was the truth of the moment. No one said, “I’m not buying it.” No one was telling you that “you’re doing it wrong”, or “someone else is better at it than you”.

As a child, you didn’t second-guess your experience. You had no self-doubt. You didn’t need permission or approval. You weren’t “watching” yourself. You were only interested in your own experience. That was the reason you did it.

As a student of acting we are the exact opposite.

In theater schools, performances are judged, work is assigned, and, very often, all the magic is sucked out. You learn there is a right and a wrong way to do things. You learn to ask for permission.

It is in school that our inner “student/soldier” is born.

Your inner “student/soldier” is the part of you that wants to get it “right” for the teacher. It wants to please what it perceives as the authority figure. This part of you feels comfortable with heavy weight on its shoulders. It will sweat and push to get the job done, because it knows that there is no one there to help it. It alone bears responsibility to keep control over the given situation.

Many adult actors are unable to let go of their “student/soldier” upon graduating school.

They have a habit of needing approval. They approach a performance like a student who is about to take a test, or like a soldier carrying out orders from his sergeant.

There’s no enjoyment involved, only “getting it right”. That’s no fun!

You must understand that once you are out of school, there is no one to please but yourself. An audience can only enjoy your performance as much as you’re enjoying it.

They can only feel your joy or your pain as much as you’re feeling it.

As an adult actor, your desire to please others only works against you.

In school, we learn to ask for “permission”. Actors who hold onto their “student/soldier” will not allow themselves to have a full, selfish experience without some outside source’s permission. They are forever waiting for someone to give them the green light that it’s okay to fully invest themselves in the journey of a scene.

As an adult, there's no need to seek permission. The audience wants you to "go for it". You don't do anyone any favors by holding back.

Why, as adults, do we need permission to allow ourselves to have a rich, emotional experience in an audition? Why do we, so often, play it safe by just showing people what we think they want to see?

-Some people feel that they are not enough. These people should trust that they are interesting enough onstage without a controlled embellishment. Simply because they are human, they share the most wonderful characteristics with all mankind.

-Some people are afraid that they will fail, so they play it safe, control the scene, and don't allow themselves to "behave as if it's really happening". They figure, "If you don't try, then you can't fail". These people have an inner fear that they are inadequate.

-Then others don't fully try for the opposite reason. It's not that they are afraid to fail. These actors are afraid to *succeed*.

Why would someone be afraid of success? In her book "Return To Love", Marianne Williamson writes:

"Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, 'Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?' Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God (or "love") that is within us. It is not just in some of us; it is in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others."

The voice in your head saying, "Play it safe and small," is your own. Have no shame in shining your light. Your output is worthy simply because it is genuinely you. And you are a fascinating creature, simply because you are human.

In school we learn that acting is "hard work". We are taught that there are so many different ways to work hard at preparing for a role. We can read countless books, and do countless hours of research on the period, the accent, the physical and internal life of the character.

For some actors all this hard work can do the opposite of what it was intended for. It can distance the actor from the character he is going to portray, and take away all the fun and magic of playing the role.

A wonderful acting teacher once told me:

"You know more than you think you know."

This blew my mind. Until then, the sole message I had gotten from my instructors was that only intense work allows an actor to play a role. It was my understanding that I knew nothing about, and shared nothing in common with, the characters I would be

playing. But that, with enough study, research and rehearsal, I could earn the right to portray them.

But here was this teacher telling me otherwise. Saying that, just because I was human, I had an understanding of every human who came before me; that we are all fundamentally the same.

This teacher was directing us in a Tennessee William's play. A period piece. She had us find a picture, from the time period, of our "character" (what we thought our character looked like) and told us that just by looking at it, we could inhabit the role. And it was true.

It takes as long as you want it to take to allow yourself to behave as if the circumstances are "really happening to you". You have the ability to give yourself permission.

Investing time to research the circumstances and daydream is a fine idea, as long as it's fun, but there's no set amount of time you must take.

If you tell yourself, "I need to do 'this much' preparation in order to play this character", then that will become your reality. Your brain wants to be correct. You will not allow yourself to "behave as if it's really happening" until you have done what you perceive as the right amount of work.

Please don't get me wrong. I definitely support actors getting training, especially if they hope to make a living in the theater.

I like to think of actors as "artists." We are like painters. It's a good idea for a painter to learn from those who came before him; to study how the great painters of the past did what they did.

But then, he must throw all of that away, and find his own way of approaching the work. When he is in the act of creating his art, any concern or anxiety he has about doing it "correctly" would weigh him down like chains.

Creating art is something magical. While doing it, we commune with a higher power. But you can't do that if you are "controlling" your performance with a result-oriented technique.

I believe that studying acting is a positive step in an actor's journey. But, as an artist, it's your responsibility to find a healthy way to incorporate what you've learned, without letting it work against you.

As an adult actor, any thought that triggers your inner "student/soldier" into action should be ignored.

Acting should be fun.

And, if you have faith, it is magical.

"It often happens that things come into the mind in a more finished form than could have been achieved after much study."

- La Rochefoucauld (1613-1680)

BE A SELFISH ACTOR

Here's a fact which I am surprised actors don't hear more often from coaches and teachers-

"Acting runs on empathy."

What that means is that an audience can only FEEL what YOU FEEL. They can only have the experience that YOU have.

In other words, if you want an audience to feel your sadness, for example, then you must want to feel sad. If you feel it, they feel it. (However, if you are just "showing" sadness, then the audience won't feel anything.)

Therefore, any part of you that is involved in how the audience is receiving your work, and worrying, "Are they getting this? Do they like me?", is a part of you that is not having a rich, emotional experience, thereby giving the audience a rich emotional experience.

That's why I tell actors, "**You must be selfish.**"

"Selfish" – concerned exclusively with oneself: concentrating on one's own personal pleasure without regard for others

Our whole lives we are told that it's wrong to be selfish.

And in many situations that is true.

It was good of us when we shared our school lunch with a hungry friend, or raked the lawn of the old lady across the street...

However, what I want to share with you is that there is great advantage to being a "selfish actor".

Please don't get me wrong. I don't mean the kind of selfishness that affects other people negatively. Like, for instance, when an actor will stand slightly upstage of his scene partner, so the scene partner is forced to turn his back to the audience, or the kind of actor that will steal focus during someone else's moment.

(I heard a rumor that a famous actress used to carry a scarf as a prop in a play, and, when others would talk, she would wave the scarf around to draw the audience's eye back to her. If that's true, "BAD Famous Actress, BAD!")

No, not like that.

I'm talking about the *good* kind of "selfish actor" who is only interested in his own journey through a scene, and not in how the audience perceives him.

This is the kind of self-absorbed behavior that children engage in when they play "pretend"; there is zero concern in pleasing an audience.

Why, as adults, don't we approach our "playing" of roles the same way?

During an actor's training he seems to get the message that acting should *not* be selfish.

After all, he does scenes FOR his acting coach. He is taught to please his teacher. And after the scene, he eagerly awaits his teacher's feedback, hoping that that he has pleased her.

This is a step in most artists' lives, but, upon graduation, the actor must let go of this way of looking at things.

That "need to please" does not, in any way, serve the adult artist.

The "selfish actor" understands that he cannot please an audience by *trying* to please them.

He understands that an audience's experience can only be *his* experience. Therefore if the actor, by being selfish, has a rich, emotional experience onstage, then so will the audience while watching.

Everyone wants to give a "powerful" audition. We're told it's the "powerful audition" that books the job. But if acting runs on empathy, then the "powerful audition" is not the audition where the actor is screaming and jumping up and down. On the contrary, the "powerful audition" is the audition where the actor *feels more*.

It's so sad for me to think of all the actors who are trapped in the illusion that their feelings are unimportant, and all that matters is what the audience thinks.

Some actors go their whole lives approaching their work this way, and they wonder why they have lost their love of the craft.

I will never forget the first time I saw what I would term a truly "selfish actor" in the positive sense.

I studied at a conservatory program, and at the end of my four years we went to New York to perform scenes for agents and casting directors. It was, for us, like a high-pressured "cotillion" for actors.

Anyway, we spent months beforehand choosing our scenes and just as long on choosing our outfits. We wracked our brains trying to figure out what would impress the powers-that-be in New York City.

Other schools were performing there as well, and we watched their scenes with a mixture of curiosity, and competitiveness.

It just so happens that Parker Posey was graduating the same year as me, from a different school, and when she appeared onstage in her scene it truly was a revelation! Her outfit was "casual" at best (I don't think she even wore shoes...gasp!), but if she'd been in high heels and a gown we would've had the same reaction, because it was her *energy* that surprised us all.

The audience drew in their collective breath. We were mesmerized. It was so different. She wasn't trying to impress. She was just uniquely being herself. This was an actress

who honestly didn't give a shit as to how she was perceived. She was wholly involved in her experience in the scene. She felt it, so we the audience felt it as well. At that moment, I knew I was watching someone approach acting differently than I had been, but I had no idea how she was doing it!

It's understandably difficult for young actors to achieve a selfish mind-space. We are, after all, trained from infancy to seek approval. And seeking approval is the very foundation of schooling; striving to impress teacher and to "get it right". It starts in elementary school, with reading, writing and arithmetic. Then, in college, we're graded on our scene work. But it is the actor's job to let this go upon graduation. It is your duty to yourself!

*The "selfish actor" is **magnetic**:*

Who books the greatest number of acting jobs?
The actor who is the most "*magnetic*".

We've all heard that expression. People gush, "Oh, he was marvelous, absolutely *magnetic*!", or, "She was so magnetic, I couldn't take my eyes off her!"

Well, what does that mean?
It means having the properties of a magnet, which attracts things. A magnet pulls things in; it draws them closer.

Can you pull something *in* when your energy is going *outward*?
Put your arms out in front of you. Wiggle your fingers as if you're feeling things; you're checking things out. You're thinking-
"*Am I good? Is this okay? Are you enjoying this? How are you responding to me???*"

...Is this magnetic?

No.

This energy makes people lean back, *away from you*.

However, when you are only interested in your own experience ("selfish"), with no attention to how others perceive you, then you create a void, an empty space, between you and the observer.

The space that might've been filled with a needy energy is now empty.

The audience finds themselves leaning in to fill that space.

They are *attracted* to the performance, like a magnet, and therefore wish to focus on it more closely. They cannot take their eyes away.

I want your audition to be “*creepy real*” at times.

The casting person should be taken by surprise and think, “Oh, she’s acting now! I thought she was just talking to me!”

It should feel to the casting person that they are pulling back a curtain and peering from behind it at something they’re not supposed to be watching.

The Law of Attraction:

One of the laws of attraction is to “feel and behave as if the object of one’s desire is already acquired.”

There have been many books written on the laws of attraction.

Scholars, gurus and scientists alike have tried to unlock the secret to getting what you want from the universe.

But let’s keep it simple and not get into all that complicated mumbo-jumbo.

After all, I believe you’ve known the secret all along; just so long as you’ve been in a *high school cafeteria!*

Have you ever heard the phrase “All I really need to know I learned in kindergarten”? Well, I’d say it’s more like “seventh or eighth grade”!

The laws governing attraction in high school still apply to the world of grown ups.

It’s as simple as this:

1. No one wants to sit at the lunch table with the needy kid who is desperately patting the seat beside him saying, “Here! I shined the table for you! *Please* sit with me!”
2. However, everyone wants to sit at the lunch table of the easygoing kid who doesn’t care if they sit there, and says, “Hey, I’m having a good time. You can join me if you like, but I’m fine either way.”

The first kid *needs* you to like him.

The second either already knows that you do, or doesn’t give a shit either way!

Subsequently, there’s two ways you can approach an audition. Like the “needy kid” or the “easygoing kid”.

Sadly, most actors approach an audition like the “needy kid” who is desperate for friends.

They worry and fret that they aren’t “good” enough or prepared enough, so they stay up late the night before; over-preparing, picking outfits, reading and memorizing entire scripts and basically doing work that is joyless and unneeded.

Being a “good little boy” is not a very attractive energy to have.

The “easygoing kid”, on the other hand, doesn’t *need* anything from you. It’s not that he’s cruel; he’s just *self-sufficient*.

The actors who approach their auditions in this way know that they are not there to get *that* job, but to have a good relationship with the casting director.

The “easygoing” actor does only the amount of work that he feels is necessary to have an audition that he will *enjoy*.

Think about it; do you really want to come off as an actor who had *all the time in the world* to prepare his audition?

Actors strive to create the perfect audition, which is in fact not very attractive. There is an air of desperation in the room when an actor has over-prepared in a panicky, controlling way.

And the people watching still react to that desperation just like the kids in the cafeteria.

Wouldn't you rather come off as someone who has a full life; joyfully busy with working on their structure as an artist?

Perhaps you were too busy working on some independent film to memorize the entire script word-for-word.

Or maybe your hands were so full rehearsing a play with the theater group you helped to create, that you weren't able to scour the mall and buy the exact jacket that is mentioned in the script.

You don't really have to be in some independent film; just act as if you are.

You don't have to really *be* the “easygoing kid”.

...Just *behave as though you are*.

It's alright to “want” the job...but let go of your attachment to results.

Be joyful. And behave as though you already have everything you “*need*”.

Once you have released your “need to please”, you will be a “selfish actor”!

In summation:

There's nothing wrong with being wrapped up in your own experience when you are acting.

You are doing the audience a favor when you approach your acting this way. Your experience will be richer and more emotional and thus the audience's experience will be richer and more emotional as well.

Let's all be “selfish actors”!

“A work of art is the unique result of a unique temperament. Its beauty comes from the fact that the author is what he is. It has nothing to do with the fact that other people want what they want. Indeed, the moment that an artist takes notice of what other people want, and tries to supply the demand, he ceases to be an artist, and becomes a dull or an amusing craftsman, an honest or a dishonest tradesman.”

- Oscar Wilde

THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS 'NERVOUS'

I don't allow the word "nervous" in my workshop.

There is no such thing as "nervous".

The physical sensation of what some people call "nervous", i.e., your heart racing and butterflies in your stomach-
-is the exact same physical sensation as "excitement".

So, "nervous" is just "excitement" labeled negatively!

And let me say this loud and clear:

YOU MUST BE EXCITED IN ORDER TO ACT!

Your heart **MUST** be racing! Your stomach **MUST** be full of butterflies!

It's **WHY** you became an actor to begin with. So you could feel that thrill of excitement.

Your heart racing is what plugs you into your higher power (or "the magic of acting"), and allows you to have an experience larger than yourself.

It allows you to feel what mountain climbers and alpine skiers risk their lives to feel, but you get to feel by simply standing in front of an audience.

That feeling of excitement is there to help you. Without that adrenaline rush you wouldn't be able to give the performance you want to give.

It's that extra flow of blood to the brain that makes you "super human". It sharpens your senses, improves your memory, and makes you emotionally available.

It's this "excitement" that allows a basketball player to shoot the ball through the hoop, SWISH!, from mid-court.

Just like an athlete, you need that energy to perform to the best of your ability.

Famed British Actress, Dame Judi Dench describes the sensation this way-

"You use it, because fear produces adrenaline, which fuels the performance. It is batteries."

However, when an actor is feeling excitement AND his vulture says something negative, he may make the mistake of labeling that wonderful excitement as something called "nervousness".

In other words, "nervousness" is just "excitement" PLUS negative thoughts.

To illustrate:

Two people are waiting in line for a roller coaster. They are both feeling their heart racing and butterflies in their stomach.

The first says, "I'm so excited!" then goes on the roller coaster and has a great time.

The second says, "I'm so nervous!" then runs home and misses out on a great experience.

It was the same feeling, but two very different reactions to that feeling.

The first person's vulture was silent, so he was able to enjoy the feeling of excitement. Whereas the second person's vulture was saying something like, "This roller coaster is old, and it could break while you're riding it. You could DIE!" It wasn't the feeling that was upsetting the second person. It was the negative thoughts.

Feelings aren't facts! They are caused by thoughts.

It's your thoughts that create your reality.

This is why learning to control your thoughts is so important! As an actor, it's the only thing you *can* control.

So to sum it all up:

If I was feeling what some people call "nervous" before an audition, and someone asked me how I was doing, I'd reply-

"I'm excited, THANK GOD, and am currently in the process of releasing some negative thoughts."

See, in this way, I'M the one in control. Not some monster called "nervous" that I have no control over.

All actors feel excitement.

It's up to you whether you want to use it for or against yourself.

THE 'REAL' ACTOR

One of my favorite self-help gurus is Marianne Williamson. I used to listen to recordings of her lectures in my car, and I always felt so terrific afterwards. I learned a great deal from her teachings.

Here's a story she told from her college days:

She had begun singing in a club, and really enjoyed it. Although, maybe not the best singer, she had such a love for it, that she truly shined onstage. People started to come to the club just to hear her sing.

One day she was filling out a form, which had asked what her occupation was. She was unsure at the time how to answer that, but a friend said, "Put down 'singer'. You are a singer!" And she did.

Later she started thinking, "I'm not really a singer. Those other, more talented, people who came before me, they were *real* singers. I better figure out how they did it. I've got to learn how to be a *real* singer."

So, she started trying to perform the way she imagined a "real" singer would perform. People sensed this, and stopped coming to hear her sing. All the fun was gone from her performance. She had stopped giving herself permission to love and trust what she was doing, and instead came to her craft from fear and insecurity.

Now imagine what would've happened if she had just said to herself, "You know what, I'm not a 'singer'. I release my need to be a singer. I'll let all those other people who sing be the 'real singers'. I'm just here to enjoy myself." If she had thought that way, you can bet she would've had a lot more fun, the audience would've felt it, and the crowds would've returned.

Right before I perform, I like to tell myself-

"I'm not an actor. I'll let those other people, in the show or in the audition waiting room, be the actors. I'll let them have the responsibility to have read all the right books and taken all the right classes. I'm not an actor. I'm just here to be me and to enjoy playing in the circumstances of the scene."

Acting should be as playful and magical as it was when you were a kid.

As soon as you take on the responsibility to be an "ACTOR", the question comes up: "Am I talented enough, and have I done what it takes to be a *real* actor?"

There are millions of books on acting, and millions of acting classes. You wouldn't have the time to read and take them all, even if you tried.

Yes, it's important to work on your craft. But don't talk yourself into believing you don't deserve to be an actor. Anyone who wants to act deserves to be an actor.

Some actors will say, "Yes, but I haven't trained enough. I haven't got enough experience to believe in myself yet."

Ever heard of the book title “An Actor Prepares”? Just hearing that title can make you feel uneasy. When you are about to perform, how can you know whether you’ve prepared “enough”? The answer is that you have. You have, simply because that is the reality of the situation.

Everyone deserves to act. So stop worrying whether you’re good enough, or whether you’ve studied enough. You’re trying your best, and you’ve studied as much as you’ve studied, and you’ve had as much experience as you’ve had. You can’t change that, so accept it.

Let me ask you this:

What if there was a young man who worked in a gas station, and one day a film producer said, “You’d be perfect for this role in my movie.”

Then the young man stars in the movie, and is so naturally talented, open and honest, that he wins an Oscar for his performance.

Would you say to that young man, “You don’t deserve to act! You haven’t studied for enough years, read enough books, paid for enough workshops”?

If not, then why do you say that to yourself? Don’t you deserve the respect you’d give him?

All actors have a vulture that at one time or another tells them, “You’re a terrible actor”. The true test is how you react to that.

Even Laurence Olivier stopped performing for a period because he felt he was a lousy actor. Laurence Olivier!

A while back, I performed in an improv based comedy benefit. On my way to the stage I felt a heavy weight. I felt scared and insecure. I felt I had to fulfill some expectation from the audience to be funny.

All feelings are caused by thoughts. I was performing alongside some extremely talented and funny people, and my vulture was telling me that I wasn’t as good as them, that I was an impostor, and the audience would quickly find that out. I knew if I didn’t refocus my thoughts, I would freeze up onstage and have a terrible experience.

So I put this thought in my head-

“I release my need to be a funny performer. They are the comedians; I’m just a guest here, playing in the circumstances and tickling myself with my own spontaneous human behavior. I release my need to be a funny actor. I’m just here to play, and have fun.”

And I did have fun. I had a blast, and so did the audience.

You see, you can’t feel like an impostor, if you’re not interested in looking like anything other than just who you are.

You’ll never have the time to read all the thousands of books on acting that exist, nor take all the classes taught by all the brilliant teachers.

Stop needing to be a “real actor”. It is a goal that your ego has created, that you can never truly reach.

Just admit to yourself, “Whatever it is that I think I’m supposed to know, I don’t, and it doesn’t matter.”

Because the truth is that there is no secret to acting. Once you understand this, you'll never feel the need to be something other than yourself again.

What some acting teachers don't want you to know is that a lot of your favorite actors on your favorite hour-long dramas *never trained at all!*

Aaron Paul, who played "Jesse Pinkman" on "Breaking Bad", is one of those actors.

In an interview on Reddit.com he said-

"The only training I have is really trial and error. I never went to any sort of class. When I came out to L.A. I was 17-years-old ... I sat in on two different classes. What I saw during those classes was them doing these strange acting exercises, which I didn't understand. I always just thought 'Hey, pretend like you're being someone else, and that's all there is to it.' I wasn't a fan of those classes, so if I go into an audition and fail miserably, I just think to myself, 'Well, let's not do that again,' and, 'Do better.' So that's really it. I just force myself to truly believe that I am living the situation through the character." ...And he won three Emmy Awards!

I met Pauley Perrette, who plays "Abby" on "NCIS", and she shared with me that she also never trained as an actress.

I asked her why and she replied-

"Why would I?"

Exactly. ...Acting is simply "behaving as if it's really happening". Which is easy. It's playing pretend. And there's no right way to do it.

An interviewer recently asked Oscar winning actor, Christopher Walken, if he is a "method actor" and whether he goes "deep down into the character".

Christopher responded "No."

So the interviewer asked, "How do you approach a role?"

Christopher replied, "For me it's never changed much from when I was nine years old. 'I'll be this, and you be that, and we'll pretend'. It's still like that."

The interviewer asked, "Have you taken acting lessons over the years and studied with serious teachers?"

And Christopher said, "Yes. But basically it's still that 7 year old thing - 'Let's have fun'."

I received the following email from one of my workshop attendees:

"Wanted to tell you a little success story. Last time I was in class you talked about going to an audition where you felt great in the waiting room until another actor you knew came in - somebody that you thought was a better fit for the part - but then you said your affirmations and went into the room and had a great time.

*I had a similar experience - I went in to audition to play Tommy Hilfiger in a sketch on a new comedy show. Anyway, I thought to myself that I look like Tommy Hilfiger. I got to the audition and there were three other guys who looked dead on like him. I started to go to that negative place in my head but remembered your story. I said 'fuck it' and remembered that **I wasn't there to be an actor**, or get the job--I was there to have fun. Went in and gave a great audition. That would be a great ending to the story--but the icing on the cake is I got the gig!"*

THE DIRECTOR-PROOF ACTOR

Not all directors know how to talk to actors. Very often their direction can be result-oriented.

Directions such as; “do it faster”, “be funnier”, “hold for a few beats”, etc., cause your vulture to start squawking result-oriented concerns and fears, which causes a sensation that feels like you are “in your head” or “watching yourself”, which makes it impossible to continue to behave *as if it’s really happening*.

Directions like those awaken the “student/soldier” in us, who wants to “get it right”. That is why it is important for an actor to become “director-proof”.

Please don’t think I am saying to disregard what a director says. You must take the note! In a casting situation, very often it is the actor who can take direction that books the job. Many times actors have lost the job by failing to “take a note”.

And, once you book the gig, it is your job to take in what a director says, and make it work for you.

However, when someone gives you result-oriented direction, you must translate it for yourself into a circumstance which you can put in your belly.

For instance, the direction “do it faster” can be translated to “up the stakes”, or “you only have three minutes before your husband gets home”, or “you have a bus to catch”.

So when a director, or casting director gives you direction, you should not listen to it with your ear, because if you do, the direction will go right into your brain.

Let me explain. Have you ever been on the phone with someone who you don’t like, and held the receiver away from your ear a bit? It’s almost as though you didn’t want to let their words directly into your head.

And so it is with directors.

So how do you listen to a director, without letting it affect you adversely?

Imagine it this way: pretend you have on a catcher’s mitt, and you are holding your hand up in the air, as if to catch a fly ball. When you get the direction, imagine it is going into your hand. That way it can be filtered through your entire arm and end in your belly as a circumstance which you can let affect the scene. You have translated it into something that will be enjoyable for you to play.

For some actors, getting any direction at all kicks them into a “need-to-please” headspace.

They hunker down and think “Okay, I’ve gotta get this right, to prove that I am a good actor”. Where’s the enjoyment in that? Try not to think of it that way.

Think of direction as a fun thing for you to try-

“Oh good, I have something new to try, that will surprise me in it’s outcome, therefore allowing something spontaneous to take place.”

This creates the playful behavior that acting is intended to be.

YOU ARE THE CHARACTER

"I am not this character."

"I don't know how to be this character."

"I had better become this character or I will fail."

"Another actor is more this character than I am."

"How can I trick them into thinking I am this character."

If you have ever had a thought like these, you are in good company. I believe it is this way of thinking that most stands in an actor's way.

The good news is, there is a simple remedy. You must change the way you think about the "character". And here's how:

You ARE the character.

The character is YOU - *in those specific set of circumstances!*

You may not be the only person to have played this role, you may not be the person who eventually gets the job, you may not even be the person who you would most visualize in this role, BUT when you are playing the scene, YOU ARE THE CHARACTER.

The character magically exists in the writing, and will appear through whoever's tool is performing the scene. The character will look, behave and respond differently depending on whose vessel it is being channeled through.

The only thing that can stop this wonderful process, is if the actor doing the scene doesn't have faith that he is the character. That actor will then try to "prove" to the audience that he is the character, and this will block the character from truly appearing.

When many actors get a scene, they envision the character as sitting just to the right of them. They think-

"This character is not me. How can I become this character?"

As soon as you do this, you're screwed.

You've set the character *outside* yourself. You've built an invisible brick wall between you and the character. Nothing can penetrate it, and nothing will be felt, by either you or the audience. You will spend the scene chasing after the character.

When this is the case, imagine putting your hands around the waist of the character sitting beside you, and just slide him right over towards you, until you and the character occupy the exact same space. This is the only place that the character can truly live. His breath must be your breath. His heart beating must be your heart beating. Don't worry if it's *right*, just accept that it *is*.

As a performer, you are an artist. Just like a painter.

A painter's tool is his brush. And your tool is "yourself". So if you are not using your "tool", then you cannot allow your art to happen.

So what causes actors to put the character outside themselves?

I believe it is the thought “I am not enough”. That thought puts a wall up between you and the character. Even though that wall is imaginary, it feels impenetrable.

We think, “I need to become this character”, which feels impossible and causes panic, while the truth is that we already are the character if we would just allow it.

You must trust that you are interesting enough onstage without embellishment. Simply because you are human, you are infinitely interesting!

We are all *one*. Because you are human, you share everything in common with every human that came before you; kings and queens in ancient Egypt, whores in Medieval London, soldiers in the Civil War...

Humans are fascinating simply because they are *human*. And that’s what you are!

It is always entertaining to see a living, breathing human. But, when you place some false idea of “character” in front of yourself, the audience can’t see through that to the real person. So, essentially the stage is devoid of human life. The scene is dead.

Your mind will fight against simply owning that the character is you. Your insecure ego will think, “But I’m tired today, and I have a headache.”

Well, couldn’t the character also be tired and have a headache today?

Or your ego will say, “But this character is very happy/sad/angry, and I am not.”

But I say to you that there is a little part of yourself that is also happy/sad/angry at this very moment.

Because you are human, there are seeds of every emotion in your belly at all times.

You don’t have to be actively feeling it at the time. The scene will plug into it and make it grow. (see: “THE EMOTIONAL AUDITION”)

All you have to do is say, **“I’m going to take it from where I am”**.

Honesty lives in that place, and only from honesty, can more honesty come.

This issue of “character” comes up most often at auditions.

I used to always let the idea of “character” work against me. When I got an audition scene, I would immediately judge whether I was “right” for the part. More often than not, I would deem myself less right for the role than everyone else in the waiting room.

I was thinking like a casting director, and not a very nice one. This is what I mean when I say “Don’t cast yourself in or out of a part”. So I would try to pretend that I was the “character” that I thought they were looking for. Ugh!

Our ego wants to view our performance through the eyes of the casting director. We think, “Others are more right for this than I am.” So we go into “fake it” mode. Once you’re involved in just “showing them what you think they want to see”, YOU are out of the equation, and it is impossible to behave as if it’s really happening to you.

At and audition, just remind yourself this:

“I am not here to get this role. I am here to have a relationship with this casting director, show her who I am in the circumstances, and then I’ll book the job I’m meant to book.”

Don't be so quick to think that you know what they are looking for. For example, if we see that a role calls for someone to play a "bully", we immediately think back to the bullies we've seen in portrayed in countless films and TV shows. This is called the "cliché". But often, if the project is a quality one, they may be looking for the unexpected, which is often a much more interesting choice. I think the little girl in "The Bad Seed" is a far more interesting "bully" than "Frankenstein". So don't be so quick to think that someone else would be better than you in a role.

It's as simple as this:

If you have faith that you are the character, then you are the character.

The audience is only too happy to accept you as the character. If you quite simply say, "I killed a homeless person today", then the audience will believe it. By just saying those words, and trusting it is true, it will appear completely true to the audience. The audience will project upon you all the details that they believe could make you the kind of person who is crazy or evil enough to do that.

You don't need to "prove it" or "show us" that you are crazy or evil. If the audience sees you attempting to prove that you are evil enough to do something like that, they will pick up on that and not believe you.

Don't worry about "playing" the character. The character exists in the material.

The character lives in the circumstances!

If you put the circumstances of the scene in your belly, and behave as if it's really happening to you, then the "character" will take care of itself. The specific thoughts, judgments and reactions of the role are what create character. Just get specific with the circumstances and the character just happens.

I learned this at an audition some time ago-

Whereas, sometimes in the past I would attempt to layer a character over what I was doing, at this audition I decided to let go of my anxiety about "character" and just behave as if it was really happening to me.

I trusted that I WAS the man I was playing. I thought his thoughts, and played in the specific circumstances. After which the casting woman said-

"What an interesting character you created!"

Well, I didn't create it as much as allow it to appear.

Try to look at it this way:

In the case of an audition for "Hamlet", it is not the actress who best creates the **character** of "Ophelia" who books the job, but instead, it is the actress who best plays **herself** in "*Ophelia's*" *specific set of circumstances*.

If a character has a circumstance which is beyond your own personal life experience, you can choose to fulfill that "circumstance" with others which are more in your sphere of understanding.

For instance, if I was auditioning to play a crystal meth addict, I might try putting the following circumstances in my belly:

1. I just drank five red bulls.
2. I would much rather be outside smoking, than in here talking to you.
3. I don't trust you, and am pushing down a lot of anger I feel towards you.
4. I am pushing down a lot of sadness and shame I feel towards myself.

When replacing a circumstance with others, there are no "correct" substitutions. Everyone will choose their own based on their life experience. The circumstances which you put in your belly can be whatever you like. Follow your intuition!

There is another level of character work that can seemingly *transform* an actor, and that is to put another *person* into your belly!

It could be a relative, a friend, another actor's performance, or even an animal.

But make sure to put that person in your belly, and not your head.

If you put a person in your head, you will spend the scene doing an *impression* of that person. You will be showing us who you are trying to be, and it will be very difficult to behave as if the scene is really happening.

I once had an audition to play a "flamboyant European fashion designer". I didn't want to give them the kind of stereotypical performance I have seen so many times with roles like these, and I had just seen Philip Seymour Hoffman's brilliant performance as Truman Capote in "Capote". So, I put that performance in my belly, along with an accent that was a hybrid of French and German and booked the job!

They couldn't tell that was what I was doing, but it created a "character" very different from myself, and one that I was much more interested in playing.

I hope that you will no longer entertain the idea that you are "not enough".

You *are* enough. Because you are human, you are infinitely interesting and detailed. You share the fundamental qualities of every other human who ever lived; emperors, addicts, courtesans and cowboys.

Which reminds me of a story from "The Power of Now" by Eckhart Tolle:

A beggar had been sitting by the side of a road for over thirty years.

One day a stranger walked by.

"Spare some change?" mumbled the beggar, mechanically holding out his old baseball cap.

"I have nothing to give you," said the stranger. Then he asked: "What's that you are sitting on?"

"Nothing," replied the beggar. "Just an old box. I have been sitting on it for as long as I can remember."

"Ever looked inside?" asked the stranger.

"No," said the beggar. "What's the point? There's nothing in there."

"Have a look inside," insisted the stranger.

The beggar managed to pry open the lid. With astonishment, disbelief, and elation, he saw that the box was filled with gold.

...Look inside yourself; you have a treasure within.

ACTING 'STRAIGHT'

I received an email from an actor who had been reading my website, and had a specific concern he wanted to share with me. He wrote-

"There is an issue I have been constantly dealing with, and I think it is the reason I have held myself back all these years.

Every time I get an audition, it's usually to play a straight, 'total guy'. I know I'm not a raging queen but I go back to all the teasing from school, all the 'faggot' calling and it actually makes me think I can never get parts because I am gay and straight guys have it so easy.

This is a major issue. I guess I just wanted to know if you had felt that and if so how you deal with it."

My response was similar to the following:

As a gay man, I also struggled with that exact issue.

There was a time, not long after I had graduated college, when I felt I had a terrible secret. And that secret was that *I wasn't really a "MAN"*.

(Or at least not the kind of "man" I thought I was *supposed* to be.)

When I would perform, I was afraid that everyone could see my secret, and I let this issue negatively affect my performances.

Then, one day, it just hit me...

I AM a man. I just simply am.

I don't have to prove it, or "Act" it. It just *is*.

By definition, *I am a man*.

My insecure ego was creating this self-doubt. It was an illusion.

Are all men super-macho?

No. My goodness, if David Hyde Pierce's character on "Frasier" could be accepted as straight, then so could any character you play.

Not *all* straight men act "butch".

Do straight men cross their legs? Hell yeah!

Do straight men get emotional? Hell yeah!

Stop cutting out your *self* for fear that you are not right.

If you look at a list of the top TV shows of all time, there are plenty of popular and successful actors that are far from macho: Alan Alda, Bob Newhart, Mathew Perry, Jerry Seinfeld, Don Knotts, Kelsey Grammer, Patrick Stewart, Tony Randell, Larry Hagman... None of these men had any problem being seen as a straight leading man.

Why do we want to focus on the few tough-guy characters? Remember, for every Captain Kirk, there is a Mr. Spock standing right there alongside him.

And even William Shatner isn't intrinsically a tough guy. He often plays very sweet, endearing roles.

Speaking of top TV shows, look at Henry Winkler. He was hardly the actor you'd first imagine to play the womanizing tough-guy "The Fonz": (From Wikipedia.org)
"An interesting note about his character on 'Happy Days' was that director/producer Garry Marshall originally had in mind a completely opposite physical presence. Marshall sought to cast an Italian model-type male in the role of Fonzie. However, when Winkler, a Jewish Yale MFA student interpreted the role in auditions, Marshall immediately snapped him up, smelling success. Winkler's character gradually became the focus of the show as time passed, a testament to Winkler's acting and Marshall's foresight."

You can only be who you are.

If they want someone with an innate energy that is tough and hyper-masculine, they will hire that guy.

However, as was the case with "The Fonz", the more interesting choice was the less "on the nose" choice.

I heard a story, that for his "Happy Days" audition, Henry was merely doing an impression of Sylvester Stallone, who he had just worked with in the film "Lords of Flatbush". So, the tough inner life as funneled through a sensitive actor was just what the role needed.

So don't talk yourself out of roles!

There is a simple secret to gays portraying straight roles:

If you try to prove you are straight, YOU WILL COME OFF AS GAY-

(- or at least stiff and stilted as though you are hiding something; i.e. *that you are gay!*)

However, **if you don't care, and don't get involved in being anything but who you are, THEN YOU WILL COME OFF AS STRAIGHT.**

We are all the same really. All humans share the exact same integral characteristics.

So if you just say the words and play the circumstances of the scene, you will come off as straight as the character is.

However, if you deny a part of yourself, and strictly control and monitor your behavior, then you will not be able to play the scene. Instead, you will be delivering some lifeless idea of the character.

You are your own tool to make your art. If you are not using your tool, then there is no human being inhabiting the role. The scene will be dead.

Why do we focus on the few hyper-masculine images out there?

Our ego wants to keep us in a place where we feel we are not "enough".

Just accept that you will never be Vin Diesel. So what?! No one expects you to be!

Besides, that macho thing that you wish you could be is so fucking limiting. Those people don't get many jobs.

On the other hand, think of your favorite film actors; Benedict Cumberbatch, Robert Downey Jr., Philip Seymour Hoffman, Dustin Hoffman, Martin Freeman, Tobey Maguire, Gene Wilder, Ralph Fiennes, Jeremy Irons, Jason Schwartzman, Kevin Kline, Mathew Broderick, Jake Gyllenhaal, Bill Murray, Johnny Depp, Owen Wilson, Richard Dreyfuss, etc. etc.

THEY certainly aren't putting on some bullshit macho crap.

That macho behavior crap is *learned* and *acted* by the people who do it. It's not real for ANYONE. No one comes out of the womb and acts like that. They see people do it, and they imitate it. So, it's not even REAL to begin with.

You are so much more interesting than that.

You have warmth and sensitivity. Why would you want to deny or hide that?!

A great tool to rid yourself of this issue is affirmations:

"I release and destroy my need to be 'masculine'."

"I release and destroy my need to be an 'Actor' - I'm just here to be me and to play in the circumstances."

Those kids from your childhood may have called you "faggot", but they're gone now.

So, whose voice is that you're hearing in your head, still calling you "faggy"?

It's YOU!

They may have handed you the baton, but *you* are the one who is still running with it.

Read the "Finding Your Inner Child" chapter and start treating your inner child with the love and acceptance he should've been given from the beginning.

He wants to shine.

The actor who had originally written to me responded to my thoughts as follows-

"You are so right, I have always tried to 'act' like a straight guy, and was so nervous that someone would ask about my girlfriend or wife, that I was not 'Being' the goofy, sweet, caring, funny person I am.

I always hold back, for fear of being found out as being gay, and therefore not as valuable as a 'real' straight guy.

Outrageous! I know, I so see it!

I don't know many actors who are gay and do great work. So I always wondered what it was I was or wasn't doing right. Thank you for being there and open to talking to me about all of this. I am really very excited about this 'new' chapter or step for myself."

A side note:

With so many great actors coming out as gay lately, and still playing straight parts, there are plenty of terrific role models; Matt Bomer, Wentworth Miller, Zach Quinto, Neil Patrick Harris, Matt Dallas, Luke Macfarlane, Sean Maher, T.R Knight, Ian McKellen...

FOCUS ON THE MEANING OF THE LINES

While memorizing, I cannot stress enough the importance of focusing on the *meaning of the lines*.

Good news! This is much easier than it sounds, because the meaning of the line is *the same exact words* as the line.

Take, for instance, the line-

“I love you.”

The “meaning” of the line is-

“*I love you.*”

See, I told you it was easy!

It is merely a simple and subtle difference in the way you look at and perceive the line.

You may think that you’ve been memorizing focusing on what the words mean, but you may instead have been

- memorizing a line reading (*how you plan to perform the line*)
- or, have been turning the line into a series of words in a certain mathematical order. (*“The first word is ‘I’, the second word is ‘love’, then the third word is ‘you’.”*)

When I say the “meaning” of the line I’m not talking about some deep psychological hidden or subtextual meaning that you need to work hard to figure out or create.

Instead I am talking about the most *shallow, literal and obvious* meaning of the words.

Simply push yourself, when memorizing, to put the bulk of your focus on the literal and obvious meaning of the words you are memorizing.

In other words, the “*idea*” of what you are saying.

Once you understand the idea of the line, “I love you”, you can see how, in the moment of performance, it will be fun to be surprised by a **thought** which creates in you an

impulse or need to share the **idea** that you love the person you are talking to, and then

choose the words-

“*I love you.*”

That’s all the audience craves to see - a person, being surprised by thoughts or feelings, and then communicating.

The *writer* does the work to make it interesting.

The same simplicity can be applied to a seemingly emotionally complex line.

If, for instance, the line is-

“You make me so angry.”

Then the *meaning* of the line is-

“*You make me so angry.*”

They sound alike, except that the first is just a series of six words strung together, while the second is the *idea* your character is sharing.

Once you understand that difference, you can enjoy having a *thought* surprise you, which then creates in you the impulse to share with someone the *idea* that they make you feel angry, and then choose the words-
“*You make me so angry.*”

Now, you may be thinking, “But I *do* need to have *some* thought or emotion when I say a line like that.”

Don’t worry, you will! There’s no need to plan or attach a thought or feeling to it. That will happen in the performance.

Your goal is to receive a thought or image or concept which you can have an emotional reaction to *in the performance*.

Because acting is an art that happens *while you’re acting!*

Trust that you understand the situation, and have faith that the thoughts and feelings will happen spontaneously in the performance.

Don’t build the acting into the memorization. That’s how you come up with controlled line-readings. That’s being result-oriented.

The last thing you want to do is practice saying the line in an angry way. You’ll just end up with the same cliché “yelling” that most everyone else will do. Allow yourself the opportunity to be original.

Maybe you’ll end up yelling the line, who knows, but at least your performance will be spontaneous.

Another great thing about focusing on the meaning of the words is that this will make memorizing MUCH easier. Trust me! You will feel as though you are *absorbing* the lines into your belly...and then you’re not afraid to paraphrase because you feel you understand the line.

SCENE COMPREHENSION

This chapter deals with one of the most important aspects of acting - *scene comprehension*.

I believe that it is one of the areas in which actors most often get tripped up, and side-tracked by loads of unneeded, fear-based and result-oriented work. And, it's this topic of concern that often allows actors to be taken advantage of by fear-based and result-oriented teachers.

All I *do* to prepare for a drama audition is “memorize” and “scene comprehension”, so clearly it is essential.

And memorizing is a cinch! Sure it's a bit of a headache to have to commit the words to memory, but while I'm memorizing, I have no interest or anxiety about how I will perform it, so the process is fairly pain free.

And then I do my scene comprehension so I will know the circumstances. And that's it! That's all I do to prepare. It's all you need!

Now, result-oriented and fear-based coaches may tell you they agree with that.

They'll say, “Sure, that's true. All you need to do is memorize and scene comprehension...**but scene comprehension is VERY DIFFICULT!**”

They will then share with you that, “there is so much you need to *do* in order to comprehend a scene! There is so much time you should put into it! In fact, it is so difficult that you will need to take my 12 week course in script analysis/scene study technique!”

...Bullshit.

Scene comprehension is actually *incredibly easy!* It's so easy that I am going to teach you everything you need to know about it in this very short chapter.

The mistake actors make with scene comprehension is when you pick up a script and say to yourself, “This is a scene.”

You're screwed from the outset!

You know why?

As soon as you say, “This is a scene,” your vulture gets involved!

Your ego (the fear-based side of yourself) kicks into action and wants to approach the scene from a result-oriented direction.

Your vulture will say things like-

“A scene?! What should it look like and sound like?”

“What are the actions, beats, and objectives?”

“What daydream or substitution work could I do to earn the right to play this scene?”

"Who'd be better in it than me?"

"How can I get them to give me this role?"

"How can I make this look the way I've seen other scenes like this look?!"

All of these are fear based and result-oriented concerns. They are all involved in *planning how the scene will look; in controlling its outcome*. (They are the enemy of spontaneity. And the camera *must* capture spontaneity!)

These concerns reinforce the idea that "acting" is "showing what the scene will look like in the finished product" instead of "behaving as if it's really happening" (the definition of "acting").

When you approach a scene this way, there is an unspoken fear of failure which you are desperately trying to avoid.

And it is this fear of failure which result-oriented teachers will prey on. They will offer you loads of techniques to help you figure out and then perform the perceived "correct" result of the scene. And, of course, all of these techniques will cost you money! ...And, sadly, ruin your love of acting.

It is imperative that actors create a reality where there is no such thing as failure. Otherwise they will always be trying to avoid it, instead of enjoying their craft.

And concerns such as those actually *make* scene comprehension very difficult.

When an actor approaches the script as if it's a "scene", all of those result oriented questions and concerns which his vulture squawks will lay over the text like a fog of fear. The actor is not even able to SEE what is actually on the page, because it's so fogged over by his fear-based concerns.

To illustrate-

Recently, I had an actress come to me for a coaching on an audition. She had written all over her script; ideas she had for preplanned thoughts, beats and actions which she planned to use in the scene.

Right before she began the scene, she anxiously asked me, "Do you think I should sit or stand?"

Well...the script had a stage direction at the top of the scene, which read, "She sits down with her friend."

When I pointed this out to her, she blushed. She admitted that in her haste to figure out how to do the scene "correctly", she hadn't even noticed the stage direction.

She couldn't see the forest for the trees. She was so sidetracked by needless work, that she missed out on understanding this literal and obvious circumstance.

She then showed me a ditto she had been given in a workshop she took. On it were 15 steps actors were supposed to take in order to break a scene down, figure it out, and execute it correctly. While there were some seeds of truth in the advice it gave, in my opinion it treated the actor as though they are stupid and turned the whole artistic, imaginative and magical process of acting into something that looked and felt like *high school homework*. UGH!

(I personally feel that just by *writing down* the circumstances it conveys a measure of distrust of yourself. Don't you think you can remember a few obvious circumstances?

Plus, the act of writing down the circumstances puts them *in your head*, which makes you spend the whole scene trying to show the audience that you understand the circumstances. On the contrary, I feel it's imperative that you put them in your stomach, and trust your gut to do with them what it will. In this way, choices will happen TO you.) I asked her if she enjoyed doing this "15 step process"; this "work", and, as everyone who I ask this question to responds, she answered, "No." Big surprise.

There is another way to "work" on a scene, that doesn't *feel* like work. You can spend time understanding and absorbing a script and its circumstances without anxiety about the end result of the performance, or feeling like a teacher is watching over your shoulder, grading you on your "work".

The remedy is simple!

The healthy way to do scene comprehension is when you pick up the script and say to yourself-

"This is really happening to me."

Ah! What a revelation!

Everything is so simple when you approach it this way.

When you approach the script in this manner, it's as if you're blowing that fog of fear-based concerns away from the page, and suddenly everything is so clear!

Once you've said, "It's really happening to me," it's so incredibly easy to see what's *literally* and *obviously* happening to you in every moment of the scene. Those are THE CIRCUMSTANCES.

That's all that scene comprehension should be; understanding the literal, obvious circumstances of every moment of the scene.

Actors are not stupid. We don't need to use "techniques" in order to understand what's literally happening in a scene. As soon as you realize that it's really happening to you, the circumstances become obvious.

And then your job is to just walk into that audition room, and approach those circumstances *as if they are really happening to you* for the first time. Or what I call, "approach the scene like an improv" - which means it lives under all the rules of real life, for instance; you don't know what they're going to say, you don't know what you're going to say, and these may be the words but anything can happen in terms of thoughts, images, feelings and movement.

THAT is the healthy and loving way to do scene comprehension!

However, some result-oriented teachers will say-

"That's not enough! You must dig deeper than that! You must decipher and label the character's actions, beats and objectives! You must figure out and write down the character's hidden and subtextual needs, thoughts and feelings! You must figure out HOW you will enact each line!"

I strongly disagree!

And why is that?

Because all of that stuff *will happen magically in the performance!*

Because your heart will be racing, and you'll be behaving as though it's really happening to you, all that "deeper" stuff will surprise you *in the performance, just as it's meant to.*

You'll *discover* it in the performance! And it will be different each time you do it! That's the THRILL and EXCITEMENT and JOY of acting!

And the reason why I can promise that it will happen in the performance is because **acting is an art that happens *while you're acting!***

-and *not* the night before, when you're huddled over the script, anxiously scribbling down notes about thoughts, actions, beats and objectives.

That's NOT acting. I don't know what that is. But I have a sneaking suspicion that it was created by teachers and coaches in order to keep you in class.

I meet many actors at my lectures and workshops who tell me that as soon as they stopped doing the result-oriented "work" which they were trained to do, they started booking jobs!

Now, some people will hear just a little of what I teach and misunderstand my message.

I am not saying to just read the scene once and then GO!

I believe in taking the time you desire for scene comprehension. But that should be only the amount of time it takes you to understand the literal and obvious circumstances.

In doing so, there are many things to consider. The script tells you everything need to know, so read it carefully.

In the script, you are given wonderful circumstances to enjoy, so make sure to take notice and use them. Many actors won't think to.

For instance, consider the locale. Let the setting of the scene affect your behavior.

People behave differently based on where they are. The way you talk in bed in the morning is different than the way you talk at a bar. How you behave in an interrogation room is different than how you behave in a restaurant. Let your surroundings affect you.

Suddenly, without thinking about it, you will allow choices to happen, instead of creating choices and serving them to us cold on a platter.

Also, make sure to read the stage directions. Many actors will not pay the stage directions close attention, and will just sit there like a lump, completely missing opportunities provided in them.

Not only do they give physical instructions that might be fun to play ("She begins to exit, then stops"), but they also give clues to the character's inner life ("She stifles a sob").

The casting person knows the scene very well. When you miss a good opportunity that the stage directions are offering, they will notice.

Also, make sure to give yourself permission to behave as if everything is *really happening*. Something as simple as the act of making a telephone call, or recalling an

event from your past becomes full of interest when you enjoy the honesty of how you really behave in that circumstance.

Once I had to die of poisoning in an audition, and I was told that I was the only person who *really did it*. I rolled on the floor (as per the stage directions), crying in pain and then “died”. And booked the job.

Apparently, the other actors only dipped their toe in, barely enacting the circumstances. And some skipped the death entirely.

So take OWNERSHIP of the scene, and dive in fully! Don’t see it as a “scene”, but instead see it as a set of circumstances which you are going to do an “improv” about. Don’t wait for permission to behave as if it’s *really* happening to you. Give yourself that permission.

Many actors can’t see what’s literally happening in the scene, because their vision is blurred by their need to impress.

They feel it is all up to them to come up with brilliant choices in order to stick out of the bunch. That puts a lot of pressure on an actor, and is no fun. But the truth is, the “brilliant” choice to make, that most actors don’t think to make, is to just do what is literally happening.

In the waiting room, you see all the actors anxiously trying to come up with the “creative” choice; the choices that no one else will think of.

When the truth is, the “creative” choice is the *honest* choice. It’s just what’s literally happening in the moment.

As soon as you think that way, all sorts of fun things to play will come to mind. Real human behavior is what’s entertaining.

No one wants to go up in front of an audience alone.

They want a life raft to hold onto. To keep them from failing.

So they work too hard on needless things to create an illusion of safety.

When the truth is-

you're not up there alone!

There are two things up there with you-

1. Your higher power (or “the magic of acting”) is guiding you through the scene. And another way to say that is- your heart is racing so you have become superhuman.
2. The audience is PROJECTING upon you everything they know about the character and story.

I believe that when you pick up a script, the scene exists magically in the air around you, just waiting for an honest vessel to funnel through.

All you need to do in order to provide the scene an honest vessel is to be free from anxiety (by silencing your vulture), and understand what’s literally and obviously happening in every moment of the scene.

And then...*play*.

THE DEFINITION OF 'ACTING'

I like to say, "Acting is fucking easy."

And why can I say that?

Because I personally define "acting" as-
"Behaving as if it's really happening to me."

Isn't that *it*?

I certainly can't think of anything I'm missing.

And if you agree with that definition, isn't that just called "pretending"? Which you've done since you were a child, and there's no correct way to do it, and it's different every time you do?

And if "acting" is simply "behaving as if it's really happening to you", then who is your best acting teacher?

You! ...Your life!

Actors live their life in a certain way. They think and communicate in a certain way in their real life.

But as soon as the scene begins, they think they have to enter a "magic room" where all the rules are different, and they have preplanned line readings, "actions", beats", "objectives", and a responsibility to show pre-conceived concept of how they will enact the moments.

We need to get rid of this idea of the "magic room" and instead remember that *the only thing that changes about your life when the scene begins...is the circumstances.*

So often, when I work with actors, I am simply getting them to remember how they really think and communicate; to stop doing the needless things that are part of their acting routine. To stop being involved in "showing what the scene will look like" (or what I sometimes call "acting with a capital A").

Many times an actor will be putting so many unneeded things out there, that I have a hard time seeing the scene. I have a hard time seeing the actor. He is unclear, and difficult to see through the fog of fear-based needs and choices he is putting out.

Sadly, many actors aren't even using their "authentic voice".

Instead, they are literally speaking differently than they normally would.

This inauthentic voice, or "false personae" was created by the actor out of fear. Fear that he isn't "enough".

One of my favorite exercises is specifically designed to silence the actor's vulture, which releases him from the need to "show what the scene will look like in the final product".

Here's how the exercise works:

I will ask the actor questions about their life.

It's a selfish exercise, designed to remind the actor *how they really think and communicate*.

I ask the actor questions that relate to their childhood. I find that when actors are forced to recollect something from their past, they are too involved in the process of recalling the event to be able to continue being concerned about how the audience is perceiving them.

Plus, we *care* more about those stories because events from our youth had more impact on us than those in our adulthood. We were more vulnerable in our early years so things affected us more deeply.

Talking about their youth, reminds people who they really are. They touch their genuine sincerity and earnestness.

I will then interrupt the actor mid-story and have him jump right into the scene- but bring with him right into the scene *how he really thinks and communicates*.

When we are talking about our lives we don't have a vulture squawking, "You're doing this wrong! You're forgetting your lines! You better impress them!"

And when the actor jumps right into the scene, very often they forget they are doing a "scene" and instead simply behave as if it's really happening.

Their vulture forgets to start squawking!

It's important for me to clarify that the *affirmations* do what this exercise does. They are a better, and more specific way to silence your vulture.

I don't do this exercise before an audition. Why would I need to remind myself how I think and communicate before an audition, when I've been thinking and communicating *all day long?!*

The only thing that changes when the scene begins is *the circumstances!*

An actress was doing a scene in my workshop and I could tell she was "acting with a capital A". She was not trusting that she could just be, but instead was controlling and presenting each moment to us.

It's as if she was *putting quotes* around everything she was doing, instead of *really* doing it.

At one point she was talking on a phone in the scene.

I asked her if she was talking on a phone, or

(fingers making air quotes)

"talking on the phone".

She shyly admitted that she had been

(fingers making air quotes)

"talking on the phone".

As a matter of fact everything she was doing in the scene had quotes around it. It's the difference between **really doing something**, versus

(fingers making air quotes)

"doing it".

She knew that she was not behaving as if it was really happening, but instead was showing what the scene would like like. But she didn't know how to stop.

In her scene she was playing a receptionist who really enjoys her job. So I had her tell me about an activity she really enjoyed as a child. Mid-story we jumped right into the scene, and it was suddenly so alive. She was behaving as if it was really happening. *She had remembered who she really was, and how she really thought and communicated.*

As a side note:

I do not use this exercise for "substitution". I believe that "substitution" is a marvelous gift to receive while you're acting, but shouldn't be something you plan beforehand.

After an actor leaves the audition room, the casting director will often make notes beside the actor's name, in order to remember their performance.

Sometimes the casting director will simply write "real" or "not real".

When a casting director writes "real", it means he feels that the actor is "hirable".

Whether the actor is right for this particular role is yet to be seen, but at least they can feel secure bringing in an actor who approaches the material *as if it's really happening to them.*

It means they weren't "acting with a capital A", but "being".

They weren't involved in "showing", but instead were "experiencing".

Don't misunderstand. When they say it felt "real", it doesn't mean that the actor is insane and truly believes that he is living the reality of the scene. The actor doesn't hallucinate that the walls have disappeared and he is suddenly in a different locale. The goal in performing a scene is to have your thoughts as aligned as possible with what you would be thinking in those circumstances.

The more your vulture is squawking, the more difficult it is to do so.

Again, it's not that the great actors have something you don't. It's that you may have things that the great actors don't have. And those things are "needs". Needs to impress, to look a certain way, to be something that you believe you aren't.

When something *spontaneous* happens in an audition there is an electrical charge in the air. That charge is felt every time something genuinely unplanned and unexpected happens to the actor. The audience can smell it. It's like when you would shoot off those old metal cap guns. Remember that smell of the burnt powder in the air?

The more moments you have like that in an audition, the better chance you have of booking the job.

A friend of mine was watching a rather uninspired performance of "Twelfth Night".

Either the actors had been doing it for a while and had grown bored of their performance, or simply had not been directed well. But for whatever reason, the actors were going about the performance in a very controlled and premeditated way. They

were “doing it” instead of *really* doing it. My friend had leaned back in her seat, uninvolved with the proceedings.

Well, this production happened to take place in an old church, which quite literally had “bats in the belfry”. Halfway through the show the bats decided to pay a little visit to the stage, and began swooping through the proceedings.

This, at first, scared the crap out of the performers, some of whom took cover. But as the play continued, there was a completely different energy. Everyone was alive and alert. My friend said that the rest of the show was dynamic, exciting, and absolutely riveting.

I’m sure you’ve had the same experience. Perhaps an actor forgot a line, or an understudy is on, or it’s simply opening night and no one is sure of their blocking. And suddenly things are really “happening”. The actors are no longer “in control”. It can be a subtle switch, but you know when it happens. Sparks are flying, and the air is alive with electricity.

I describe it as a “switch”, because that’s what it seems like for me. Allowing yourself to let go of your control can be as simple as flicking a little switch in your head. It is locating that switch that can be tricky for actors. It’s as though you’re fumbling for a light switch in the dark. But every time you find it, and turn it on, it becomes easier to find it the next time.

I’m embarrassed to admit that in college I used to do push ups before a performance trying to “get there”. Then, later in life, I used to smoke a cigarette right before I’d do a scene. But looking back, it didn’t make my work any better. Now I see I was doing those things because I didn’t trust that I was enough, and I didn’t have faith that my higher power would be there to help guide me through my performance.

In her one-woman show, “Elaine Stricht: At Liberty,” the famous actress discusses her bout with alcoholism due to stage fright. She said she never went onstage without drinking first because she didn’t want to “go out there alone”.

But the truth is you are never alone when you act.

You are there with your racing heart. And when your heart races, more blood gets to your brain and you become superhuman. You get plugged into your higher power.

I’m so glad that I no longer feel “alone” onstage. Now, I see *not* smoking as my way of letting the universe know that am coming from a place of trust and faith in my higher power; in the magic of acting.

Do what you want before a performance, but don’t make the mistake of thinking you NEED to do a specific thing in order to be in a place where you are *really* doing things.

I believe that sometimes it’s the things you DON’T do that can book you the job. If actors would drop the unneeded things they are doing and just simply say the lines, they would then be free to be involved in the things they should be involved in, like having spontaneous thoughts, reactions and feelings.

THE SECRET TO ACTING

Years ago, I was a series regular on the FOX TV show "Action". On it, I had the privilege of working opposite the incredible actor/comedian, Buddy Hackett.

One day we were talking, and I shared the fact that I was experiencing some anxiety on set. So Buddy shared with me the following piece of advice. He said-
"When I'm doing a scene, I like to pretend that I've already filmed it."

I regret that, at the time, I was unable to understand what he meant. But years later, I believe I've figured it out. He was sharing with me what I consider to be *the secret to acting!*

And here is how I would describe it:

You never want to go to an audition (or a set for that matter) to show them what the scene will look like in the finished product.

Now, that might sound counter-intuitive.

After all, isn't that the goal when you go to an audition? And doesn't the actor who best "shows what the scene will look like in the finished product" book the job?

Isn't figuring out HOW to "show what the scene will look like in the finished product" why you took that 12 week class or bought that expensive book?!

Nope. And here's why-

When you go to an audition to show them what the scene will look like in the finished product, all it does is intensify your need to

- get it word perfect
- keep it moving
- make it look like a nice smooth, polished surface

And it doesn't book work!

The way I describe to approach your audition is like this:

Every actor, when they book a job on film, approaches their *first* take of each scene the same way-

"Let me get something on film that won't embarrass me!"

Do you know that feeling?

Or in other words "Let me show what the scene *will look like in the finished product.*"

And the director glumly says-

"Ugh...well let's keep doing it."

And then, around the eighth take, the director will happily say-
“Terrific! We're done! We have the scene; it lives in those eight takes. So we can move on!”

Then he'll stop, check his watch and say-

“Hmm. We've got some extra time. We might as well do it again, but this time just do whatever you want. This one's for you. I'm never going to use this take.”

And then what happens when the editor watches the *ninth* take?

He's always like-

“Finally something I can use!”

And that's because the great movies and TV shows are made of lucky accidents caught on film!

So you want to approach your audition as if it's the *ninth* take, where you have no responsibility to the “scene” and instead you're playing in the circumstances wanting stuff to surprise you.

Because, when something surprises you in an audition, there's an electric shock in the air, and everyone feels it. And the more moments like that you have, the better chance you have a booking the job.

That's how you book a job!

So every actor's motto should be-

“All I want to do was surprise myself!”

Not only is this the secret to auditioning, but more importantly...**it is also the secret to *acting!***

And the reason why is because actors will only “behave as if it's really happening” (*the definition of acting*) on the ninth take!

Sadly, I believe that a large percentage of actors spend their entire artistic life NOT “acting”.

So, you may be wondering, “if they aren't ‘behaving as if it's really happening’...what are they doing?”

The answer is-

They're “behaving like an actor with a great responsibility to show what the scene will look like in the finished product.”

And that's not “acting”.

It's something the actor was tricked into thinking “acting” is, perhaps by a coach or a teacher in his life.

And then you wonder why the actor eventually quits his art, saying, “I don't enjoy acting anymore.”

...He wasn't “acting”!

When you think your job is to “show what the scene will look like in the finished product”, you give your vulture free reign to squawk an endless stream of fear-based and result-oriented concerns, which make “behaving as if it’s really happening” impossible.

However, when you are there to do the *ninth* take your vulture can’t get away with any of it.

Again, the ninth take is the one where the director has said-

“Okay, we are done. We have the scene. I loved all of your beautiful choices, and I have them all on film, and will be using them in the edit. So this time, you can just play. Just want to surprise yourself. Take all the time you want. I don’t care what it looks like. You have permission to do it badly.”

The ninth take is the one where you aren’t *showing* what *should* happen in the scene, but instead are *discovering* what *could* happen in the scene!

I meet a lot of actors who say-

“I’m never good on my first take. I always have to get a couple bad ones out before I can perform well.”

At an audition, you only get one shot, so that’s not the reality you want to create for yourself.

Changing your thoughts, changes your reality!

So make every audition, and every take on the job, *the ninth take*.
It is the secret to acting.

ACTING 'TECHNIQUE'

Everybody has a “technique” to their acting.
It is simply the way you carry out your performance of a scene; i.e. your “process”.

However, when I say “technique” in *this* chapter, I refer to the result-oriented and mechanical way that many actors are taught to create a performance – the systematic procedures that many acting coaches impart to their students.

Sadly, I feel a lot of acting coaches will recommend to their students “techniques” that are controlling and result-oriented.

(I try to never discuss *results* with the people I coach. It takes them away from the selfish and self-absorbed experience they should be having. Instead I discuss *circumstances*.)

I am not totally against these “techniques”.

I understand their genesis. I believe they are all part of a desire for better and more thorough scene comprehension. They are a device to help young actors to *understand* the scene better.

However, I feel “techniques” are something student actors should learn, but should then throw away.

“Techniques” can make you anxious and concerned about things that nature will take care of, if you let it.

“Technique” replaces magic. It is for artists who don't trust that there is magic in their art.

And the real issue is that when an actor is doing these result-oriented techniques, it makes *“behaving as if it's really happening”* very difficult.

Let's discuss what I feel are some unneeded “techniques”:

Somewhere a teacher is making a lot of money instructing actors to cover the text with notes, circles and underlines. Bewildered, I'll often come across audition sides that are *covered* with markings.

You may enjoy the illusion of safety and control that this “mapping out” affords, and, in fact, doing so may help you to clarify to yourself what's happening in the scene, but *don't be duped into thinking you need it*.

In my opinion, it should all be thrown away when it's time to play in the scene. And you can't let it go if your script is all marked up like a map to some secret treasure.

I don't even like highlighting my script. I feel that by highlighting only your own character's words, it sends a subtle signal that the rest of the scene isn't as important. It's as if you can just put yourself on hold until your next line comes along.

Real people don't just tune out and wait for their next turn to speak, but that is what I believe highlighting reinforces subconsciously.

Another “technique” some actors use is “beats” or “actions”.

The way I’ve understood it, you choose an active verb that your character is involved in for a particular segment of a scene.

But, if you do this, you’ll find that your thoughts will be confined to simply repeating the chosen verb to yourself. You will be restricted by this pre-chosen notion of the scene, and unable to react to any new and exciting stimuli that surprise you in the performance.

On one occasion, I watched an actor do a scene in my workshop and it just didn’t seem that he was behaving as if it was really happening. The scene seemed to have had a false quality placed over it.

I asked him if he was playing an “action” or “beat”, and he said that he was. ...He had been playing “to convince”.

When we act, our goal is to have our thoughts as aligned as possible with what they would be if this was really happening to us. Any other thoughts will just make acting more difficult.

Real people don’t think in “actions” or “beats”. It’s simply not how real people think.

When you pre-choose an “action” or “objective”, you are trying to find an “answer” to the scene.

In real life there is no “answer” to an event. Life is constantly changing in every moment.

Besides that, the scene is supposed to be different every time you play it. The fact that the thoughts and line readings are allowed to slightly change on each take is what makes every take spontaneous!

When you’re really having an argument with someone, you are far too busy with your own rushing thoughts and emotions to concentrate on a generalized verb.

By choosing to overlay a single “action” or “objective” onto a portion of a scene, you are laying a *general quality* over it.

When you layer a *quality* over even one line of dialogue you can’t get in touch with the moment-to-moment fleeting *thoughts, feelings, and impulses* that happen even in a single line!

Consistently remind yourself how it is you really think and communicate. Your acting should be an exact mirror of that.

Stop believing there is some trick to this.

I received an email from an actor who had been reading my website and I really liked how he described his desire to find a new way to experience the scene-

*“I just read some of the things you said about the ‘idea’ of the line. I am going through my sides and I have to admit, I have never done that before. I am really excited about trying this new way. In the past, I had never thought about what the ‘thought’ behind the line was. There was no struggle to come up with the line to communicate what I was feeling or thinking in the scene. **It was just so easy to say the line with an action or a beat behind it, so I could accomplish my ‘need’ in the scene.**”*

Breaking a script down into “beats” and “actions” turns what should be an *art* into something like science and math, and what’s fun about that?

(...Unless you’re a scientist or mathematician, which I’m guessing you’re not!)

A *healthier* way to think about the concept behind “beats” would be to simply “do an improv about each new changing circumstance in the scene.” Sounds like much more fun, doesn’t it?

I was recently speaking with a well known young actor who was feeling a lot of anxiety because an illustrious acting teacher (one who has several famous actresses under her tutelage) had recently been telling him that he needed to study with her and use her technique if he wanted to really “do a good job and book big roles”.

This created a fear in him that he wasn’t “enough” and that there were things he was missing in his “process”.

By saying this, she gave his vulture free reign to squawk like crazy! (How else could she get his money?)

So I explained to him why I felt her technique was malarkey, and reminded him that there are plenty of Oscar winning actors who haven’t and *don’t* coach with this teacher! After that, he felt a great sense of relief.

And then he remembered something that really tickled him-

He shared with me that he had once had the pleasure of acting opposite Jennifer Lawrence...*who never trained at all!*

He had asked her why, and she told him that when she was 14 years old she went to an acting teacher in New York who told her that she didn’t need training. And so she believed him!

Good for Jennifer! That’s two Oscar nominations and one win for the woman who ISN’T working with that teacher...or ANY of the teachers who will tell you that you have to pay them to learn their technique or never get work!

He later wrote this to me in an email -

“It’s amazing the power of acting teachers to convince you against your own natural joyful instinct. Because ultimately if we are emulating humanity then how are we supposed to create that when we approach it like homework for a scary teacher in class.”

I had another student who was a terrific actress, however, lately she had been feeling weighed down by all the “technique” she was using.

Originally, the idea of marking up a scene with beats, objectives and intentions excited her. She thought, “Oh, I can do this. I’m smart and a hard worker.”

For years she worked this way. But once she realized there was another more exciting way to play, she realized that all that busywork was keeping her from being able to behave as if it was really happening to her.

In my workshop, she experimented with throwing away all the work and planning, and found that she was having fun for the first time.

Actors are *artists*. But it can be difficult to find the strength to be an artist, even in today’s society. There is quite a bit of inner shame in artists. We are so often

considered lazy, flaky, silly and immature by the rest of the working world. So often we are alone in our family, surrounded by people who don't understand art. When asked, this actress told me that she *didn't consider herself to be an artist*. We discussed her childhood, and she admitted that she had felt a lot of pressure to be intelligent and levelheaded. I believe she may have been using all that result-oriented technique so that her performing wouldn't feel like art, but like a more intellectual kind of work. The pressure of pleasing her family was still affecting her adult life. Now she happily embraces her newfound role as an "artist"!

I'm sure that some actors have found a way to successfully utilize "techniques" like these, but I just feel it can be *so much simpler* than all that.

Learn to trust your instincts.

Utilizing result-oriented "techniques" sends a fearful signal that you don't trust yourself, and that you don't trust that your higher power will be there to guide you through the scene.

Thinking you need a certain "technique" is like a fish holding onto a life preserver. It can swim just fine without it.

It's like the bird that thought it needed to build an airplane to fly. Sure, it eventually flew, but it always could.

The following is an excerpt from Gene Wilder's autobiography, "Kiss Me Like a Stranger". In this passage he describes his early years of studying under Strasberg:

"During these months in Strasberg's classes, I used to sneak into the balcony of The Actor's Studio and watch him give critiques to members. A very talented actor named Gerald Hiken had just done his first scene for Lee Strasberg. After the scene was over, Strasberg said, 'Tell us what you were working on.' Gerald said, 'I just wanted to show you how I normally work – using Actions, Objectives, Conditions, Obstacles... all the things I was taught in classes with Uta Hagen.'

Then Strasberg illuminated the mystery I had been wrestling with for many years. He said, 'You did very well, Gerald, because we got it. We could see everything you worked on – all the Actions and Objectives and all the rest of it. But at the Studio we believe that if you have a relaxed body and a relaxed mind, and if you can believe that the situation the character is in is actually happening to you, then all those other things you were talking about are going to happen by themselves, only not in an intellectual way, but in a more natural, organic way. And if they don't, then we have certain tools we use that might help you. But they're not intellectual tools.' ...The two most important things I learned at the Actors Studio were: don't use any technique if the situation and the author's words are working for you, by themselves; and, try to stay in the moment, which only means that every time you do the same scene, on stage or in front of a camera, if you're relaxed and you're reacting to the other actors at that moment – not the way you did it yesterday or fifteen minutes ago – then even though the lines are exactly the same and the staging is exactly the same, the scene will be a little different each time you do it, and it will be alive."

THE TRAP OF MAKING IT 'REAL'

Acting is easy.
 Yes, it's exciting!
 Yes, it's uncomfortable!
 Yes, it makes you feel incredibly vulnerable!
 But it *is* easy.

Here's something acting teachers don't share enough-
"If you say it, it's true."

What this means is that if you just stood onstage and said-
"I'm a rodeo clown"
 -the audience would perceive it as truth.

It doesn't matter if you're behaving like your idea of a rodeo clown, or whether you've done research on rodeo clowns, or daydream work or substitution work, etc. Because if you simply have *faith*, or *trust*, that you are a rodeo clown, it will appear to an audience that you are.

This is because of "projection".
 An audience will *project* on you all the circumstances of a rodeo clown, simply because you said it.

But this is not a means to an end!
 Once you realize that it can be so simple and easy, then you have freed yourself from all the result-oriented fears and concerns that would clutter up your mind and keep you from being free to play in the imaginary circumstances! You are available to *receive* and *become* in a more joyful and spontaneous manner.

And this brings me to the point of this chapter. I want to discuss what I feel is a trap for a number of actors-
 Some teachers seem to instill in actors the idea that their acting has to be "REAL".
"You have to REALLY feel it; REALLY think it; REALLY make it happen."

But the definition of acting isn't, "It's *really* happening".
 It's "behave AS IF it's really happening".
 There is a big difference.

Could you image if you were in the waiting room, and you looked at the audition room door and thought-
*"I have to go in there in a moment and make it **really happen!**"*

All the anxiety that would create!

However, if you looked at the audition room door and thought-
"I have to go in there in a moment and behave as if it's really happening."

That's a cinch!

But actors may ask, "Don't I need to truly *believe* that I am in the circumstances."
 No.

You are setting yourself up for an enormous struggle if your end goal is to "truly *believe*" or "make it *real*".

You are not expected to be *insane* and truly *believe* the circumstances are happening. The walls are never going to melt, and you'll be standing in a garden, hospital room, or police station. Instead, I like to say that you *trust*, or have *faith*, that the circumstances are happening to you.

Imagine the amount of work someone could teach you in an attempt to "make it real". But teachers will cite examples in order to convince you that this is what a "true actor" does.

They will say-

"You know, Daniel Day Lewis never broke character for three weeks while he portrayed Abraham Lincoln."

(Why is it always Daniel Day Lewis?!)

"And he stayed in character while they filmed 'My Left Foot'!"

Well, if you are ever portraying actual historical figures like our most beloved president, or an alcoholic man stricken with cerebral palsy who can only move one foot (in other words, people who's circumstances, voices, postures, and times of existence differ 100% from your own), then you have my blessing to stay in character if you wish. However, you will run the risk of irritating everyone around you.

I had the honor of acting opposite Ian McKellen for many days while he was filming his Academy Award nominated performance as James Whale in "Gods and Monsters". James Whale was the famous director of the Frankenstein movies who died under mysterious causes.

Ian was a complete delight on set; playful, joking, and spirited. In between takes he was his merry old self, flirting and joking with everyone as if he were back in high school!

And then at "Action!" he would jump whole-heartedly into the circumstances, and give the most breathtakingly beautiful performance.

He didn't torture himself; he didn't struggle; he didn't make us refer to him as "Mr. Whale" at lunch!

I know an actor who was recurring on a TV show in which the lead actress needed to keep everything "real". In between takes she would talk to people "in character", calling

them by their character names, which would put them in the uncomfortable position of remaining in character as well, or risk offending her.

The other actors were annoyed and would roll their eyes behind her back.

And if she had to film an emotional crying scene, she would spend the whole day in hysterics, crying and torturing herself to stay “in the zone” while they set up the shots.

Academy Award nominated actress, Juliette Lewis, was interviewed while filming “From Dusk Till Dawn”. In that film there was a terrifying sequence in which she and her family are being attacked by vampires; it took days to shoot.

Here is what she said about her approach to acting-

“My whole thing about acting is that you’re just lying. It’s plain and simple. I’m not gonna try to really feel like death is near and really put myself in that head frame for hours on end. I mean, I don’t understand that. I just understand acting is lying and you can lie a million different ways, but you are faking it. But with that you can step into just pretending and becoming and just being something.”

If you simply trust or have faith that the circumstances are really happening to you, that can be your experience.

And once you realize it’s that easy, and that there’s nothing you need to DO in order to make it “real”, then your vulture stops squawking. You stop getting involved in a bunch of needless fear-based and result-oriented thoughts and concerns.

And, when your mind is freed from that anxious worrying, it is then available to receive gifts of thoughts, images, concepts and feelings aligned with the circumstances *as if it were really happening to you!* Which is my definition of great acting!

I was talking with a friend, a twice Emmy nominated writer, about actors who drive themselves **crazy** with a “process” that requires a certain amount of time and effort in order to “connect” and make it “real”.

And he encapsulated my feelings by sharing this wisdom-

*“A ‘process’ is a way of doing something. But the minute it becomes a reason you **can’t** do something, it’s not a process anymore...it’s an impediment.”*

My favorite thing that Liv Tyler said to me while I was directing her in my film “Space Station 76” was-

*“I may have certain anxieties before I shoot a scene, but I do trust that when the camera rolls, **magic happens.**”*

THE SHORTCUT TO SELFISHNESS

This chapter is a bit more complex than others, so I thought I'd begin by summing it up in advance:

“Nice Guy” actors can short-circuit the psychological process of *insecurity* by allowing themselves the permission to *hate the audience* which will release their “need to please” and allow them to be “selfish actors”.

...Don't worry, it's simpler than it sounds. Enjoy!

So, we've established that being a “selfish actor” is a good thing.
But how does an actor with a strong “need to please” become a “selfish actor”?

Consider this:

I heard a story that, before her concerts, Judy Garland would scream into the curtains-
“Fuck the audience!”

And then she'd sashay onto the stage and joyfully sing her heart out.

Additionally, it has been said that before his stage performances, the great actor Richard Burton used to peer through the curtains at the audience and whisper-
“Fuck you! Fuck you! Fuck you!”

Sounds crazy, doesn't it?

Why in the world would they behave like that?!

Actually, what they were doing makes perfect sense.

They were taking **“the shortcut to selfishness”**.

They were simply doing what they needed to do in order to stop caring what the audience thought about them.

It worked as a kind of “affirmation” to release their “need to please”, so that they could have a *selfish* experience.

You might think that saying, “Fuck you!”, is a mighty strange affirmation...but sometimes just saying, “I release my need to please,” isn't quite enough.

...Sometimes you gotta bring out the big guns!

And if reminding themselves that they have permission to hate the audience frees them to play, then what's the harm?

Sadly, this strong “need to please” is epidemic among actors.

So, like a medical condition, I have named it. I call it “Nice Guy Syndrome”.

Hmmm...Doesn't sound like such a bad condition to have, does it?

“What's so wrong with being a *nice guy*?” you might ask.

Well, what does it mean to be “nice”?

“Nice” - *pleasant, agreeable, satisfactory.*

...Not very exciting, huh? I’d go so far as to say that it’s kinda “blah”.
I mean, nobody ever won an Oscar for being “pleasantly satisfactory”.
It’s just not that *attractive* of a quality to have.

I believe that practically every actor has the “Nice Guy Syndrome” to some degree.
I know / do!

You needn’t be ashamed if you fall into the “Nice Guy” trap, for it shows that you are, at heart, someone who cares about people.

However, I hope you will realize that being a “Nice Guy” doesn’t serve you as an adult artist.

“Nice Guys” may have a deep desire to *please* their audience, but, more importantly, they have a deep fear that they won’t!

The problem is that you can’t truly please an audience if you are coming from a needy place of fear that you won’t please them.

The way to please an audience is to *release your need to please them*. When you do that, you will free yourself from anxiety, you will return to being joyful...and you *will* please them.

Any energy spent on pleasing the audience is energy *not* spent on having a rich, emotional and selfish experience in front of the audience, WHICH IS IN FACT WHAT WILL PLEASE THEM!

Some information on *extreme* cases of “Nice Guy Syndrome”:

There are some actors who, based upon their background, find it *extremely* difficult to be a “selfish” actor.

These actors feel that they need to be charming, and to make their audience feel “comfortable”.

So where does this concern for the audience come from?

When a child plays “pretend” he certainly isn’t coming from a need to please anyone.

So where do we pick up this need?

One way is in our acting training, which is built on impressing our teachers. Trained actors have spent years doing scenes then eagerly awaiting feedback from their teacher.

But, I feel that the worst cases are born in the actor’s childhood and upbringing. In general, pleasing people is a survival tactic we use since birth, and throughout childhood it is regularly greatly awarded.

However, very often, an actor's strong "need to please" is based on very specific childhood circumstances, for instance:

- A sibling was a problem child and therefore you felt that you needed to be perfect.
- Your parents were unhappy so you felt you needed to not add to their problems.
- A parent made you feel unloved.

Conditions like these can create a crippling "need to please" that can take all the joy out of acting.

Even though these actors are no longer living in their former situation, they are still finding their lives governed by the same old rules from that time. They are letting these old demons affect their performances. They are having a "hysterical" reaction to something in the present, due to something "historical" in the past.

(These actors should read "FINDING YOUR INNER CHILD" and "IF IT'S HYSTERICAL".)

To ALL you "Nice Guys" out there (whether you have an extreme case or just a mild one), I quote "Little Red Riding Hood", from the musical "Into the Woods"-
*"Nice is different than **good**."*

Stop wasting your time being "nice".

You should only be concerned that you are a *good* person.

...And you ARE a good person!

Are good people *always* nice? No!

But, that doesn't change the fact that they are good.

So, stop wanting to be "nice" in your auditions. That energy will run counterpoint to the selfish experience you should be having.

The best way you can be "good" at your audition is to have a fully *selfish* experience.

Acting runs on empathy. If you're feeling it, the audience will too!

And now...THE SHORTCUT TO SELFISHNESS!:

I had a very talented student with a serious case of "Nice Guy Syndrome". His performances were always very smooth, pleasant and polished.

However they were *safe* because they were highly *controlled*.

His acting was "nice", and therefore..."blah".

He was always "taking care" of his audience, and making sure they were *comfortable*.

But this runs against what an audition should be. An audition should feel dangerous and exciting, like a roller coaster!

He had made his audience feel so comfortable that they were rarely excited by his work. There was no true danger, tension or element of surprise. No spontaneity.

So how did this actor break his “Nice Guy” habit?

I explained to him that, not only did he not have to love his audience, but that he was free to hate them.

He was free to be “an asshole”.

(He didn’t have to “behave” like an asshole; there’s no need for him to be rude or show the slightest contempt. He simply was free to stop doing all the unneeded “nice” things he was doing.)

I told him that before each performance, he should allow himself the permission to hate everyone who’s watching. That he should say the affirmation-
“Fuck them. I have permission to hate them.”

And when he did this, he finally took on the qualities of a selfish actor. He was thrilled with the results!

So many actors try to make the audience feel safe and comfortable.

“Don’t worry”, they seem to be telling the audience, “I’m controlling the scene, and making sure I give you what I think you’re expecting. I’m entertaining you like a good little boy.”

Fuck that! BE A BITCH! BE AN ASSHOLE!

If you’re striving to make everyone comfortable, then that is what they will be. And they don’t want to feel comfortable when watching a drama scene. That’s boring!

The opposite of “comfortable” is “*vulnerable*” and “*tense*”. Sounds like much more exciting and appropriate words for a performance of a drama, wouldn’t you agree?

Don’t forget *acting runs on empathy!* Meaning, the audience’s experience can only be *your* experience. They can only feel what you feel. So the only way the audience will feel uncomfortable, vulnerable and tense is if you, *the actor*, are feeling uncomfortable, vulnerable and tense.

Which means that *anything you are doing in your drama auditions to make the audience or yourself comfortable is the antithesis of booking the job!*

Therefore, your last thought before a drama audition should be-

“I hope they feel so fucking uncomfortable watching this scene. And I’ll do that by not taking care of the scene at all, but instead, and only, being interested in my own selfish experience of playing in the circumstances and behaving as if this is really happening to me.”

I was personally unaware of how strongly I needed to please people until I began reminding myself, prior to auditions and performances, that I could hate my audience. When I did, the change I felt was so tremendous and freeing that I finally realized how deep my “Nice Guy Syndrome” went.

Suddenly I looked back on all the years of missed opportunities in which my sweet-natured “shyness” caused me to clam up and squelch my light.

But now, I remind myself that I can hate the casting director who brought me in. I can hate the director who is behind the camera. I can even hate the other actors on set.

But please notice I'm *not* saying I DO hate them.

Of course, I don't really hate them, and never will!

We are all one, and I love all humans.

However, I am simply saying I *could* hate them if I wanted to. I am reminding myself that I don't have to NEED their approval.

By reminding myself that I *permission* to hate them, I free myself from being needy.

How it works:

The idea of "hating the audience" may still seem peculiar to some of you, so allow me to explain, in detail, exactly why and how it works.

In order to be a "selfish actor" we must rid ourselves of **INSECURITY**.

"Insecurity" – *to feel uncertain and anxious.*

Insecurity is a feeling of general unease or anxiousness that is triggered by perceiving oneself to be unloved, inadequate or worthless.

It is our *insecurity* that causes our "*need to please*".

Insecurity is insidious because it quietly dwells within us, growing so gradually and subtly that we don't even question or challenge it.

We don't ever realize the extent to which it controls our lives.

We take for granted the fact that we worry what others think of us, so we never stop to ask ourselves *why* we do all that worrying.

We worry all the time, but we don't understand *why* we worry.

So WHY do we feel insecure?

Let me remind you that there are two voices in your head; two sides of your personality.

There is your *ego* (or vulture), which wants you to live in fear.

And your *true* self, which wants you to live in love.

Your ego doesn't want you to figure out *why* you feel insecure (or *how* he makes you feel that way).

It knows that if you did figure it all out, you might choose to stop feeling that way.

So your ego found a sneaky way to make you feel insecure...

But here's the truth; the REAL reason you feel insecure - (drum roll please...)

**You're not worried what *other people* think of you.
You're worried about what *you* think of yourself!**

Case in point, you have a terrible and negative thought (insecurity) about yourself, like- "I'm a lousy actor".

Your ego/vulture *put that thought there* because it wants you to be unhappy; to live in fear.

But -

Your ego knows that if you were to become aware that it's YOU who put the thought there, then you may realize you have the power to STOP thinking that negative thought.

So, this is where your vulture/ego does something brilliantly treacherous and crafty. It utilizes a psychological device called "**projection**".

In simple terms, your ego *projects* your negative thoughts about yourself upon other people. You imagine that *they* are thinking them.

In other words, you convince yourself that you know what people are thinking, and that it's terrible things about you.

Under the spell of "projection", you tell yourself-

"I'm not thinking that terrible thought about myself...they are!"

It is in this way that your vulture has tricked you into allowing that terrible thought to be there; in the air around you.

You allow it because you don't think you're responsible for it!

Here is a more thorough explanation of "projection" (from Wikipedia):

"Psychological projection is a defense mechanism in which one attributes one's own unacceptable or unwanted thoughts to others. It has been described as 'the operation of expelling feelings the individual finds wholly unacceptable—too shameful, too obscene, too dangerous—by attributing them to another.'

To understand the process, consider a person in a couple who has thoughts of infidelity. Instead of dealing with these undesirable thoughts consciously, he subconsciously projects these feelings onto the other person, and begins to think that *the other* has thoughts of infidelity and may be having an affair. In this sense, projection is related to denial. Those who project deny a part of themselves that may otherwise come to the surface. In this case, they cannot face their own feelings of infidelity and therefore project them onto the other person."

So you see, it's in this way that the mind allows terrible thoughts to be there without having to take credit for them.

It seems to say, "Here's a horrible thing about yourself, but YOU'RE not thinking it. THEY ARE!"

So if an actor has the thought, “I am a bad actor”, rather than acknowledge that he feels this way, he will imagine that everyone who watches him perform feels this way.

And from this simple trick sprouts your insecurity and, consequently, your “need to please”.

But there is a simple solution; a *shortcut!*

Allowing yourself the freedom to hate your audience SHORT CIRCUITS this psychological process!

After all, why would you care in the least what other people think of you, if you’ve already established that you are free to hate them.

If you have permission to hate them, it gets rid of that blank slate that you are projecting your negative thoughts onto.

Some actors are hesitant to do this because they are afraid of being “mean” in the room. You won’t be!

I am actually so much friendlier now that I don’t need anything from the audience! I smile more!

It’s not that you are doing something *new* (like behaving rudely, for instance). It’s that you will *stop* doing the things that you don’t need to do; the things that are hindering your performance.

You will STOP worrying about what they think of you! (...But, you and I know that the truth is, you will stop being interested in the negative thoughts about yourself, which you are projecting onto them.)

Remember the Richard Burton story?

Well, when I was in high school, sometimes I would peek through the curtain, excited to see who I might know in the audience.

However, as soon as I saw a friend or family member, it always hurt my performance because I would worry about all the judgmental things they might be thinking.

Another way to put it is, that I would spend the show *seeing myself through their eyes*.

The truth is that, of course, I couldn’t know what they were thinking, therefore the judgments which I felt were coming from me!

A sidenote:

I think the technique of hating your audience is especially helpful when you are playing a character who is either angry or any form of a “jerk”; two very difficult things to play if you are involved in being a “Nice Guy”.

If you are playing a character who doesn’t care how the people around them feel, then you, as the actor, should create a reality where you can experience those same circumstances.

Some of you may be thinking-

“Wait a minute! I know that some of my insecurities aren’t coming from me, because so-and-so told me that I was a lousy actor.”

Look, I’m not saying that you haven’t been scarred by real people’s opinions of you in the past.

Worse comes to worse, maybe there was even a seed of truth in it what they said...at the time.

But times change. You’ve grown as an artist; gotten better.

And that person is gone.

So who’s voice are you hearing in echoing in your head? Yours!

Let it go! They may have handed you the baton, but why are you still running with it?!

(Check out the chapter “WHEN SOMEONE DOESN’T LIKE YOU,” and remind yourself that when someone doesn’t like you, it’s about *them*, not *you*.)

If you still have your doubts of the appropriateness of this approach, then please understand that the reason it’s perfectly alright to hate your audience is because- (the same way that releasing your need to get the job actually *leads* to getting the job) - allowing yourself the freedom to hate your audience is actually the thing that leads to the audience loving you.

Having a selfish and joyful experience in front of them is your way of loving them, and in return they will love you in return.

In summation:

In the past we may have denied ourselves happiness due to our own self-hatred.

We have needed people to love us, but have unknowingly projected all our self-hatred onto those very self-same people.

And all the while, our egos have kept us in the dark about our own self-destruction.

But, we needn’t be victims of our egos any longer!

The whole point of this chapter is to give you back the power; to make you realize how much power you have!

There’s only one thing that actors can control in their lives, and that’s their thoughts!

Let’s be dedicated to doing what we need to do in order to be joyful!

Section 5: THE PERFORMANCE

ISSUES WITH LINES

If issues with “character” is what most trips up actors, then issues with “lines” runs a very, very close second!

I have seen so many terrific actors completely blow a performance because they had some anxiety concerning the process of taking the lines from the page and speaking them.

For instance, it’s sad to see how many actors shoot themselves in the foot by having their “head in the page” in their audition. In other words, their primary focus was *down*, on the page they were holding, instead of *up*, on the situation or person they were dealing with.

I recently went to a commercial audition and was asked to stand behind the camera and deliver the cue lines to a couple actors.

Their lines, as is the custom with commercial auditions, were written on a large tablet of paper beside the camera, so they can read them if they want to.

The casting director asked them to do a quick rehearsal so she could give them notes if needed.

Both actors were amazing! Neither one even glanced at the tablet, trusting that they knew the lines well enough. They came off as spontaneous, “real” and funny. It was pure magic.

They were so fearless...UNTIL the casting director said-

“Okay, we’re going to film this now.”

Well, guess what happened...

As the camera rolled, BOTH actors stared at the lines on the tablet out of concern they would not get the words right, so, of course, they came off as dead and stilted.

All the joy was gone. POOF!

It was so sad to see.

As an audience, we must feel that the actor *wants* to be up off the page, for that is where the “magic” is.

(That doesn’t mean that he has to be looking the reader directly in the eyes. His gaze could be off to the side, deep in thought.)

The actor doesn’t *mind* looking down to grab the idea of the next line, but he must always *want* to return to looking up.

Notice I say grab the “idea” of the line. That is because although he *wants* to speak the lines exactly as written, he doesn’t *need* to. He would rather paraphrase than put “getting-the-lines word-perfect” ahead of his selfish experience of the playing in the circumstances of the scene.

“Paraphrase” - to express the meaning of something written using different words.

Whenever I bring up “paraphrasing”, some panic-stricken actor inevitably says something like-

“My friend paraphrased at an audition once and the casting director got very upset!”

...Personally, I think this is an urban legend. It certainly has never been my experience. But you know what I say to that one-in-a-million writer or casting director who gets **ANGRY?**

“Screw you.”

Normally, if a casting director needs you to say the words *exactly* as written (almost never happens) then they will politely ask you to do it again. If they get offended for some reason then that’s their unhealthy issue and has nothing to do with you.

I guarantee that until you are completely okay with paraphrasing (changing *a word here or there*) you will have difficulty auditioning for TV and film.

Because even if you’ve had three months to memorize the material, come the audition you’ll still put *getting it word perfect* as more important than your selfish experience of playing in the circumstances.

The pressure that actors put on themselves to get all the words right DESTROYS their auditions!

The character you are playing isn’t involved in needing to get all the words right, so why are you?

NO ONE ever booked a job because they got all the words right!

But you will lose job after job after job if you make getting it word perfect your number one priority.

Theater actors, especially, have a difficult time paraphrasing.

This is understandable because theater is a medium of words and ideas. (Whereas TV and films are mediums of images.)

Therefore, in theatrical productions, there is a great respect for the writing. No one in their right mind would paraphrase Shakespeare! (However, I did once in college because I forgot my speech. Try paraphrasing in iambic pentameter! Yikes!)

However, the same does not hold true for TV and film, where, in general, there is less respect for writers.

Mind you, this is not *my* feeling to be sure! But executives (or “suits” as some people call them) tend to feel a little differently.

And besides, even if you are auditioning for a well-respected writer, he knows that this is just the audition, and that you haven’t had a lot of time with the material. He understands that if you book the job then you will memorize it completely.

Don’t forget that casting is just like high school. Nobody wants to be around the kid who is desperate to make friends, and everyone wants to sit at the lunch table with the kid who doesn’t need them to sit there.

Therefore, do you want to be seen as the “good little boy” who, with nothing better to do, had all the time in the world to read the entire script and memorize it word-for-word in a desperate need to impress?

Or wouldn't you rather be the actor who was too busy putting up a theatrical production with his friends or filming some independent movie, to put in all that unnecessary work. You can behave *as if* you are that lighthearted actor, entering breezily, as if to say, “I have a busy life, but I'm glad to be here, I'm as prepared as I had time for, and let's have some fun.”

It's not that you're unprepared. Put in the amount of work that you desire in order to have a joyful experience.

But do it for *you*, and not for *them*!

When I first moved to LA, I met this very pretty young actress who worked all the time. I remember we were talking about the subject of paraphrasing at auditions, and she said- (*Valley-Girl accent*)

“I don't care. I just say whatever I want to. I just say whatever. I don't care. I change the lines all the time to whatever I want.”

And in that moment I realized-

“Okay...if she can do that and book work, then certainly I can change a word here or there!”

Please give yourself the same freedom.

I'm certainly not saying that you should just change the words willy-nilly.

Obviously you have to, at the very least, get out the “idea” of each line, or the other character's responses won't make any sense.

When paraphrasing, there is a line you do not want to cross, or they won't feel that they can trust you to say the script as written on the set. However, *trust yourself* that you know where that line is.

The healthy balance is to go into an auditioning *wanting* to say the words perfectly but not *needing* to.

As long as you *want* to say the words perfectly, you will never over paraphrase.

I like to say that if you are an actor who is concerned about getting the words right, then that's “in your pocket”.

In other words, you *own* that desire and carry it with you all the time, so you'll never paraphrase or change the lines SO MUCH that you'll offend someone. *So you can stop worrying about it.*

And here's the good news: When you release your need to get all the words right, you free yourself from the pressure of anxiety that is scrambling your brain. When you're free from that pressure, you end up getting more of the words right!

I can't tell you how many times the following has happened at my workshop:

Someone does a scene, the whole time reading the lines right off the page; their head buried in the script.

When they are done, they explain that they have “a tough time memorizing lines”. So I immediately ask them to do it again, but this time they are not allowed to look down at the script *at all*.

Gulp!

Then they do the scene again, and, inevitably, remember almost every word *exactly as written*.

Why does this happen?

Because the actor is free from fear and anxiety.

And *why* is the actor free from fear and anxiety?

Because he has been given permission to be.

He has an excuse now - everyone watching him heard me say that he wasn't allowed to look down. Therefore, he won't get in trouble when he forgets a line.

Well, this permission I gave him he could give himself.

And you can do the same.

This may sound contrary, but while I am saying that it's good to be memorized enough to be able to have your primary focus be upwards, it is ALSO important to know that you don't *need* to be memorized to book a job.

The way a scene is played in a TV or film audition is not quite the same it will be played in front of the cameras. It really is a different animal. It's not supposed to look just like what will be seen in the finished product. *It's an audition*.

The most obvious difference is the fact that the scene needn't be memorized. The actor is *expected* to hold the sides through the scene, and use them whenever needed.

When you are not fully memorized, there is a simple trick to getting the lines from the page during an audition:

Make sure to look down at the page *while the reader is speaking*, and look up *when you are speaking*.

Many actors make the mistake of looking down at the page while they, themselves, are speaking. It's fine to do that once in awhile, but it should be something you avoid if at all possible.

I think this habit is most often due to some long ago teacher instructing the actor to – “Always look at the person who is speaking!”

But remember, your acting should be selfish!

So what's the most selfish and fun moment to get to play in a scene?

As a great actress once said-

“Acting is hearing something for the first time, then saying something for the first time”.

Those moments of honest reaction and decision are the delicious and *magical* moments.

Therefore, the most fun moments to play are when the reader is finishing his line, because you get to receive it, react to it and deliver your next line. So, be off the page for those moments so you can enjoy them.

So to clarify:

- While the reader is saying his line, look down at the page to grab the idea of your next line.
- While you are doing so *have faith* that you are hearing what the reader is saying. (You have read the material earlier, you know what he's saying, so have faith that you are hearing it now for the first time, even if part of you is occupied with getting your next line.)
- Now, get your head up **BEFORE he is done reading his line**, so you can have your delicious moment of reaction. Once you've begun your line, you can feel free to go back down to the page if you have a long series of lines. The important thing is that you got to play with that magic moment of discovery and decision.

Someone once said, "**Acting is reacting.**" So don't miss out on those magic moments because you have your head down in the page!

Besides, the casting person is undoubtedly looking *down* when he is saying his lines, so what good does it do you to be looking at him at that time anyway? He's studying you primarily *while you are speaking*, so be up and off the page as much as you can at those times.

I was shocked to find out that there is a highly respected acting coach in Los Angeles who tells her actors to do the exact opposite!

In fact, I have heard that most coaches are teaching their actors to not look down until it's their turn to speak.

Why?! In my opinion, that makes no sense!

Think about it logically. Besides all the reasons I have already listed, ask yourself this; in a film, when the camera pulls in for a closeup, who is the camera usually showing?

The person who is talking!

No one won an Oscar because they were good at listening!

You might ask, "Well, couldn't I watch the casting director as he speaks, then have my reaction, THEN look down quickly to get my line?"

The problem with that is, by looking down during the time between having a reaction to something and choosing what you want to say in response, you are interrupting the moment. You are not "behaving as if it's really happening".

Why would you want to break up the most important moments by looking down?

When coaches suggest that actors look down at the start of their lines, they are turning the actors' audition into an acting "exercise". The exercise goes as follows:

You sit facing your scene partner. You watch and listen to your partner as he speaks.

When he's done, allow yourself to take in what he said and have a reaction to it, THEN look down to get your next line.

This exercise teaches young actors to not just rush to speak their line, but to make sure that they are hearing and reacting to their scene partner. However, an audition is not an exercise!

(By the way, apparently the respected LA acting coach also warns actors to *never* paraphrase, giving them one more reason to feel anxiety in the audition room.)

Many actors are afraid to look up off the page while they are speaking, because they are worried that they will forget the next word or line.

They are terrified of that *moment of silence* when they are trying to remember a line. And when they *do* forget the second half of a line, they quickly look down at the page, sacrificing whatever magic was happening for them in the moment.

What they don't realize is that *it's fine when you forget the next line!* That moment of silence is a must have!

Real people aren't always sure of what they want to say next. Being unsure of what to say next is just like LIFE!

Allow me to illustrate by using the famous quote from "Hamlet":

"To be, or not to be."

Many actors, if they forgot the *second half* of the line, would do this:

(Looking up, self assuredly)

"To be..."

(Uh-oh! Immediately looking down in a panic and quickly reading the line as they stare at the page)

"-or-not-to-be."

Ugh!

Now if the same actor would just stay up off the page and take a moment to remember the second half of the line, it would look like this:

(Looking up, self assuredly)

"To be..."

(Thinking. Thinking. Thinking. Ah-ha!)

"-or not to be."

Isn't that, in a way, exactly how that moment *should* be played.

The audience can't read your mind.

The moment of silence when the actor was trying to remember the next line, **looks exactly like the character is *thinking!***

It's a freebie moment of real human behavior.

So forgetting the line was a gift, because it made that moment so much more than it would have been if the actor had just raced through the line, as most actors would.

Every scene is a scene about someone who *doesn't know what he's going to say*. But we turn every scene into a scene about someone who *knows everything he's going to say*.

I love the quote, "It's the cracks that let the light of God in."

Here's what well-known British actress, Glenda Jackson, has to say on the subject- "*The whole essence of learning lines is to forget them so you can make them sound like you thought of them that instant.*"

Many actors are in such a panic to get the words perfect that they just quickly rattle them off. The reason being that these actors are trying not to falter or stammer, or worse yet, leave a pause where they feel that nothing is happening.

They fear the uncomfortableness of that moment of silence.

However, in most scenarios, there *must* be moments of silence. Because it's untrue to say that "nothing is happening". Something very important is happening - *the character is trying to decide what to say next!*

There must be some faltering or hesitation. It's real human behavior.

So, you see, the thing those actors are trying *not to do* is actually *essential* to booking the job!

Think about "Emily's" famous monologue from the end of the play "Our Town".

Could you imagine if she just rattled off her lines like she had them all memorized?! -

"Good-bye-world.-Good-bye-Grover's-Corners-Mama-and-Papa-Good-bye-to-clocks-ticking-and-Mama's-sunflowers-And-food-and-coffee-And-new-ironed-dresses-and-hot-baths-and-sleeping-and-waking-up-Oh-earth-you-are-too-wonderful-for-anybody-to-realize-you."

What a terrible, missed opportunity that would be!

The character of "Emily" must be discovering the words in the moment. Her mind is racing with thoughts, images, and concepts, and she "chooses" these words.

Don't plan the silences. Let them happen spontaneously. And if one of the reasons they happen is that you are not sure what comes next, then that's great! *Neither is she!*

So when you forget your next line, don't have a fearful, knee-jerk reaction and think to yourself, "Come on! Hurry up, Stupid! Get the right line out or they'll know you're a sham!"

Instead, just stay involved in the scene, and be glad that the moment came up to add realism and texture. Trying to think of what to say next is a wonderful, authentic moment for your character to have in most any scene.

Better you should paraphrase a little until you are back on track, then to stop the scene, blush and apologize that you "messed up your lines."

Another reason why it's fine to leave that moment of silence is because time speeds up when you're auditioning. When your heart races, what feels like five seconds of dead air, is actually about ONE second!

So that's why you have permission to tell your vulture that "I can take all the time I want."

An added note:

Make sure to memorize at least your first couple of lines. It's of the utmost importance that you begin a scene looking like a real person, and not an actor looking down to get his lines.

In my opinion, if you have the first few lines memorized they won't mind how many times you look down later!

And you have no excuse for not knowing those first lines, because you are free to take a moment to look at them before the scene begins.

I was coaching an actor in New York City, who was struggling in his performance of a scene. At one point in the scene he threw his script to the floor.

Afterwards, I asked him why he had done that, and he explained that he hated holding sides during an audition. He felt it made the scene "less real".

A lot of actors are uncomfortable holding the sides (or "script").

But it simply isn't true that using your sides keeps an audition scene from being "real". The casting people *expect* you to hold and use the sides in an audition scenario. They are *accustomed* to seeing actors look down at the script to get their next line. As long as you stay involved the scene, the sides are invisible to casting people.

The problem is that many actors have a hard time "behaving as if it's really happening" when they have to look down at the sides.

But, this issue is completely of their own making. It is a wall that was built by them. If you think looking down to get your line "takes you out of the scene", then that will be your reality *until you change your mind about it*.

There's no reason for you to feel that the scene has stopped when you look down at the page.

I think a lot of these actors have that same ghostly voice of an acting teacher repeating in their head, "Stay focused on your scene partner. You must keep looking at your scene partner."

But, this does not apply to an audition.

Nor should you feel constrained to do so in an actual filmed scene.

I certainly don't STARE at the people I talk to in my everyday life.

You can let that ghostly voice go. It's no longer helpful.

Here are three reasons you should hold onto the sides, or at least have them in your lap:

1. If you forget a line, the pages are right there in front of you, and you won't miss a beat as you look to the page to get the line.
2. I believe it may make some casting people uncomfortable if you don't have your sides. It doesn't fit the style of an audition, so they are wondering why you don't have your sides.
3. If you don't hold the sides, it sends a message that you are now giving your "final" performance. It says, "If you hire me, this is exactly how I'll play the scene." ...Wouldn't you rather have the casting person think, "Gee, if she's this good in the audition, just think how great she'll be when they actually shoot this!"

Concerning line memorization:

When memorizing the lines, you should solely be involved in just that; *committing them to memory*.

Many actors combine line memorization with planning how they will say the line. You mustn't do this. That's how you come up with lifeless and controlled line-readings.

We all have a vulture that wants to give us line readings as we memorize. He's squawking line readings in fear that the line won't come out "correctly" if you don't plan it ahead of time.

Just let your vulture know that you're not interested in his line reading.

So how do you memorize a scene without inadvertently memorizing line readings as well?

First you must make sure that you are seeing the lines as "ideas" and not just a series of words in a certain mathematical order.

(Read the chapter "FOCUS ON THE MEANING OF THE LINE".)

When your vulture tries to give you a line reading, tell him that you're not interested, and that you're going to focus solely *on the idea of the line*. In other words; "*what the line means*".

I'm not talking about some hidden subtextual meaning.

On the contrary, just the literal, shallow and obvious meaning of the words.

Tell him that you want to be *surprised* by how the line comes out in performance, just like the *character* is surprised. Because it's the only way that the scene can be spontaneous.

Seeing the lines as "ideas" will make memorizing MUCH easier.

Personally, I used to hate memorizing, and now I find that it's easy and painless.

When you memorize lines while focusing on what the words mean, it's as though you are *absorbing* the lines into your stomach, versus shoving them into your head. You will *own* them.

And, you will no longer feel the pressure of saying every line word-perfect, because now you *understand* the line and are not involved in simply “getting the words right”.

A side note:

For the most part, if an actor can't paraphrase, it's because he has memorized the lines as just a series of words in a certain order, or as a line reading. It means he didn't put the bulk of his focus, while memorizing, on the meaning of the lines.

It's not that he doesn't *understand* what he's saying, but he's more interested in getting the words perfect than sharing the ideas.

For a drama audition, I never say the words out loud *the way I might say them in my audition until I am in my audition.*

This is a gift you give yourself!

You don't have to pretend you've never said these words this way...you never have!

The goal of an audition is to have it happen, as if for the first time, right there in the casting director's office.

I figure the less you have to fake the better. The character certainly hasn't said these words before. Therefore, if I wait until my audition to speak the words out loud, then I will have the genuine experience of saying those things for the first time right there in the audition. I won't have to pretend that I've never said those words before. That aspect of my performance will be totally spontaneous by definition.

My favorite way to memorize is to just sit and write out my lines on a separate piece of paper. I write slowly, really taking in each word, and the meaning of each sentence. After doing that just once, I find that the words are well on their way to being memorized.

If I do want to run the lines out loud, I speak them quietly to myself, void of any emotion. Sanford Meisner, the famous acting teacher, recommends using a “robot voice”. While saying the lines aloud to yourself, use a quiet, monotone voice with no inflections, and speak in an even, rhythmic pacing. This way there will be no line readings set in stone.

THOUGHTS VS. WORDS

A terrific casting director once explained to me that an actor must “throw away the words”.

What does that mean?

It’s just a way to describe how you live your real life.

In real life, we have no idea *how* we are saying what we are saying.

On the contrary, we have interesting thoughts and feelings, and then these words tumble out.

Some actors make the mistake of just “acting” or “coloring” the words.

It’s as if they are only performing the words and not understanding that there are many thoughts and feelings *behind the words*.

When I see an actor doing this, I will usually say, “It seems that you are just *on* the words.”

These actors are not concerned with the *inner* journey of the character, only the *outer* effect of their performance.

This is called being “result-oriented”.

Think about how most *beginning* actors approach a text:

First, they memorize the lines either as “line readings”, or just as a series of words in mathematical order.

Then, they say the words the way they’d imagine the character would say them, which is usually based on some similar past performance they’ve seen, which may have been predictable and unoriginal to begin with.

High school productions are full of “earnest” young thespians *coloring* their words, trying to make it all sound very dramatic and entertaining.

But this is not how real people behave.

Real people never have a prepared speech.

Real people never know quite what they’re going to say, or how they’re going to say it.

Real people don’t “act” or “color” their words. They are too busy *coming up with what they want to say*.

Real people have interesting thoughts and feelings, and then search for the words to express those thoughts.

They attempt to communicate their thoughts with words that are chosen in the moment *and not always successfully*.

A person might have many thoughts, images and concepts in their head at any moment. The words we use to communicate these thoughts are not as important as the thoughts themselves.

Strive to be surprised by thoughts, images, concepts and feelings you might be having if these circumstances were really happening to you, and then let the words become an extension of that.

It is not about the words, it's about the thoughts.

And what *are* the character's thoughts?

That is completely up to the whim of whatever actor is playing the role at the time. And the thoughts will be different for that actor each time he plays it.

I like to put it this way-

Think the thoughts, feel the feelings, *and the words you throw away.*

THE GOOD NEWS IS-

I'm not giving you more work to do, because *you mustn't plan the thoughts.*

Your goal is to allow thoughts (images, ideas, opinions, concepts and feelings) to *surprise* you during the performance of the scene.

It's the fact that the thoughts surprise you and are different each time that allows you to do a scene ten times, and each time it is totally spontaneous.

I promise that thoughts will surprise you in the performance. Because your heart is racing, magic will happen, and you will receive gifts of thoughts. Allow that joyful process to happen, and stop with planning thoughts beforehand. Acting is an art that happens while your acting!

THE BETTER NEWS IS-

The audience can't read your mind. So you could be thinking about your laundry and still book the job.

THE BEST NEWS IS-

You don't really have to have the character's thoughts, just have faith you do and that's enough. And by having faith you have the character's thoughts, you invite the universe to send you gifts of thoughts, images, concepts and feelings in the performance.

Which is the definition of great acting!

And worse case scenario, if no thoughts come to you, the audience will *project* upon a blank moment what they believe the character is thinking. So even if you just took a beat and stared out into space, it would appear you were having fascinating thoughts. And chances are, if you left that moment of silence, *an interesting thought would occur to you!*

The scene is not about the words. It's about what happening in the scene.

You must want more than to just say the character's words.

The script provides you with the words, but let the *thoughts* come in the moment of performance.

Those surprising thoughts and images will give you something to react to emotionally.

That is what makes sparks fly in a performance.

That is the magic of acting!

TAKE IT FROM WHERE YOU ARE

In college I had an acting teacher who, if she felt a student's performance in a scene wasn't going well, would shout-
"BE THERE!"

I always found this so frustrating.
 I wanted to "be there", but I really had no idea how to "get there".

Where is "there"?

I believe what she meant was "be there *in the moment.*" And I certainly couldn't disagree with the general thought.

It is important to experience a scene specifically focused on the moment-to-moment thoughts, words and events of the scene, and not to have your thoughts stray to unrelated areas.

However, many actors use this phrase of "being there" as a weapon against themselves.

Often, in my workshop, when I ask an actor how he felt a scene went, he will reply, "I just didn't feel like I got there".

To which I say, "Your mistake is thinking that there is a 'there' to get to."

In voicing his experience like that, the actor has created a reality wherein there is a possibility of NOT getting there.

You must be very careful of how you word things to yourself, because your thoughts create your reality.

It is a mistake to believe that there is some place you must get to. By setting up your reality this way, you have created a possibility to fail.

By creating a reality where there is a "there" to get to, you will always be striving to get there. Your ego will not allow you to achieve your goal of "getting there", and you will spend the scene chasing after an experience you think you are *supposed* to be having.

As soon as you create a place to get to, you are putting where you need to be to do the scene OVER THERE.

And as soon as you put the scene OVER THERE you are screwed. Because your vulture will not let you "get there" but one in a hundred times.

And you have created a reality wherein you must do an insurmountable amount of work to earn the right to "get there".

Why create a reality in which you can lose?
 Why not get rid of that way of looking at it?
 Why not choose a reality wherein you can't fail?

Just remember this:

You're always "there". You can't leave "there".

Right before I am going to perform I say to myself-

"I am going to take it from where I am".

What I mean by this is *wherever I am* is a fine place to start a scene.

I completely accept my conditions. However I am feeling and however prepared I am is fine!

As long as you begin a scene in an honest place, the scene will take you where you need to go. Only from honest soil can the scene grow and become something wonderful.

It used to be that I'd look at an audition room door and feel that I had to be something totally different from myself once I entered that room. The door became an impenetrable wall of fear.

And whatever I thought I was missing upon entering, I would simply try to fake, in hopes that the missing emotion would catch up to me or, if worse comes to worse, I could just trick the audience into believing me.

But then I realized that exactly who I am in the waiting room is who I should be in the audition room. *Exactly.*

The only thing separating me from who I am in the waiting room, and who I will be in front of the casting agent is *15 steps.*

And so it is with any performance. The scene will take me where I need to go.

I have a friend who described it likes this:

When he was a young actor he saw a performance as the act of jumping though the chalk drawings in "Mary Poppins".

Once in a blue moon he'd land safely in a completely different, colorful world full of magic... but much more often he'd *SPLAT* onto the pavement.

Now he's happy, no longer experiencing the anxiety he once felt, safe in the knowledge that he's the same person onstage and off. The only thing that changes when he walks onstage are *the circumstances.*

Actors who want to "get there" will approach a scene with a long "to do" list. They frantically attempt to check off each item as they go. They are constantly evaluating whether or not they have "done enough" to enable themselves to fully experience the scene.

Where does this list come from? Often it is the ghostly echo of voices from past acting teachers. Things like; "Make sure your beats are clear" or "You must find circumstances from your own life that coincide with that of the character's", etc...

There are a million things an acting teacher could remind you to do. Do you really want to enter a scene with a list of shoulds and shouldn'ts in your head?

When you do a scene, you want to have only your character's thoughts in your head. Obviously you can never have your thoughts 100% aligned with that of the character's or you would be insane. However, the goal is to have as few "outside" thoughts as possible. Well, the character you are portraying certainly isn't focusing any attention on a laundry list of acting techniques. He doesn't have a preconceived notion of how this experience should look and unfold. He isn't focusing on whether he is "there" or not.

Imagine it like this:

When you have a goal to "get there", it's as if you envision your performance as a board game, like "Candy Land" or "Life".

You see your goal as moving yourself through many spaces in order to get to the final square, which is your destination: "THERE".

Perhaps each space along the way represents some important acting step or technique you feel you must remember.

For instance, teachers may have told you-

"Do your 15 step scene analysis."

"Figure out your 'beats', 'actions', and 'objectives'."

"You must rehearse in order to perform."

The list goes on and on.

If this sounds familiar, it is time to let go of that way of thinking. Just push that game board off the table and onto the floor!

Once you're at the audition it's too late for that stuff anyway!

You can skip all those steps by simply saying to yourself the affirmation-

"I am going to take it from where I am."

If you are hungry, then the character could be hungry at the top of the scene. If you are tired, then the character could be as well. If you are experiencing anxiety, don't feel you have to pretend you are not.

Once you look at it this way, the panicked feeling that you are faking something or hiding something from your audience goes away, and you experience a great sense of relief, and freedom. You no longer have to fear that you are a sham that will be found out. Accept what is, and all pressure to be something else fades away.

And when the anxiety is gone, it's so much easier to trust that you are in the circumstances.

(Just to clarify: when I say, "Take it from where you are", that is meant for the moments right up to when the scene begins. Once the scene has begun, you should have faith that you are in the circumstances which the scene presents.)

As actors, we always want to convince ourselves that there's something we're missing, some approach to the scene that we haven't thought of.

I had an audition where I had to play a man on crystal meth. I have no idea what the effects of crystal meth are, so I was very anxious before the audition.

I thought, "I should've done more research. I've got to prove to these people that I'm a man on crystal meth." I was trying to envision what they wanted to see, and then felt a pressure to make myself appear that way.

I could've brought all this self-doubt into the room with me, but instead I accepted that there was nothing I needed to know, do, or prove. By freeing my mind of these negative thoughts, I was able to more fully throw myself into the imaginary circumstances of the scene.

By stopping those fear-based and result-oriented thoughts, I made more space in my brain to receive gifts of thoughts and circumstances aligned with being a meth addict. ...And I booked the job!

So, the next time you think, "I want to get there", just remember that **by creating a place you have to get to, then by definition, you are not there.**

Why not just accept that where you are is fine. You see, it's the panic that you don't know what to do that ruins the audition. The "fake it till you make it" reflex.

"Take it from where you are" is a shortcut to say, "Fuck it, I'll just go in and enjoy myself."

ACTING IN A DRAMA

This chapter deals specifically with how to approach acting for hour-long TV dramas and dramatic features.

Because acting in a drama is really a “mirror to real life”, most of what this chapter does is describe how you *really live your life*.

In the past, I had always felt uncomfortable with dramatic acting. My sitcom work was fine, but when I was hired to do an hour-long TV show or a movie, I was never happy with the results of my performances. I just never seemed as “real” and “honest” as the dramatic actors that I admired. To me, my performance always seemed subtly preplanned and false. I felt I could see myself “Acting”.

What I felt I was missing was a truly “spontaneous” approach.

Spontaneous - *“Performed or occurring as a result of a sudden inner impulse or inclination and without premeditation or external stimulus.”*

You see, with broad comedies, such as sitcoms, I had been able to get away with my controlling tricks and preplanned bits, because the genre supported that approach. However, with hour-long TV shows and movies, the close-ups revealed the lack of true spontaneity that my preplanning created.

Many actors have a desire to emulate the great performances they see in dramas. They watch, for instance, an episode of “House of Cards” and notice the actors seem to be doing very little. They appear very still. That may be the result you want, but you must be sure to get there in a *healthy* way. If you give yourself the direction to “be still” or lay an overall QUALITY of smallness over your performance, then you will be unable to “behave as if it’s really happening”. It will be controlled and dead. Remember, your character certainly isn’t thinking “I must be very still while I talk”, so neither should you!

One day I got an audition for an hour-long dramatic series on HBO. My friend was an assistant writer on the show, and he gave me one piece of advice before I went in for my audition. He said-

“Don’t make any choices.”

He explained to me that the producers of the show didn’t want the actors to “make” any choices. If they saw even a hint of that, then they would not be interested in hiring me.

What are “choices”?

A “choice” is a moment of behavior. It can be anything from how you say a line, to how you move your body. A scene is made up of countless choices.

So, what did my friend mean by “*making*” choices?

In this context, I believe he meant when an actor makes up his mind *beforehand* how a certain line will sound, or what a certain moment will look like, and then *recreates* that in the performance. You *choose* a result to enact, and then you do it...as opposed to life where you do things simultaneously with the impulse.

In life, you rarely stop, even for a millisecond, to control the way you behave or speak. You don't even have to have preplanned the choice - “Muscling a moment” is as bad as making a choice. “Muscling” means that you are controlling your performance; squeezing and shaping it to make sure it looks appropriate.

When you see an actor “making” choices, it's the same thing as seeing that actor “acting with a capital A”.

In my opinion, the acting should be invisible. It should seem that the actor is behaving as if it's *really* happening, reacting to what is happening to him. When an actor makes a preconceived choice and then follows through on his execution of it, the whole thing comes off dead and planned.

Well, I had always understood this concept, but had never been able to fully let go of my preplanning of choices. They seemed like just a bit of a life preserver that I could hold onto in order to make sure my performance was “correct”.

I thought to myself, “I know I'm not supposed to plan, but surely I can plan just this little bit, just to make sure I don't look bad.”

But my friend putting it so bluntly as to say, “If they see you make a choice they will not hire you”, finally gave me permission to truly let go of this perceived life raft, and stop controlling the scene.

I had always thought that if I didn't “make” a choice then my performance would be dull. Nothing would happen.

But to say don't “make” a choice, doesn't mean you can't “*allow*” a choice to happen. ***Don't make choices but, more importantly, allow choices to happen to you.***

Don't make the mistake of only focusing on “not making choices”.

Giving yourself the direction to “NOT DO ANYTHING” is still a *choice*. You are *choosing* to lay a general quality of non-movement and blankness.

The second half of the phrase is where your focus should be – on *allowing things to happen*.

You must want choices to happen! Happen TO you! Lots of ‘em!

So the day of the HBO audition came, and I had read the material and completely understood the situation therein. I found that by not “making” any choices in my audition, everything that happened in the scene was “organic” and “honest” (in other words- *spontaneous*). I was finally not controlling my performance at all. All sorts of interesting things happened because I was *allowing* them to happen. And I finally felt that my performance was completely appropriate for the genre.

I truly believe that this concept is the key to my performing in hour-long TV and film.

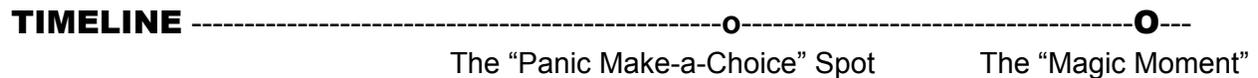
And, yes, I booked the job.

The sensation should be that you are “allowing things to happen” **ON THE MOMENT** instead of “making a choice” **a millisecond before**.

It’s as if there is a “magic moment” wherein a *genuine* reaction or impulse can occur. It is the authentic place where a choice should occur. You should want to “act” directly on the “magic moment” of genuine reaction.

But many actors make the mistake of acting a millisecond BEFORE the “magic moment”. As they feel the “magic moment” approaching, they will panic and want to “control” the outcome of that moment. So they will make a choice in the spot right before. I call that spot the “panic make-a-choice” spot.

You must ignore that urge to *make* a choice before the “magic moment”, and let that false spot go by. By doing this, you will allow the choice to *happen* directly ON THE MOMENT.



Your acting will feel so much more exciting (and easy) this way. It is this kind of “jumping out into darkness and trusting the net will catch you” that makes great acting.

Actors, who are afraid to let the “make-a-choice” spot go by, feel a panic that nothing will happen (or at least nothing that they would consider to be “entertaining”) in the “magic moment”. They fear being left with a BLANK SPACE on the “magic moment”.

The sad thing is that these actors are stuck in a “catch-22” (self-defeating) situation. They are afraid that nothing interesting (or “real”) will fill the “magic moment”, so they make a false and dead choice a moment before, and stick that onto the “magic moment”.

If you don’t leave the “magic moment” open, then nothing “real” and interesting can come and fill it.

Here’s some good news:

If the worst thing that can happen when you let the “make-a-choice” spot go by, is that you’ll be left with a blank space on the “magic moment”, then... that’s fine!

The audience PROJECTS upon a blank space what they think the character would be thinking in the moment! They fill in the holes based upon what they know about the story.

Even if you just stared out into space, the audience would project upon you their own impressions and fantasies about the character.

So it’s not the fact that you have a blank moment that’s the problem. It is your *negative reaction* to that which can mess you up.

There is a famous story about the unforgettable final shot of the film “Queen Christina”. This powerful close-up of Greta Garbo is one of the most celebrated sequences in all of cinema.

In it, Garbo’s character stands on the bow of a ship. As her ship set sails, she looks out at the war she lost and the dead lover she leaves behind...And it’s fascinating. According to the director, he told Garbo to think of *absolutely nothing*, to have her face be a mask. He told her, “I want your face to be a blank sheet of paper. I want the writing to be done by every member of the audience.”

Garbo was doing NOTHING, and it may be the most awe-inspiring and powerful close-up ever recorded on film!

YOU are more interesting than the choices you “make” in order to entertain and impress us. An audience simply wants to see a human, standing before them, experiencing life. You don’t need to worry about SHOWING us anything. The audience sees every thought that passes behind your eyes. The camera picks all this up without you having to DO anything.

Often what keeps us from simply “allowing” choices to happen is the thought that we are “not enough”. The fear is that if you don’t DO anything, then the audience will be bored, you won’t entertain, and you won’t be perceived as an actor.

However, you must understand that you are enough.

YOU ARE ENOUGH.

Actors should understand that as human beings you are incredibly interesting mechanisms, full of specific details.

Simply because you are human, and an artist, and have lived as long as you’ve lived, you are an incredibly multi-textured vessel. You’re like an English muffin, full of nooks and crannies. Therefore, the scene being funneled through your mechanism will be interesting enough without your embellishment. It will be different than everyone else, because it is being funneled through YOU.

One of my students describes it like this:

“My idea of what I used to do was to use a lot of decorating when I did my work. I felt like I needed a lot of frosting and pretty pictures. Now I realize I am the cake and I’m enough. It sure makes it a lot more fun!”

You are infinitely detailed and idiosyncratic. Therefore, the way that you react to a scene and the opinions you have during a scene will be plenty different from the actor who auditions after you. Release your need to STAND OUT with creative choices. The creative choice is always the honest choice.

And the only way for those “honest” moments to happen is if you leave space for them to, by not overcrowding your scene with a bunch of preplanned choices. Leave the space and have *faith* that it will be filled with interesting moments. That is the “leap of faith”, the “stepping out into darkness”, the “jump and the net will catch you” excitement and magic of acting.

Once you stop busying yourself with those preplanned shallow choices, the “deeper”, more spontaneous and subtler choices can come through.

As actors, we are just so sure that everyone else is performing brilliant choices in the audition room, so we start trying to pull tricks out of our hat. We start trying to prove that we are the better actor by “making” up even more brilliant choices. And we end up pushing and overacting so much that the casting person never brings us back.

But the truth is *most of the actors going in are also doing just that*. So much so, that it is a breath of fresh air to the casting person when an actor comes in with a different energy. An energy of simply “allowing”. Not being “showy” or needy, but just “being”.

You should feel sympathy for the actors who don’t know this. When you see them in the waiting room, anxiously mouthing their lines, practicing how they are going to perform the scene, say to yourself, “There but for the grace of God go I.” For you know the truth. Sadly, they are going down the wrong path.

Sometimes, once an actor has freed himself from “making” choices in a controlling way, he finds that he is left with a blank slate. His performances are bland and void of detail. He wants to allow choices to happen...but they’re not coming, so the scene feels boring. The answer as to how to correct that can be found in the next chapter: “PUT THE CIRCUMSTANCES IN YOUR STOMACH.”

Some actors have asked me, “Don’t you *have* to make a choice in a drama sometimes?”

Well, yes and no.

For instance; during the filming of a scene, you must maintain your general body positions in each take, for continuity. But I don’t call that a “choice”. I try to look at it as a “circumstance” of the scene.

Same thing for stage directions, like “He sits down”. Sitting down at that moment is a “circumstance” of the scene.

Yes, you will be making the choice to sit down, but try to experience it as though the choice is happening *to* you.

And as long as you’re behaving as if it’s really happening, these kinds of “choices” will be fine, as long as you are enacting them for your selfish enjoyment, and not from a fearful place of wanting to “get it right”.

As far as auditions are concerned, I like to use the days leading up to it to simply take in and absorb the circumstances of the scene, understand the situation therein, and memorize my lines. I make sure to refrain from making any choices or performance decisions.

I find that in the moments shortly before my audition, when my heart rate is up because I am excited and am therefore more in commune with my higher power, I will occasionally “make” some choices concerning the scene. For instance, I might think:

- “It would be fun to start the scene standing, and then sit down on this line.”
- “I will fully enact this stage direction, but skip this one.”
- “I think it would be humorous if I...”

You see, then the choice is *an exciting thing to try, to see how it plays out in the room*. As opposed to something I’ve rehearsed and am just recreating in a stale way in order to try to impress the casting person.

For years I had wanted to find a spontaneous approach to film work.

Other words you could use to describe it are:

Unplanned

Unpremeditated

Unrehearsed

Impulsive

Unstudied

Impromptu

These words illustrate how we actually live life.

Strive to approach your dramatic acting in the same way.

The four things I always remind myself right before a drama audition:

1. I will not make any choices, but more importantly I will allow choices to happen to me.
2. I have faith I have the characters thoughts and feelings, and the words I can throw away.
3. I hope they feel so fucking uncomfortable watching this audition, and I’ll do that by not taking care of the scene at all, but instead, and only, being interested in my selfish experience of behaving as if it’s really happening to me.
4. I am doing the ninth take.

PUT THE CIRCUMSTANCES IN YOUR STOMACH

I had a student who, with some work, was able to stop trying to “get it right”, let go of his controlling choices, and allowed himself to just be “him”. He expressed to me that it felt good to just be himself and not try so hard.

However, he found that, in performance, he was left with a blank slate. His scene work was uneventful and uninteresting for him.

He wasn't having fun. And since his experience is the viewer's experience, neither was the audience.

After you do a scene, ask yourself, “Did I have fun?”

Please don't misunderstand me when I say that. Some actors might think I'm saying that you have to be “funny” or “entertaining”.

So what do I mean by “fun”?

It's when you leave an audition and think, “Wow! I didn't expect THAT to happen. All those unplanned moments were so exciting!”

“Fun” is surprising yourself.

And how do you surprise yourself in a scene?

By accepting the circumstances of the scene and then letting them affect you.

That is the “fun” of being an actor. Getting to live in someone else's conditions, and experience things that you didn't expect.

So many actors can go their whole career thinking that acting is something you create, rehearse, perfect and then serve to people. They see themselves as “in control” of the whole scene.

However, the *writing* of the scene is in control. You are only responsible for your own selfish journey through the scene.

What the actor, who was experiencing the “blank slate”, needed to work on was his “*scene comprehension*”. In other words, his ability to read a scene and understand what is literally and obviously happening.

When you get a scene, make sure to take in what is REALLY HAPPENING IN THE SCENE. I don't mean in some deep psychological way. I just mean what is *literally* happening.

For instance, there may be a scene where what is literally happening is:

-In a restaurant, a man is professing his love to a woman.

What background information will affect this?

-The man hurt her in the past, and is terribly sorry.

What clues does the script give as to his behavior? What new information is he taking in and how does he react to it? What real life activities are they involved in? How might the setting affect his behavior? What are some of the ways you might feel in these circumstances?

Remember to behave as if it is *really* happening to you. Don't look at it as a "scene". Take ownership of it. Don't put quotes around everything you do. REALLY do it.

Remember when you were a kid, and you'd think, "I love Wonder Woman! I wanna save the world like her!"

And then you'd do it!

You didn't have any other needs but to experience what that would be like for yourself. You weren't concerned how an audience might respond.

It's getting back to that kind of childlike playing that I want you to achieve. Yes, it's selfish. Yes, that can make you feel like an asshole. Who cares! It's all to benefit the scene.

When given a scene many actors are too involved in-

- trying to be clever with a scene
- imagining what they believe the casting people want from the scene and the character
- coming up with a similar scene they've seen in the past that they can imitate

...that they miss what is there on the page for them.

They make choices based on the above concerns, thereby leaving no room for *allowing* spontaneous (or "honest") choices to come through.

In order for a scene to be fun for you, and to have power and detail, **you must make sure to feed yourself with the circumstances of the scene.**

When I see an actor give a dispassionate or detached performance, I suggest that he has not *fed* himself enough information before performing the scene.

The reason I say "*feed*" yourself information, is that when considering the circumstances of a scene, make sure to store the info in your stomach.

Putting the circumstances in your stomach is the same thing as saying "trust your gut to do with them what it will".

Or another way to say "put it in your stomach" is to just say "throw it away". In other words, you're not stupid; you're not going to forget the circumstances of the scene.

Do not put the circumstances in your head!

If you do that, it can become something that seems like mathematics or schoolwork.

Yuck!

When you put circumstances in your head, you feel a responsibility to show the audience what the scene will look like in the finished product, which makes "behaving as if it's really happening" impossible!

When you put circumstances in your head, you feel a responsibility to manipulate the information, with your brain, into something that can be seen by the audience. You will want to prove to the audience that you understand the circumstances, and you will become involved in "showing" instead of just "being".

It's as if you are saying-

"See! See how I understand the circumstances!"

On the contrary, it is not up to you to know how this information will look in your performance. You must want to be *surprised* by how the information affects you.

Please don't misunderstand me, and think that I am saying that you must *work hard* to figure out all the circumstances. It's a very simple process. In general, I'd say that after you've read a scene twice, you probably understand all the circumstances. It's not complex. There's no need to overthink it. (check out the chapter "SCENE COMPREHENSION")

Don't approach a scene with your mind. That turns it into a math equation. It is ART. Art is *felt*, not thought.

So, put the info in your stomach and trust your gut to do with it what it will. I want you to go into a performance with a full stomach and a clear mind. Don't act from your head. Follow your gut instincts!

And have fun!

THERE IS ONLY ONE KIND OF ACTING

I'm about to save you a lot of money in classes.

I always see ads on bulletins boards offering classes in "Film Acting", "Sitcom Acting", "Commercial Acting", etc...

Teachers always want to break up acting into many categories, which gives the illusion that there are many different *kinds* of "acting".

There may be a benefit to going to some of these types of workshops, but remember, these teachers make a lot of money by convincing people that they have something to teach. They need you to believe that there is some secret way that film actors act, that you don't know anything about; or that commercial actors know something you don't, unless you pay hundreds of dollars for a workshop.

Well, here's some good news:

There is only one kind of acting, and that is "**behaving as if it's really happening to you**".

...And that's easy!

What is the difference between theater acting and film acting?

Let's get the biggest question out of the way first.

Most actors begin their performing lives in theater. So it's understandable that they worry about how to adapt their performance for film and TV.

A casting director gave me the secret to film acting one day at an audition. I did the scene once, and she kindly allowed me to do it again, with this one simple direction: "*Do it just for this room.*"

She continued, "Don't perform for 10 rows beyond this wall. Don't perform for ONE row beyond this wall. Be in THIS room, just talking to ME."

And THAT is how you do it. Simple.

(And if the scene takes place in a car, then you do it "just for this car".)

In theater acting and film acting you are "behaving as if it's really happening", but with film acting you don't "project" your performance outwards to an audience. Instead you are selfishly only involved in your own experience, just like real life.

Film acting runs on "empathy". The audience sees and feels EVERYTHING you are experiencing, so there's no need to project what you're experiencing outwards to an unseen audience.

Many actors, when attempting to adjust their performance to film, make the mistake of giving themselves the result-oriented direction to be "smaller".

This is controlling direction, which stifles spontaneity. Suddenly you are “watching yourself”, controlling your performance.

The great thing about “just for this room” is that sometimes in a room you may shout-
“GET OUT!”

While other times you may whisper-

“Get out.”

So you no longer need to monitor how “big” or “small” you are behaving.

In real life, people have moments where they experience big choices AND tiny, almost imperceptible, choices. Film acting is simply a direct mirror to life.

I was speaking with a stage actress who was having a difficult time adjusting her performance to “just for this room”.

Because her only acting experience was in theater productions, she felt that learning how NOT to project out her performance would be difficult because she had grown accustomed to this style of performing.

She said to me, “It’s easy for you, because you’ve been doing film for awhile, but I’ve only ever done theater.”

So I asked her, “What percentage of your life have you been on stage? At the most, it’s 5%. Well then, *the rest of your life you’ve been behaving appropriately for film*. There’s nothing NEW to learn; it’s just more of the same!”

Her whole life she’s been talking to people in rooms, and selfishly thinking her thoughts and feeling her feelings without projecting them outwards.

Film acting is an exact reflection of how you *really* behave, so don’t make it harder for yourself. You’ve been doing it all along!

How do I adjust my performance to the different genres of film and TV acting?

All acting is the same. It’s *behaving as if it’s really happening to you*.

However, depending on what genre of acting, sometimes you will be *making choices* and sometimes you will only be *allowing choices to happen to you*.

Sitcom -----	Filmed Half-hour -----	Hour-long Drama
(Choices)	(1/2 Choices, 1/2 No Choices)	(No Choices)

On one end of the acting spectrum is the hour long drama or drama feature film. This must be an exact mirror to life. Therefore you don’t want to make *any* choices, but only allow choices to happen to you.

On the opposite end of the spectrum is the sitcom, in which you can make all the choices you want. You can muscle the moments, do line-readings you’ve planned out ahead of time...anything goes. (Especially for the wacky guest star role!)

And, in the middle, is the the half-hour filmed comedy or comedy feature, in which throughout the scene, for half the scene, you can make choices and muscle moments. BUT throughout the scene, for half of the scene, you should not be making any choices, and instead only be allowing choices to happen to you.

(I should add that if you are auditioning for one of the leads in a sitcom, you should bring your performance a little more to the middle of the acting spectrum, because the audience needs to believe that you are a real person in order to become invested in you for many years. Why else would we spend a decade worrying whether or not "Ross" is going to end up with "Rachel"?!)

But in all these genres, you are always behaving "as if it's really happening to you."

What about commercial acting?

Each commercial you audition for falls somewhere into the acting spectrum I just described.

Sometimes, in the audition, they'll say "This director likes it very 'real'" or "Just play the honesty of the situation".

In this case you will approach that commercial audition as if it's a drama, and you won't make any choices, but only allow choices to happen to you.

Likewise, if they say, "This is a wacky spot, and we really want you to have fun with it" or "We're looking for some funny 'characters'", then you should probably approach it like a sitcom, and make all choices you want.

That's ALL you need to know about commercial acting!

What is the difference between dramatic and comedic acting?

Essentially there is no difference.

All acting is the same. It's "behaving as if it's really happening to you."

However, in a comedy, while you don't want to "try to make the audience laugh", **you should be involved in tickling yourself!**

You cannot set out to *make an audience laugh*. If you approach it that way, you will most likely fail.

Trying to *make* people laugh comes from a place of "need" and brings about desperation and fear. Acting runs on empathy. The audience's experience is YOUR experience. Therefore, if you are tickled by something, then we will be too!

You should approach a comedic scene the same way you approach any scene. The acting in a comedy should be played with as much honesty and personal investment as the acting in a drama. It is the *writing* that will make the scene funny.

The humor comes from the writing, and the fact that you are tickling yourself.

Actors often ask me, "How do I tickle myself?"

My answer is...you know how to tickle yourself. If you've ever told a joke to a friend, or recounted a funny story at a party, then you were most likely tickling yourself. It's the energy you had at that party, as you stood in the kitchen with a group of friends, and shared that silly story about your day.

Actors also wonder, "WHAT am I tickling myself about?"

The easiest way to answer that is the following:

Human behavior is funny. ...It just is.

We are weird creatures. Our honest behavior in most any situation is funny. It is funny in its vulnerability, it's spontaneity, it's inappropriateness...it's just funny!

Therefore, in a comedy scene, you are tickling yourself with your own honest, genuine, spontaneous *human behavior*.

Here's another way to describe the process of tickling yourself in a comedy scene:

You simply ask yourself, "What tickles me about this scene?"

You don't agonize over exactly *how* you will perform the scene. That will cause you to plan and control your performance, which will turn it into a dead gift you are offering the audience.

Instead you find the elements or "circumstances" of the scene that you find funny and then approach your performance as if it were an improv so that you are playing in a spontaneous way in front of the audience.

Let's use a made-up scene about a woman in a pet store who can't stop sneezing as an example:

Imagine that inside your stomach is a small version of you. In your tiny hands you are holding the circumstances that you find funny about the scene (as if each circumstance was a brightly colored ball). For instance, in one hand you hold the fact that you love puppies and want to buy one, while in the other you hold the fact that you are allergic to puppies.

Now, you have no idea how these two "balls" will bounce against each other in the scene, but you have faith that they *will* in very amusing ways. You have no idea what the result of them bumping into each other will be, but you look forward to finding out in the performance of it.

In imagining the circumstances as a child's ball in your hand, they become something you PLAY with. In a comedy scene, it's important that you are playing and having fun. And the scene needn't be a *silly* scene about sneezing at a pet store to have fun in the playing of it. You can also have fun being angry. You can even enjoy crying your eyes out. (The human behavior of crying could be experienced as quite funny! What silly creatures we are!)

As long as you are tickling yourself in the performance of it, the scene will be a "comedic" scene.

I'd like to add that there is something that happens when an actor approaches a comedy scene in a spontaneous and "tickle yourself" way- You get a hint of mischief gleaming in your eyes, like a naughty little glint of excitement, as though you're up to no good but you know you won't get caught. This means your inner child has really come out to play!

Actors are often quick to tell themselves they don't know how to do something. The actor with only comedy experience feels he can't do drama. The dramatic actor feels he can't do comedy. These limitations are self-imposed. These walls were built by you. If you hold a belief that you can't do something, it will be your reality until you change your mind about it.

I think the best dramatic actors are the ones who understand the humor of people's behavior, and strive to bring that out.

Likewise, I think the best comedic actors are the ones who play the honesty and true emotion in the comic beats.

Think about Robert Downey Jr., Dustin Hoffman, Holly Hunter, Christopher Walken, Meryl Streep and Shirley MacLaine. These actors always find the humor *and* the drama in every role they play. For that is the truth about life.

Is there a "style" to acting in a sitcom?

The answer is "no". ...At least that is the healthiest way to look at it.

However, there is a healthy way to achieve the result you see when you watch a sitcom. Remember, *human behavior* is funny. So, in a sitcom, we need LOTS of human behavior!

In order to achieve this, all you have to understand is that in a sitcom **the stakes are always very high.**

The characters in sitcoms feel very strongly about things. After all, a sitcom has only 22 minutes to tell an entire story. Therefore, there is no time for extraneous scenes. There is no time to show a moment in a character's life that bears no weight. The scenes that the audience sees move the story along quickly because they are important moments in the character's lives.

Therefore, you should *put high stakes in your stomach.*

Do NOT put high stakes in your head, or you will spend the scene showing the audience, "Look! See how much I CARE about this situation!"

Be careful not to get result oriented. Some actors make the mistake of laying a general quality of excitement or frenzy onto the scene; speaking faster and getting louder.

While these are outer traits of people who are feeling intense emotions, you will not be able to behave as if it's really happening.

The reason why we put high stakes in our stomach is that *it will make MORE spontaneous human behavior pop out of you.*

A lot of actors will try to mimic the result of their favorite sitcom actor's performances. For instance, on an episode of "Friends":

When Monica heads to the closet to get her jacket, Chandler does a double-take, his eyes bug out, he throws out his arms and shouts "STOP!"

Some actors watch that moment and think, "I have to learn how to do that."

But, the important thing to understand is that Mathew Perry didn't *plan* that moment to look just like that.

The *reason* that moment came out like that was because "Chandler" didn't "kind of" want Monica not to discover the ostrich he had hiding in the closet -- he "REALLY" wanted her not to discover the ostrich he had hiding in the closet!

Mathew had "high stakes".

When an actor has STRONG circumstances or "stakes" in their stomach, it causes lots of spontaneous behavior to "pop out" beyond their control.

And THIS is exactly what comprises sitcom behavior. Not because it is stylized, but because it is spontaneous and uncontrolled human behavior, and therefore highly amusing.

I want to quickly address those classes I've heard about where they teach "Sitcom Technique" in a highly result-oriented fashion.

I've never been to one of these classes but the stories I've heard shock me!

Apparently these teachers have broken down the way sitcom actors deliver their lines, and are teaching actors to mimic these line readings.

Let me just say this:

I highly doubt that Bea Arthur, Ted Danson, Ellen DeGeneres, Carroll O'Connor, Lucille Ball, John Ritter or *any of your favorite sitcom stars* were doing these highly result-oriented techniques!

As a matter of fact, I assure you that they weren't.

I never learned these techniques and yet I have made dozens of sitcom guest star appearances. And during the filming of those shows, I have never once seen or heard any other actor talking about these techniques.

Doing these kind of fear based and result-oriented techniques and line readings make it virtually impossible to behave as if it's really happening to you (the very *definition* of acting!). They are just dead gifts, delivered out of fear.

I'm not saying that the lines don't sometimes sound like the way these teachers are teaching them. However, you'll never be able to achieve the classic line readings if you are approaching them from this result oriented way.

I recently asked a sitcom writer if he takes into consideration these "techniques" when he's writing. And he assured me that he simply writes what he finds funny, and expects the actors to say the lines in whatever way they find funny as well.

And if you've ever been on a sitcom set you'll see that the actors deliver the same lines many different ways. Then, later, the editor picks his favorite, funniest, and most spontaneous moments to put into the show.

Approach your craft with love, trust and faith! And if a technique makes you feel bad... don't do it.

MAGIC BLANK SPACES

Drew Barrymore once said in an interview-
“All I want to do is surprise myself.”

I love this quote and remind myself of it often.
 I feel it should be every actor’s motto when approaching an audition or performance!

If our goal in an audition is to have something really “happen” in the room, then what is more electric than something that surprises us in the scene. Something unplanned. **You** feel the excitement and therefore your audience feels the excitement.

When I am about to audition, I like to imagine that the scene is filled with “magic blank spaces”. All throughout the scene, in the beginning, middle and end of your lines, are these magic blank spaces.

These spaces can be filled by some surprising impulse you might happen to have in that moment of the scene. In these magic spaces new choices can happen, even if it’s just a new thought.

By simply accepting that the spaces are there, you have freed yourself to allow new things to happen in every moment of the scene. This helps to bring a more creative and inventive performance out of you. Plus it no longer feels like you’re just reciting someone else’s words, but instead really living, almost improvisationally in the scene.

Often actors will see a line of dialogue, and just like a good little student, they will deliver the line as is. They don’t bother to open themselves up to all the little nuances that affect how we communicate with each other.

And the best part is that when you open yourself to allowing new things to happen, the responsibility to come up with clever “choices” is lifted from your shoulders. The experience is such that it seems these brilliant choices just “happened”.

What you allow the spaces to be filled with can be as big as a physical action or as small as a new thought passing behind your eyes.

Some examples of what could fill a magic blank space are:

- a physical action that speaks to the character’s inner life, such as straightening the seam on your pants, looking around the room, scratching your nose
- an added word, phrase or sound
- silence

If it helps, you can also think of these spaces as invisible doorways. That in every moment of a scene there is a small doorway you can open that is full of possibility.

I had a student who was an excellent improvisational actor. When he was doing improv he was in his element, having fun and taking inventive risks. But when he had to act a written scene, all the freedom was gone. It was as fun for him as if he was delivering a book report.

Without the understanding that he had spaces in which to invent, he didn't bother to invent. He felt constricted to follow the narrow path that he saw for himself in the scene. Once he understood the concept of "magic blank spaces", that in every moment of the scene he was free to allow new choices, thoughts and ideas to come to him, his scene work felt much more like his improvisational work. He was having fun again.

The benefits of this technique are especially evident in comedy, where there is much need for clever inventiveness. Casting people love a comedic actor who brings to a scene elements that they hadn't expected.

But this technique is just as helpful in dramatic scenes. Allowing a new thought or image to dawn on you is just the ticket for bringing up surprising wells of emotion.

When you're auditioning, it's your scene, your moment of time. Own it, and make it yours. You are free to do whatever you want, as long as it fits into the logic of the scene.

Put your focus on your own exciting journey in the scene, not on impressing the casting people. If you have a good acting experience, they will see that.

When you leave an audition, I want you to be able to think back to all the wonderful unplanned moments you experienced. This is why acting can be such a natural high.

"What's really magical about films is (an actor's) being inappropriate, or being irresponsible, by letting it go, by not caring. And that way the film captures magic. And a film is only as good as a collection of the best magic moments, the best lucky accidents that they happen to catch on film."

-Christopher Reeve

APPROACH THE SCENE AS IF IT WERE AN IMPROV

Improvisation - *The practice of acting and reacting, of making and creating, in the moment and in response to the stimulus of ones immediate environment.*

You must approach your performance of a scene as if it were an improv.
This applies to comedy *and* drama.

With improv, an actor is given a situation, and then he plays within the world of those circumstances. He has no idea how the events of the scene will unfold. He is unaware of the final outcome or result of the scene.

Instead of being “result-oriented” his intention is simple-
“I’m looking forward to playing in the ‘circumstances’ of this scene.”

Performing an improv demands that an actor be totally and selfishly AWAKE to every impulse. The actor has no idea what will happen in each upcoming moment. He focuses only on the moment he is in.

He doesn’t have any idea of what exactly will happen in the scene, or how it will be enacted.

...JUST LIKE LIFE.

This is exactly how a child approaches “play acting”.

The child picks a situation-

“I’m getting married to a prince”

or

“I must escape the evil scientist’s prison”,

...And then she joyfully does so.

She plays as though it were *really happening*.

However, As soon as some adult actors get a scene, they think it’s “something other” than real life. They don’t apply the rules and behaviors of real life because they see it as something “else”.

They see it as “ACTING A SCENE”, which in their minds is something else entirely (and far more difficult) than the “play acting” they did as a child.

When you are about to perform a scene, whether it is for an audition or on the job, you must approach it as you would an improv.

This brings the FUN back into your acting!

You’re not “doing a scene”; you’re doing an improv about the circumstances in that scene.

And the good news is that, in this improv, you have your lines! You don’t have to come up with what to say!

BUT you can have as many thoughts, feelings, and impulses as you would like!

Many actors think their job is *just to say the lines*. And because of that, the scene is like a very narrow hallway they're walking down.

Sure, sometimes the hallway bends to the right and then to the left, but the actor is still constricted by the narrow hallway he feels forced to walk down.

And because he is constricted by these walls, he ends up *racing* through the scene.

I want you to *break down those walls*, and instead see the scene as a wide-open space. Limitless in every direction.

Sure, you know your words, but ANYTHING can happen in terms of thoughts, images, ideas, concepts, feelings, movement, added sounds, added words, etc...

You're free to play within the scene as much as you would in an improv.

The scene is a sandbox you are playing in!

Not only should you approach the scene "in it's entirety" as an improv, but you can also see each "moment" of a scene as a *small improv*.

Let me explain:

You are about to do a scene where the situation is-

"You have taken your girlfriend to a fancy restaurant, where you will propose marriage and be turned down."

However, within the scene there is a moment where you ask your girlfriend to marry you with the line, "Will you marry me?"

That specific *moment of proposal* can be seen as a small improv about actually *asking* your girlfriend to marry you.

Suddenly you feel free to stammer and wipe your brow. You are PLAYING in the circumstance of actually saying the proposal, and feel completely free to try things, to take your time, to live in the thoughts of your character and not just on the words that are written.

Another example:

If, within a scene at a bar, a stage direction says-

"(He hands the sexy stranger his business card)"

-then you can approach that moment as a small improv about "handing a sexy stranger your business card".

Suddenly you become aware of all the little impulses that can accompany that moment.

You might find that the moment gets filled-out with things like:

-Wishing there was a way to stay in touch with the person. ("Hmm.")

-Remembering you have business cards. ("Oh yeah!")

-Feeling your pockets to locate where they are. ("Umm...")

-Finding the cards. ("Ah ha!")

-Checking that it has your current, up to date information. ("Good.")

Most actors would just mechanically hand over the card. But you can really bring that moment to life, as long as you feel free to do so!

Often, when I work with actors who are coming from an improvisational background, they say to me, “I *enjoy* doing an improv scene. I have fun and feel free. However when I get a scripted scene I am plagued with self-doubts. I freeze up.”

That’s because they think “ACTING A SCENE” is something totally different than the fun they have doing an improv.

When they are doing an improv, they are “behaving as if it’s really happening.” But when they get a scene, they think they are supposed to “show what the scene will look like in the finished product.”

When they are given a scene, all typed out on a piece of paper, suddenly they put all these imaginary pressures on themselves. They feel unsure of themselves. They are afraid that they don’t know how the scene *should* be played, or that they’re not a good enough *actor*.

But once they realize that they can approach a scene as if it were an improv, they discover that acting can be as fun, easy and *exciting* as an improv.

If you have never done improvisation, then I highly suggest that you give it a try! You could take a class, or better yet, just gather some friends together and play improv games. It’s an incredibly valuable tool, and wonderfully freeing for actors!

Seeing the scene as an improv:

- reminds you that it’s happening for the first time - that you don’t know what will happen, what the other characters will say, and what you will say in response.
- keeps you from planning ahead and thinking about what’s coming next.
- makes you relish each moment, because that’s all you have: THIS MOMENT.
- keeps your vulture from commenting on your performance, and reminds you to focus solely on your selfish journey through the scene.

AND

- *totally frees you up to add as many thoughts, impulses and “magic blank spaces” as your heart desires!*

Your acting will feel more like “playing”.

Acting is FUN again!

PREPARING FOR AN AUDITION

*To rehearse, or not to rehearse?
That is the question.*

I recently had a new student come to my workshop in which I give each actor about 15 minutes to study a scene, and then they perform it opposite me, as if it were an audition.

While performing his scene, he appeared to be stiff and self-conscious.

Afterwards, he expressed that he was unhappy with his experience.

He felt that, because he was accustomed to doing theater, he “needed” more time to rehearse a scene before performing it.

That same night, many of the other actors, who have been regularly coming to my workshop, had wonderful experiences performing their scenes.

So while it was true for *him* that he needed more time, it wasn’t true for the other actors. I explained to him-

“If you believe that you need lots of time to rehearse a scene in order to perform it, then that will be your reality *until you change your mind about it.*”

That actor has the power to change the way he thinks about preparing for an audition or performance. And it is in his best interest to do so!

You see, there will be occasions when he doesn’t have much time to prepare for an audition, either because it was a last minute appointment, or he’s just too busy.

And, as far as performances go, in filmed projects there is almost never any rehearsal.

I know that sounds crazy, but there are good reasons-

1. It is so expensive to shoot a film that, as the cliché goes, “time is money”.
2. In filmed projects, the camera must capture spontaneity or “unplanned behavior”, so most directors choose to not fully rehearse the scene so as to keep it “fresh”.

So, here’s an actor who wants to “make it” in a business where there is often very little time to prepare for *anything*. Therefore, you can see how it is in his best interest to let go of his old way of seeing things and embrace a reality wherein he needs very little time to prepare or rehearse.

Okay, so we’ve established that it does make practical sense to create a reality wherein you can trust yourself to be able to perform without much preparation...

But you’re probably thinking-

“If I have the time, then why would I *choose* to not spend *lots of it* preparing and rehearsing for my audition?”

Why indeed?

Consider the following:

When I first moved to Los Angeles, I would *wear myself out* working on (and worrying about!) auditions.

I picked up this way of doing things in college, where I was taught that there are countless ways in which an actor can, and *should*, prepare for a role. I don't fault my teachers for this; it's just part of an actor's education. However I used it as a weapon against myself by believing that I, and my instincts, could never be enough.

(A sidenote: I'm happy to say that my college wasn't nearly as result-oriented as some of the highly-paid acting coaches I've heard about from their wounded students. These coaches are not interested in empowering actors, but instead they instill fear and doubt. If you've had a coach that made you feel that acting was something joyless and difficult, please remember that teachers in general must convince you that they have something to teach or how else can they continue taking your money!)

So, like many actors, I would spend extensive amounts of time planning how I would do the scene, wracking my brain for the answer as to how it should be performed. I would somberly read the entire script (whether or not it was actually helpful), anxiously committing my lines to memory (all the while terrified that I might get a word wrong), and desperately try to plan the perfect performance. I had a tremendous need to control the scene and "get it right".

All that planning and rehearsing would kick me into "student/soldier" mode. The whole process felt like schoolwork or military orders, and it really took the fun out of auditioning.

All the work I did was joyless because it came from a place of *fear*.
Fear that I wouldn't do well in the audition unless I worked very hard.
Fear that I would fail.

And what I began to discover was that most of the jobs I tended to book were the ones in which I had the *least amount of time to prepare!*

For one job I booked, the casting director had given me the sides just moments before my audition, and I was only able to read through the scene *once* before going in! On that particular day, I didn't have time to plan out my choices ahead of time, so I was forced to "go for it" with a balls to the wall attitude. I wasn't afraid of making "mistakes" because no one expected it to be "perfect". Instead of shrinking back and doubting myself because of my lack of preparation, I had a great time playing in the world of the scene.

I was able to approach the scene that way because I had been given *permission* to. Everyone watching my audition knew that I had only had a few minutes with the material, so I was "off the hook" for any so-called "mistakes" I might make.

After I booked that job, I finally got it:

It wasn't how much time I spent preparing my audition.

It was about me releasing my control, and playing in the moment!

I knew that I needed to find a way to give *myself* that "permission" to play in a fearless and joyful way.

All this made me realize that the way I had been preparing for auditions was *unhealthy*. You see, as I would memorize and rehearse, I would be inadvertently planning *exactly* how I was going to perform the piece, which took out all the spontaneity.

And it was those *joyful moments of spontaneous behavior* that the casting people seemed to be responding to so favorably!

So, for some time, I completely stopped working on audition scenes all together. But I only did this in order to break myself of my bad habits, for, in the end, my goal was to discover how I could spend time preparing for auditions *in a healthy way*.

So how much preparation should an actor do for an audition?

I believe there is no single answer to that question. Each actor must find what works best for himself.

Once in awhile an actor at my workshop will misunderstand what I teach and think that I am saying to “not work on the scene”. Consequently, he will only read through the scene once before performing it, and when I ask why, he’ll say, “I didn’t want to control the scene.”

Let me clarify that “releasing your control of the scene” only refers to the *performance* of it.

I liken the audition process to “jumping off a diving board”.

It’s as if all your preparation is the act of walking up and onto the diving board.

But, when the scene begins, you just *jump!*

Personally, I am a big believer in preparing for auditions.

However, I believe actors should not be concerned with the *result* of the scene, but only with “*memorization and comprehension*”.

In my opinion an actor should ONLY spend the amount of time he requires in order to-

1. *memorize* the scene enough so that he is able to be off the page for the most part.
2. *comprehend* the scene and its circumstances.

- and that’s it!

The exact *result* of the scene should be something which the actor discovers in the actual performance of it!

Why is line memorization important?

Memorizing your lines allows you to be up, off the page, and play in your audition.

However, I feel that actors must make sure to distinguish between “memorizing the lines” and “memorizing *the performance*”.

Many actors make the mistake of planning how they will say the lines as they memorize.

You mustn’t build your performance into the line memorization.

Why is scene comprehension important?

How can you play in the world of the scene without having absorbed all of its circumstances?

There *is* a healthy way to study the scene for comprehension, wherein you are only interested in absorbing the scene's circumstances without being concerned about the result of the scene.

In the end, prepare as much as you care to.
But when you're done, you're done.
Don't question whether you've prepared enough. You have.

What's so bad about planning your performance?

Here's what well-known British actor, Rupert Graves, has to say on the subject-
"I used to concentrate and over prepare. I find all that makes me feel wooden. So I just try to be loose and say what you say and think as you're thinking on the moment as much as I can."

I know actors who will rehearse a scene full out in front of a mirror before an audition! I'm not saying this can't work for someone, but how is that fun for their inner child and artist, who just wants to play and experience a new life?
And talk about result-oriented! By doing that they are putting all the emphasis on the result and none on the journey.

Besides, what is this "answer" to the scene that they are looking for anyway?
There is no 100% correct way to do a scene.
It should look different on you *every time you do it*.
And it should look different on *every actor* who does it.
Therefore, there are thousands of ways a scene could look!

Consider this:

When an actor strives to "figure out" the correct way for a scene to look, he is putting himself into a "**catch-22**" situation.
On the one hand, he is trying to create the "correct" performance...
...and on the other hand he has *no idea* what the "correct" way to do the scene is!
He is stuck in a *no-win situation* and all it does is create fear, frustration, and heartache.

That's why I say the affirmation-

"I release and destroy my need to control this scene. I know I'm not strong enough to control it, and therefore ask my higher power to lovingly guide me though it."

I believe that my job is simply to understand or "comprehend" the scene, so that I may be able to discover the result of it in the moment of performance; in the room and in front of the casting director.

Remember Drew Barrymore's quote-
"All I want to do is surprise myself."

When you over-rehearse or “plan” a scene it’s like you are laying down the tracks for a roller coaster ride you will be taking later.

What’s the fun part about going on a ride you built yourself?

It’s not exciting when you know exactly what the ride will do-

“Ho-hum. Now the ride will go left, and now it will go right. And here comes a little hill.”

Boring.

Playing a scene should be as exciting as going on a roller coaster ride you’ve never been on before-

You think it’s going one way, and WHAM; you’re shooting down a hill! Wheel!

Just like life!

A lot of actors prepare for an audition as though they are creating a finished product that they will then present to the casting person at a later time.

For them, it’s not much different than:

- Writing a book report in high school and handing it in to the teacher.
- Building a model car, and giving it to someone all wrapped up with a little bow.

The actor seems to be saying to the casting director-

“Here you go, here’s my model car. Is it the prettiest, the best color, the most ‘correct’? ...If so, I get the job, right?!”

But you see, when you deliver an audition in this way, it’s as if you are handing them a “dead gift”.

The scene must be ALIVE!

An audience’s experience can only be *your* experience. Therefore, if you’re not having fun, then they won’t be either.

Instead, I want you to see an audition as, for instance, the act of building the model car *right in front of* the casting person.

It’s as if you enter the room and throw some wood on the table and cheerfully say-

“I’m going to build a model car in front of you, and however it turns out it was meant to turn out.”

The casting person should be a witness to your joyful discovery of every facet of the process of building the model car.

You’re not turning in a book report. You’re *playing* in front of them.

They don’t want you to hand them a dead idea of a scene in a little gift-wrapped package.

They want to witness you discovering the scene in the moment right in front of them.

As if you’ve never done it before.

As if you have no idea what is coming up next.

JUST LIKE LIFE.

Remember the terrific quote of Christopher Reeve’s-

“...A film is only as good as a collection of...the best lucky accidents that they happen to catch on film.”

The casting director is looking for actors who allow things to happen spontaneously in their audition.

When you plan how you will perform your audition, it creates a check-list of things you must do in the audition room.

How fun is it to have to complete a check-list?

When you drive home from an audition, I don't want you to be going over a laundry list of things you were supposed to have accomplished in the room; anxiously thinking-
"Okay, I did what I planned to do with the first line. Check. Line 2, che-e-eck. Line 3..."
 -and so on, and so on, and so on.
 Miserable.

On the contrary, I want you to drive home as though you just did something crazy and unplanned... like had sex in the park!

I want you to be laughing to yourself, thinking-

"Oh my god, I didn't expect that to happen! ...Or that! And sure, I dropped the script in one moment and couldn't find my place, but when I did, it brought up all that emotion that I wasn't expecting which made me do that thing that made everyone in the room laugh (or cry)!"

Isn't that a more joyful way to leave an audition?!

When you get a script, don't immediately try to figure out how an audience expects to hear it.

Just dive into the circumstances of your character, and the way it comes out will be correct in that moment. There are a many different ways it could sound, and they would all be correct depending on your whim of the moment.

Christopher Walken says that when he gets a script, he crosses out all the punctuation; commas, periods, etc. He knows that people don't think so neatly. They may put a pause in the middle of a sentence in order to find the right word, or they may rush right from one sentence to the next, as their ideas tumble on top of each other.

Remember:

When you have chosen a scene to do, it already exists in the air around you, and it's just waiting for an honest vessel to funnel through.

The scene can't funnel through a vessel that has made a bunch of pre-planned choices which are deemed to be "correct".

There is a multitude of ways it could look, depending on whose vessel it is being channeled through, and there are thousands of ways it could look when it is being channeled through you. Every time it may be slightly different, depending upon your mood, and thoughts in the moment.

You don't make a scene happen; instead you jump in and *allow* it to happen.

Don't make the mistake of approaching the audition as if you are going to show the casting director how you think the scene will look in the finished film.

All that will do is kick up your need to-

- Get it right
- Keep it moving
- Get it word perfect
- Make it look polished

The casting director is interested in the “water your swimming in”; not in the final product you deliver.

He knows that any “mistakes” can be fixed in editing. He is looking for an actor who wants things to happen spontaneously.

Is there ever a place for “planning”?

Yes!

There are times, especially when auditioning for a *comedy*, that I feel it can be healthy for an actor to envision in his mind how a part of the scene might look.

I strongly believe that some amount of “controlling” is okay in comedies, and especially sitcoms!

However, I, personally, never fully “rehearse” an audition scene.

The reason being that once I’ve enacted the scene “full out” then I experience the scene as “quantified” (mapped out, measured and formulated). After which, it can be difficult to let go of my image of the scene as happening in *that way*.

I don’t want to go into an audition with the goal to “re-create” something I deemed appropriate at an earlier time. If I do that, I will be handing them the “idea” of a scene; something dead. I want the scene to be “alive” and “happening” in front of them.

I much prefer imagining the scene *in my head* (versus doing it “full out”) because at least that way I haven’t truly *experienced* it yet. Therefore it will be easier in the audition to experience the scene as if it’s happening *for the first time*.

When it comes to preparing for something, an “inner experience” can be just as helpful as an outer one.

If you are deciding whether you want to rehearse the scene “full-out”, consider the following:

There was a study done once wherein two groups of school children were asked to see how many basketballs they could shoot through a hoop. Each group was given some time to prepare.

The first group spent the time practicing shooting the baskets.

The second group spent the time sitting quietly and envisioning themselves shooting baskets. They visualized themselves shooting the ball through the hoop.

When it came time to actually shoot the baskets both teams did *equally well*.

So, you see, you don’t necessarily need to *physically* rehearse a choice you have planned for your audition. All of your preparation could be done *internally*.

And the best part is that you will not have to act like you have never done the scene before. You haven't! Just like the character, this is the first time it is happening for you. It's a freebie moment of real human behavior. That is a gift you can give yourself.

For a long time I had a hard and fast rule of never speaking the lines out loud until I was performing my audition.

The idea being that the character has never said these words out loud before so why should I?

Therefore, by waiting until the performance to speak the lines out loud I was given a freebie moment of real human behavior - the character had never spoken the lines and neither had I. This really guaranteed that I wouldn't control my line readings.

Now I am able to say the lines quietly to myself while memorizing, because my vulture understands that I am not interested in how they will sound later, but only in absorbing the "ideas" of the lines.

If an actor wants to get "coached" on an audition, is that considered rehearsing in an "unhealthy" way?

It just depends on how you approach it.

Getting a coaching on an audition is a fine idea if you want one.

However, make sure that it doesn't put you into a controlling head-space.

I feel the best thing a coach can do for an actress is:

- Help her to clarify the literal, obvious circumstances.
- Help her to get out of her own way, so she can give herself permission to trust and play!

When people come to me to work on an audition, what I *don't* do is walk them through the scene; giving notes on how to approach each line. Remember there is no "correct" way for a scene to look.

You could convince yourself that there is some *specific result* that a writer is going for when he writes the scene, and it's up to you figure that out and make it happen, but that is a recipe for anxiety. I feel that if you don't block it with your controlling choices then the writer's intention will all happen automatically, *as long as you understand the circumstances of the scene.*

What I do in a coaching is to help the actor to get "out of the way" of the scene. Get them to stop "Acting" with a capital "A". Remind the actor how it is that they really think and communicate.

This is done by figuring out what the actor's vulture is saying, and what the actor can say back to it to shut it up.

If I gave a bunch of controlling, result-oriented notes, it would just kick in their “student/soldier”, and they’d feel compelled to show me how well they can do what I’ve asked for.

Instead, I want to make sure they understand what is literally happening in the scene, so they can have fun, selfishly playing in the world of the scene.
I want to empower the actress and nurture her authentic self.

I never end a coaching saying, “Let’s do it one more time to really cement these choices.”

And then, after they do, say, “That’s it! Freeze it! Do it just like that at the audition!”

Instead, when I feel they are ready, I will say, “Okay, let’s not do it again. I feel you are ready. You understand the scene. Enjoy your audition.”

How do you prepare?

All I do to prepare for a drama audition is “memorize” and “scene comprehension”.
The night before I memorize, and the day of I do my scene comprehension.

If I am auditioning for a sitcom, there is one more step to my process-
I make sure to arrive about 30 minutes early, and as I am doing my scene comprehension, I will come up with some “choices” that tickle me. (I feel it’s important to wait until I arrive at the audition to plan anything, because that’s when my heart is racing and I feel plugged into my higher power, so the ideas are always better than they would be if I had come up with them the night before.)

Here’s how I prepare, in a nutshell, when I receive materials for an audition I’ll have the following day:

- I read the scene once.
 - I memorize the lines (focusing on the meaning).
 - The next day, I arrive early enough to have time to read through the scene several times for comprehension of the circumstances and situation.
- ...Then I perform the audition as if it were an improv about those circumstances.

And now, the long version:

Between you and me, my stomach always sinks for a moment when I find out I have an audition.

I think, “Oh god, now I’ve got to memorize this, and deal with my vulture.”

I am briefly unhappy that I have to “work on/memorize” the sides, and I am more unhappy that I have to face the things my vulture will say to me in the process; things like-

“I’ve got to play something I’m not right for. How can I pretend I am right for it? How can I make this better than everyone else?”

I acknowledge these thoughts, but they don't bother me because I know they're an illusion; anything fear-based is.

I immediately find solace in the following thoughts:

- I only have to do the amount of work that I desire to do.
- I will say the affirmations that will release the anxious thoughts that my vulture is spewing.
- I remind myself that I do not need to control the audition.

I read the scene once or twice.

Once I've done that, I "get it"; I *understand* the scene enough for now.

If I am sent the entire script, I may read a part of it as well, but only if I feel the information therein affects my scene. For instance, if there are facts about my character in other parts of the script that I should know, or if the script is "stylized" and I need to understand the "world" of the script.

I'd say I read the script only about 10% of the time and usually only part of it. Once you read the first half of a script, you "get it".

My feeling is that once I know that they are *seriously* considering me, then I will read the *entire* script. Until then, I have other things in my life that take precedence.

Then, I memorize my lines enough so that I will be able to be up off the page as much as I want to be.

I like to do this by slowly writing out my lines on a separate piece of paper, putting all my focus on the idea of the line.

As I am writing them, and when I am done, I will keep attempting to say all my lines in a row.

This usually takes around 20 minutes, depending how long the scene is. After this, I am pretty well memorized.

I only write out *my* lines because that's all I need for my audition.

I don't put any focus on what the other character's lines are. I want to really listen to and re-discover their lines in the performance.

Some actors worry too much about the other characters' lines. They justify this by saying that they should know their "cue" to speak.

I am not so concerned with my "cue". I figure that when the reader stops talking - *it's my turn to speak!*

However, there are times when you are interrupting another character's lines, and so I make sure to check for those moments right before I go into the audition.

I keep the piece of paper that has my lines on it in my pocket, just in case I want to go over them again while I'm out and about.

For the average audition I won't begin to memorize any sooner than two days before the audition; trusting that my short-term memory is enough for an audition.

Your short-term memory is very powerful, and you can learn many lines quickly and probably not even be able recall them in a few days.

I memorize the lines word perfectly, but with the knowledge that I could paraphrase in the audition if needed.

I don't need to have all the words "down pat" the night before, as I trust that I will continue memorizing them in my sleep.

I know that I can continue memorizing the day of the audition, and it will be easier to finish memorizing then because my heart will be racing.

At this point I have still not made any choices concerning the performance.

This is because I know that anything I come up with the night before will be coming from a glum and fearful place.

How creatively joyful can you be while sitting in your apartment, with the weight of the audition on your shoulders?

Instead, I trust that inspiration will come to me once I have arrived at the audition, at which time my heart will be beating fast with excitement, which will send more blood to my brain, making me superhuman, and plugging me into my higher power.

I go to bed and trust that my unconscious will work on the scene in my sleep.

The next day, I may continue to memorize as much as I care to.

I choose an appropriate audition outfit.

I think this is very important, as your clothes affect how you behave and can do quite a bit of the "acting" for you.

I like to open my closet and trust my gut instinct. I don't put too much thought into it.

I make sure to never appear to be wearing a "costume".

There is a line you don't want to cross between a selfish outfit and a "needy costume".

If you're unsure of where that line is, simply ask yourself-

"Am I wearing this for me (selfish) or for them (needy)."

For example:

If you are auditioning to play a "house painter", it might make sense to wear overalls... but there is no need to have paint wiped on your face!

The "overalls" you are doing for yourself, but the "paint" you are doing for them.

Remember, everyone wants to eat at the lunch table with the kid who doesn't need anyone to sit with him.

I make sure to arrive at the audition at least 15-20 minutes early so I have time to look at/study the sides for "scene comprehension".

Invariably, I will see some actors running their lines quietly, rehearsing the "performance" which they will give in the room. When I see them I remind myself that this is just a last ditch effort to control the scene. I say to myself, "There but for the grace of God go I. Poor things, they're going down the wrong road."

I simply *read the scene*, with the inner directive that “this is really happening to me”. It is during this time that I will put all my focus on what is *literally happening in the scene*. I’m not looking for some deep, hidden, subtextual meaning; but instead just the shallow actuality of it. This is how I can discover all the circumstances.

This can be more difficult than it sounds, because many actor’s visions of the text are clouded by fearful concerns.

The average fear-based actor reads a scene, and worries-

“How should I say these lines? Who would be better in this than me, and how can I behave like that actor? What scene does this remind me of, and how can I make it look like that scene?”

Concerns like these lay like clouds over the text, and keep actors from seeing what is literally happening in the scene.

Imagine that you fan away these concerns and really see the text.

Make sure to read all the stage directions, for they can help illuminate what the circumstances are.

Once I understand what is happening in each moment I will be able to approach each moment as an improv.

Because my heart is beating fast, I feel as though I am “plugged into” my higher power, so any ideas or “choices” for the scene that come to me seem as though they were heaven sent, and will be fun things to try in the room and see what happens.

Since arriving at the audition I have been intermittently saying my affirmations; listening to my vulture and releasing/destroying his negative thoughts. In the last moments before I begin performing, my *sole focus* is on the affirmations.

When the audition is over I cut the string and move on.

The affirmation-

“This, or something greater, for my highest good, and the highest good of all concerned.”

-is a great help with that.

And that’s pretty much everything I do!

I’ll finish with a word from a legend:

“Sometimes under-preparation is very good, because it instills fear and fear is galvanizing. It makes you break out of yourself. If you’re prepared, then you think you’re ready, and if you think you’re ready, then you’re not ready.”

-Meryl Streep

(I love that quote. However, when she says “fear” I believe she is talking about that feeling when your heart is beating fast and there are butterflies in your stomach. In other words - “excitement”. ...And when the actor is excited, magic happens!)

THE EMOTIONAL AUDITION

How does an actor access great emotion?

Well, let's pick one and talk about "sadness"...

A fellow I know told me the following story...and swears it's true!

He had an audition where he was expected to cry. Having no idea how to do that, and not trusting he'd find it in the moment, he came up with a plan- "Onions make you cry," he thought to himself.

So he put some onion in a plastic bag, and hid it in his pocket.

As he was reading the scene for the casting agent, he saw that the "crying" section was coming, and realized he hadn't put the onion juice on his finger yet. He snuck his hand, as subtly as possible, into his pocket as he continued the scene. He rubbed the onion on his finger and then stuck it in his eye.

He then grabbed his eye and screamed in pain!

...Onion juice hurts.

Now imagine it from the casting director's point of view-

"His audition went quite well actually, until for some inexplicable reason he fumbled around in his pocket, stuck something in his eye, and began screaming".

We've all had moments where we were faced with bringing off an emotion we weren't sure we had.

We start off with the best of intentions. We hope against hope that somehow the emotion will just "be there", the way it was when we did it in front of the bathroom mirror the night before.

A lot of times the audition goes as follows:

We sit in the waiting room thinking about something awful, like the death of a beloved pet; trying our best to get unhappy. Then we think to ourselves, "I'm not feeling it. I'm about to get called in and I'm still not feeling it."

So we decide to "fake it till we make it."

"I'll just act like I'm sad, and hope my emotion catches up with me."

Then, when the scene begins, the slight depression we were able to muster over Fifi's death disappears as we're forced to say words that have nothing to do with her getting hit by that car.

Either way the end result is you covering your face with your hands and shrugging your shoulders. "Boo hoo."

Yeah, that'll trick 'em. Ugh!

The mistake you make is in thinking *you're not sad*.

Every person has every emotion in them all the time. Simply because you are human you have the **seed** of every emotion in your stomach. It's your birthright.

Imagine them as seeds. What is a seed? It's something that carries the promise of growth, of becoming something bigger than itself. In your stomach is a little seed of sadness, anger, sheer joy, etc. There's one seed for every human emotion.

And any of the seeds can grow into a very powerful emotion if you have faith that they're there and that you can access them.

There is a well-known parable that speaks of "the faith of a mustard seed". The mustard seed is very tiny. Among seeds sown in a garden it is generally the smallest. But as a plant, it reaches ten, sometimes fifteen feet in height. So even though the seed is small, it has faith that it will grow into a huge mustard tree.

Even if you've never experienced great sadness, you still have the seed of sadness in you, and, if you have faith, that seed can grow as large as you desire.

Now, when you want a plant to grow, do you tug at it, trying to wrench it out of its seed casing and pull it into a tall plant?

No. That would never work.

And yet that is how so many actors attempt to "acquire" an emotion. They are desperately trying to yank that emotion out of themselves in order to show it to the audience. They contort their face as though they could squeeze the tears out.

You must remember, for the most part, *real people don't want to feel*.

In real life, no one wants to experience a powerful emotion like anger or sadness. They don't want to cry. They don't want to "make a scene". It's embarrassing and makes them feel vulnerable. It's scary to feel grief.

So what do real people do with their emotions? *They push them down*.

Watch someone talking on the news about the death of a loved one. Most often their face barely moves when the first tear comes out. Their voice becomes choked, and they stop talking. This is their struggle against crying. They are pushing down the tears.

When you are in a scene, your goal should be to have your thoughts as aligned with the circumstances as possible.

Is the character thinking, "Uh oh, I'm not crying enough"? Obviously not.

And the good news is: *When you push down an emotion, it grows STRONGER.*

So before every emotional audition, remind yourself that you *want* to feel, but that the character *doesn't!*

Here's two points that can make things easier for you:

First, I believe that emotion is *physical*.

When you are very upset about something your heart rate goes up.

Well, guess what! At an audition your heart rate is way up! That's a gift to you!

Use your heart beating fast and plug it into the seed of whatever feeling you want to grow. Pretend your heart is beating fast because of the circumstances in the scene!

Secondly, just by walking into the audition room, you will feel some strong emotions. I don't know about you, but when I stand up in front of a group of people I automatically feel very vulnerable and uncomfortable.

Well guess what! In an emotional scene your character *should* be feeling vulnerable and uncomfortable. Use it! Make everything a gift!

So you see, just by walking in the room, you've got everything you need. Now just approach the scene as if it's really happening and see what happens to you!

So now I'll talk you through a "sad" audition:

The night before, simply accept that your body will spend the night collecting tears in your stomach, thereby making that seed of sadness stronger. You don't have to "do" anything to help it.

In the waiting room, acknowledge that seed of sadness in your stomach.

Now your vulture will probably say-

"But you're not sad, you're tired and crabby, and you've got laundry to pick up later."

Do not let this throw you. If that's how you're feeling, go in with that. At least it's authentic. And why couldn't the character be feeling that at the top of the scene.

In other words, tell yourself-

"I'm going to just take it from where I am. However I'm feeling is a fine place to start this scene."

You must plant the seed in honest soil if it is to grow. That means start the scene completely honestly. No attempting to show them how upset you are. That's the same thing as putting the character beside yourself. You must slide that character over so you are filling the exact same space as him.

The scene will take you where you want to go. Let the writing (or the circumstances) work it's magic. Just go on the journey of the scene. By doing this you will feel a great weight of responsibility lifted from your shoulders.

As you begin the scene, own the fact that the sadness is in your stomach. Push it down.

As the scene progresses, know that the sadness has moved up to your chest. Push it down.

The emotion will naturally grow in intensity as it reaches higher. Stay completely involved in the scene.

Now the sadness is in your throat. Push it down.

At the appropriate moment the sadness reaches your face and pours out your mouth and eyes.

Concerning “acting techniques”; I think for the most part they can get in the way of the magical and playful process of achieving great emotion.

For instance, in the Stanislavski technique, they talk about using something from your real life as a substitute for what is in the scene.

I think that if a similar situation from your own life pops into your head while you are doing your scene comprehension, that’s fine. But let it go; don’t focus on it, or overthink it. Don’t *plan* on thinking about that in the scene.

In my opinion, “substitution” is a marvelous gift to have SURPRISE you in the performance. However, you don’t want to *plan* it.

Other teachers will tell you to *plan the thoughts* you will have in the moment when the emotion is needed. This is totally illogical!

You can only have an emotional reaction to something that surprises you.

You must want thoughts, images and concepts to surprise you in the actual performance of the scene, so that you can have an emotional reaction to those thoughts.

It is only in that way that you are able to do a scene many times, and every time it is completely spontaneous and emotional.

(Read the chapter "THINK THE THOUGHTS, SAY THE WORDS". It is essential that you have faith that you have the character's thoughts, feelings and images. ...And, in a highly emotional scene, they're BIG ONES.)

Some actors do a ton of work to “prepare” for an emotional audition.

They torture themselves with busywork in hopes of insuring a good result.

If you want to be that kind of actor, you can be.

But I only have one life to live, only so much time on this planet, and I know it can be so much easier than that.

Look, if you want to spend hours daydreaming, or rehearsing, or scribbling thoughts in a journal, you can! *If* you like doing it, and it’s working for you, feel free!

However, I want to be the voice of reason, and say *you don’t have to*.

I don’t!

And I’ve booked many jobs because I was the actor who could cry when the script said to.

I did that by wanting to cry, but releasing my *need* to. Then I ask that the universe send me the gift of a thought, concept or image that I can react to emotionally. And even if it doesn’t, I have faith that I have the character’s thoughts...and that can be enough.

Much of the work actors do is because they have been convinced that they mustn't go into the audition room "empty-handed". That they are going into that room all alone, with only the work they put into the scene to help them.

Teachers convince us that preparing for an emotional audition is like filling a basket with treats you will offer up in the performance, or filling your guns with ammunition to shoot in the room.

However, you are not going into the room alone! And you don't need to bring in a bunch of work you've done.

On the contrary, you are going in there with your racing heart, which plugs you into your higher power, and makes you super-human. And because your heart is racing, you will make discoveries in front of the casting person, and these discoveries can bring about a great wealth of emotion.

Oscar winner, Mathew McConaughey, was being interviewed by Cinema Magazine about his work in the film "Interstellar".

Wanting to know how Mathew achieved a particularly emotional and powerful moment, the interviewer asked-

"You get a moment like that when you have to witness some thing. What goes on in your face was incredibly powerful. As an actor (how do you) get to that point?"

Mathew's response-

"Well, one, the information that I was gonna see in that communication room, I didn't want to see it until we shot it. Number two, I didn't want to rehearse it. I wanted to see it for the first time and make damn sure that it was being recorded on film. Cause I didn't know what my reaction was gonna be. ...Relax and receive...that it is to receive what I'm seeing for the first time. Not plan out any emotions. It can be tempting as an actor to say, 'Ooo, I think I need to do this, I think I should do this.' It's really better not going there and having any plan for what's going to happen. It's a scary thought when you go into scenes like that, cause you know damn well the scenes gotta work, if that scene doesn't work, a lot of the movie doesn't work. But to throw out any preconception of what you need to do. Relax and go in there and receive. It was a wonderful time. What's up there is, I think, the first take."

To top it all off, I will remind you once again that you must take **ownership** of the scene and its circumstances. In other words, don't think of it as "doing a scene", but instead remind yourself that you are going to **behave as if it's really happening to you!**

In an interview with Vulture.com, Quentin Tarantino was asked what led him to cast Jennifer Jason Leigh in his film "The Hateful Eight".

His reply was-

"(She) came in and was really good. She went for a couple of things that other people just kinda playacted. She had to act like she got shot, and she just screamed bloody murder. I kept remembering Jennifer's bloodcurdling scream. If it had happened in a house, somebody would have called the cops."

MOVEMENT IN AUDITIONS

Actors will often ask me whether or not they should enact a bit of stage business which is mentioned (or implied) in the script.

They anxiously wonder if they should-

Get up,
sit down,
cross to the door,
kiss the bride,
show the badge,
throw the vase,
hold the gun...
etc. etc....

If you've ever wondered how much miming and/or movement you should do in an audition, the answer is simple:

Just ask yourself-

"Am I doing it for them or for me?"

In other words, if you are doing the movement in order to more align yourself with the character's circumstances, so you can behave as if it's really happening, *then do it!*

However, if you are doing the movement in order to show the casting director what the scene will look like in the finished product, then don't bother with it.

You must understand that your job at an audition is not to *show* them the scene, but instead, to *selfishly enjoy your own experience in the world of those circumstances*. Therefore, you should feel free to do as much as movement as you want to do, as long as you are doing it in order more fully experience the scene.

In other words, make sure you are doing it FOR YOURSELF.

Here's an example I like to use:

If you are playing a character who is making a wedding toast, it would be helpful to mime the glass in your hand and raise your arm as you excitedly announce, "To the bride and groom!"

However, there is no need to repeatedly mime taking sips of your drink *throughout the rest of the scene!*

Miming the *toast* will help you to experience what the character is experiencing at that moment. (The movement *will* affect how you say the line. ...Try saying a toast *without* lifting your arm. It just isn't the same!)

On the other hand, miming the *sipping* does little to affect your inner experience of what the character is going through and/or feeling.

... And you would look pretty silly.

Often, a stage direction will ask you to do something that involves another person; like shaking hands, hugging, kissing, or punching.

Do not ever touch the reader! Not even a handshake.

But you can mime a handshake in the air in front of you if you would like.

Some actors might say, "I would feel so silly doing that."

But that statement is coming from fear. What they are actually thinking is - "I'm *afraid* of looking silly."

Ignore fear. It is an illusion. Anything fear-based is.

The casting director doesn't think it looks silly. He knows that an audition is a different animal from the actual filmed performance. They don't expect it to look just the same.

They expect you to make do with the circumstances at hand.

So, if a scene calls for you to angrily push someone as you shout-
"Get OUT, Jason!"

-then I would suggest that you do the movement.

The movement will affect how you say the line and it will demonstrate to them that you understand the circumstances and are an actor who desires to have a full, rich experience.

Don't worry what it looks like. Just forcefully push your arms out in the air in front of you, and have faith that you are actually pushing someone.

The movement will also be beneficial to your emotional life. It will affect your physical state by making your heart beat faster.

I believe that much of what makes up emotions is physical.

For instance, "rage" is an acceleration of your heartbeat mixed with thoughts/feelings that cause anger.

Do yourself the favor of helping yourself with the movement. Don't worry or be concerned with what it looks like. It is for you, not them.

Many actors feel embarrassment at the notion of *miming* an action.

They will say, "I don't want to *mime*. I'm an actor, not a mime!"

You're right! You are not there to be a mime.

No one expects you to lean on invisible counters or walk on invisible tightropes (but if you do, use an invisible umbrella, it helps with balance!)

No one is judging you on your miming skills, therefore ***you don't need to do things "full out"***.

You can mime an action "*just enough*" so that you can reap the benefit of the action without looking like you're trying to be the next Marcel Marceau. (He was a famous French mime, for you youngsters!)

You don't need to do an action *full out* in order to experience it. Therefore you can strike a balance.

For instance, if the stage directions call for you to enthusiastically hug someone, miming a "*just enough*" version of that can help you feel that experience and will therefore affect how the lines come out.

But the movement needn't look *exactly* like a hug.

You needn't reach your arms waaaay out in front of you, and carefully close them upon some invisible person.

You need only raise your shoulders, bend your arms, and tighten your body to experience what that hug would feel like. And that movement will positively affect how you say a line like, "Oh! It's so *good* to see you!"

Try this acting experiment:

With feeling (but NO movement), say the line-

"It's so good to see you!"

Now try it again, but this time do the "just enough" version where you tighten your body-
"It's so *good* to see you!"

I'll bet the second time it was a lot easier and felt more fully.

To further illustrate this "balance" I'm talking about:

If the script has you running down a hall to catch up with someone, or crossing the room to open a door, you need only take *a couple of steps* to get the feeling of it.

That's the balance we're striving for; somewhere between "full out" and "not at all".

Some stage directions are just too awkward to try to mime.

If, for instance, a script calls for a kiss, never mime it. Just look into the eyes of the reader and *have faith* that you are kissing the person. Experience it *internally*. Let the rest of your body react to the kiss.

The same is true for an *elongated* physical fight. No need to punch and kick the air for five minutes. Just *have faith* that you are involved in a fight. It's enough to just experience the physical repercussions (or "results") of the fight; i.e. heavy breathing and trying to catch your breath.

When an actor is too shy and cautious to make interesting physical choices, I will tell them, “Some actress is going to come in and sit on the windowsill for her audition or jump up onto the table.”

And when she does, the casting director will think-

“What a wonderfully audacious performer! What a free spirit!”

I’m certainly not suggesting that you do *either*. You can just as easily book a role sitting in a chair the whole time.

But I *am* trying to make you see that the space is yours to do with what you like. I want you to feel free to do what you want to do, and what will excite you.

One of the first TV jobs I booked was to play a mall security guard in a sitcom pilot. In the scene, my character was involved in a gun fight. So, I crouched behind a chair, fired my “gun”, then jumped into the air, did a somersault and rolled behind a couch across the room.

I took a risk, and it paid off with getting the job.

So, if I can do *that*, certainly you can stand up at some point!

Many actors feel overwhelmed at auditions. They have so much they are worrying about (the lines, their performance, etc.) that they would rather play it safe and just sit in a chair, even while the stage directions describe movement.

They figure, “I have enough to worry about without adding movement!”

That is not thinking from a place of *abundance*.

That kind of thinking is coming from a place of *scarcity* and is not attractive to the universe.

I say do more than you think you can because –

The universe always pays off to a joyful risk!

Actors worry that they don’t know the scene or the lines well enough to get involved in some movement, but I guarantee that you will find that you know the lines and the scene BETTER when you are daring and taking a risk.

The reason being that when you take a risk, your heart rate goes up, which causes you to be more connected to your higher power. That kind of excitement makes your consciousness expand; your mind becomes sharper. You become MORE than you think you are!

So don’t play small.

Believe in yourself. You are capable of great things!

No discussion on “movement” would be complete without a warning about “props”.

Why a “warning”?

Because, for the most part, they are a bad idea.

I believe that actors most often want to have props in their audition when they fear that they aren’t *enough*.

That certainly was my experience.

I remember that I once brought cookies into my audition to eat during the scene. I just didn't feel that I was interesting enough on my own. Boy, did it backfire. The casting director didn't care for the "choice" and I ended up feeling pretty foolish.

There's a line between being playful and "trying too hard".

Being playful is selfish and courageous.

Trying too hard is needy and unattractive,

You will have to find out for yourself where that line is. It may be in very different places for different actors.

Recently I was at an audition where the script mentioned that my character was eating cereal at the breakfast table with his wife and son.

Well, one of the actors auditioning showed up with a bowl of cereal to eat during the scene.

Maybe that could have worked if he had some very funny bit of business planned, but the problem was the cereal had no bearing on the scene.

The thrust of the scene was about a father trying to help his son to be happy. I can't imagine that the cereal did anything but distract everyone, *including the actor*.

Mind you, I am not totally against props, but I think they are best when they are something that isn't too out of place in the audition room.

For instance, if an actress would like to use her purse, cell phone or pen for a bit of "business"; terrific!

So next time you are trying to decide whether or not you are going to do a movement that is suggested by the text, just ask yourself-

"Am I doing it for them or for me?"

As long as it's for *your selfish enjoyment*, GO FOR IT!

LEAN BACK, LOOK UP

If I could say two things to every actor before their auditions, I would save millions of auditions.

Those two things are:

LEAN BACK

LOOK UP

When I initially work with an actor, these two concepts are consistently the first things I share to improve their auditions.

Let's begin with **LEAN BACK**-

If you are sitting during your audition, make sure that your "home base" is *leaning back* in the chair.

Too many actors fall into the trap of leaning forward through their entire scene. The problem is that once you're in that position, there's very little that can occur. You're stuck. Nothing new physically or emotionally can happen.

And why is that?

Try this little experiment:

Sit in a chair and lean forward, with your elbows resting on your knees. Seems like a fine place to spend a scene, doesn't it?

Now, very slowly, stand all the way up without taking your elbows off your knees.

...THIS IS THE POSITION THAT YOU'VE BEEN PERFORMING IN!

How can anyone act in that position? Your body is essentially bent in half and doubled over.

So, now you can see how that forward-leaning position stifles physical and emotional freedom. It puts you in a physical position wherein your body is not able to move freely and spontaneously. And, it cuts you off emotionally at your waist so it's more difficult to deeply feel something.

The act of leaning forward is often an outcome of wanting to please the audience. It's a very weak position to be in. It's not "magnetic". When you lean forward, it very often feels like you are subconsciously saying to your audience, "Please like me!"

Remember, this should be a "selfish" experience.

In love scenes actors tend to want to lean forward towards the person they are attracted to. As if getting closer to the person will show you are attracted to them. In truth, leaning forward physically *closes you off*, while leaning back *opens up your body*, making you more available and vulnerable. It's sexier.

The same can be said for scenes where the actor is playing someone imposing or menacing. Leaning back is a position of power!

Time and time again, I have found that if an actor who is leaning forward is given the adjustment to “lean back” and the opportunity to do the scene again, the second time will always be an improvement; more fun, freer, and new choices will come pouring out.

Please feel free to lean forward in a scene, as much as you like. But when you can, return to your “home base” which is leaning back.

As for **LOOK UP-**

Everything you need to know about this can be found in my chapter “ISSUES WITH LINES”.

In a nutshell: Too many actors throw away their audition by having their head in the page far too much. The selfish actor wants to be up, off the page, for that is where the magic happens.

You’ll never get a job because you said all the words right. But you will lose job, after job, after job, because you put saying the script “word perfectly” over your selfish enjoyment of playing in the scene.

I truly believe that until you are free to paraphrase without anxiety it will be very difficult for you to book work. This is because, even if you have a *month* to memorize the scene, when it comes time to audition you’ll still make saying all the words correctly more important than having fun playing in the circumstances.

The healthiest way to look at it is, “I *want* to say it word perfectly, but I don’t *need* to.”

The following scenario plays out continually at my workshop:

Recently, an actor came to my workshop for the first time. After 15 minutes of studying a scene, he got up to perform it. When he did, he never looked up from the script, and was leaning forward (almost *hunched* over!) throughout the whole scene.

Clearly, it was not a very good audition. And I can’t see how it was much fun for the actor.

I asked him what his experience of performing it was, and he said, “Not good,” and that he felt he “needed more time to rehearse a scene before performing it”.

So, I asked him to immediately do it again, and gave him two simple notes (and nothing else!):

1. Be up off the page as much as he possibly can; paraphrasing if need be.
2. Lean back in the chair.

When he did the scene again the difference was remarkable! It went from stilted and stiff to alive and spontaneous. It was a terrific audition! The result was astonishing as usual.

LEAN BACK. LOOK UP.

Those two concepts can instantaneously change a bad audition into a great one, with no other work done on the scene!

AT THE AUDITION

In The Waiting Room:

A lot of actors think the preparation is over once they arrive at the audition. They've worked out everything they plan on doing with the scene, so they just sit in the waiting room, letting their brain do what it will.

A lot of negative thoughts come up while waiting for your turn to audition. If you don't deal with these thoughts, you will bring them into the room with you, and they will screw up your audition.

While you're in the waiting room, be keenly aware of your thoughts. What is your vulture saying to you? Then disarm the vulture's thought with an affirmation.

Everything I think before an audition is carefully placed there by me. My number one task in the waiting room is to disarm my squawking vulture. This is most important in the moment just prior to entering the audition room.

In the waiting room, I like to keep to myself for the most part. This is out of respect for the other actors and myself. If an actor is putting out an energy that you find disruptive, just find another place to sit.

Refrain from comparing yourself to the other actors. Just wish them all "white light". Do not try to cast the role in your head. None of you may get it. Just be yourself and have fun.

Remember: You're not there to get this part; you're there to have a relationship with the casting director, and show her who *you* are in the circumstances.

At this point a lot of actor's go into a kind of "last minute panic" mode.

You can see them quietly, and sometimes frantically, running through their performance. They repeatedly speak the lines over and over to themselves, practicing their performance. I believe this is a last ditch effort to "control" the outcome of the scene.

You should fight your desire to do this. Besides, it is an illusion to think you can control how the scene will go.

Feel free to continue studying the scene. I find that my best discoveries concerning a scene happen right before I go in.

I ask myself, "What's really happening in this scene". I'm not looking for some deep, metaphysical definition of the scene. I'm simply looking for the obvious things that many actors overlook, such as what true-life activities are taking place, which will be fun to play.

For instance talking on the phone, which is such a simple reflexive act in real life, but a joy to play in an audition.

I look forward to something like that. I think, "Oh good, I get to answer a phone. I know what that is. That's easy. I look forward to experiencing a phone call in this scene." And then I approach it as if it were an improv about that circumstance.

Why not give yourself a little massage? It will relax you, and you are your tool for the art you are about to create.

Before most auditions I like to do a simple exercise. Drop down from your waist; take slow, deep, relaxing breaths, and roll back up slowly, one vertebrae at a time. Michael Caine says he often does this before he films a scene.

What are your routines before an audition? Are they all needed? Is there anything you feel you need to do, that maybe you don't?

I used to smoke a cigarette before each audition. I didn't like the fact that it had become a habit, but I was scared to stop.

Elaine Stricht, a fabulous performer and an admitted recovered alcoholic, says that she never performed without drinking first. She said the reason why she drank before performing onstage was that she didn't want to "go out there alone". She didn't trust herself. Because she didn't have a relationship with her higher power, she was under the illusion that she was alone.

But you're not alone when we perform. If you allow it, your higher power (or The Magic of Acting) is there guiding you. Plus, the audience is doing half the work by *projecting* upon you everything they know about the character.

I'm so glad I broke that habit, and now I see *not* smoking as a way to acknowledge my trust in my higher power's presence in my audition.

If you've been doing the affirmations, but are still having a difficult time releasing your negative thoughts and anxiety, try the following visualization:

Imagine yourself going in the room the way you're feeling, but make it even worse.

See a frenzied look in your eyes as you forcefully shake hands with the casting people, desperately trying to get them to like you-

"Hi! Please like me!! I NEED THIS JOB!!!"

Then, visualize the performance you'd give under those circumstances-tense, stunted, awkward and watching yourself.

This image will be so repulsive, that it'll make you say to yourself-

"Ugh! I'd rather do anything but that! ...Screw it, I'll just be myself and not care what they think. ...I may not have all the answers, but I know where the road I'm going down leads to, and I'm not gonna take even one step in that direction."

Suddenly, it seems that all the pressure just rolls off your shoulders and you're able to enter the room free of anxiety and with an attitude of "fuck it."

In The Audition Room:

When you enter the audition room, sometimes it's helpful to notice a few specific things about your surroundings. I used to like to look at whatever's hanging on the walls, and REALLY see it. This would help me to move my focus off my result-oriented concerns. But now I feel that the affirmations are a better way to do that.

People ask me if they should make small talk before their audition.

For years I had this same concern; that I wasn't doing enough in the room before my audition began. This fear was only exacerbated by my then manager who would fill me full of panic by saying things like-

"You gotta go in there and 'WOW' them from the outset. Show them your personality! Make sure they really remember you!"

So I asked my friend, a working actress, what she does, and she gave me some great advice. She said-

"Just be your authentic self. If you don't want to say anything, then don't. If you want to; then do."

She explained to me that you can't "fake it".

There are some people that are naturally gregarious and just love to prattle on with their audience before they audition. They should feel free to follow their heart and be themselves.

Personally, I don't like to converse before my audition. I like to go in, do my joyful work, and leave. I think it's the professional way to approach it.

Now, I certainly am happy to chat for a few moments if they begin a conversation, but the truth is, in general, they're very busy and after a quick hello, they'd like to just see your audition and get home before dark.

And I never shake hands unless they offer. I've been told by casting directors that they'd probably rather just wave so as to not catch the myriad of colds and flus that travel through handshakes.

Let me reiterate, an audition is not the same as the finished/filmed/edited product.

A lot of actors make the mistake of trying to "show the audience the way the scene will look in the finished product".

THIS IS A MISTAKE.

All this will do is kick up your need to get all the words right, keep it moving, and make it look like a nice, smooth, polished product. In other words, it's a completely result-oriented direction to come from. And it makes it impossible to "behave as if it's really happening".

The casting people know that a performance in a finished film is made up of many "takes" of each line (usually 5 to 10). The editor chooses which "take" of each line they want to print in the movie. That's how they build a performance.

The casting people need to see that you are an actor who will give the editor plenty of different “takes” or “variations” to pick from and edit with. They need to see that you are coming not from a place of “control”, but a place of “playing”!

They’re looking for those electrical, magical moments of “spontaneity”, NOT someone who is going to freeze their performance and do it the same way each time.

Don’t strive to give the performance as you envision it will be seen in the movie. What this does is create a need for “perfection”, which stifles spontaneity.

You mustn’t want your audition to be perfect! Your ego knows it is an impossible feat, and trying will only create tension and fear. You want to be free of anxiety in the room, so “electric” and “magical” choices can SURPRISE you. After all, a great movie is made of many lucky accidents caught on film.

I was recently talking with a successful writer/director who said that he knows if he’s interested in someone after the first ten seconds. (Please don’t let this freak you out and make you think, “Well, then I must really WORK IT in the first 10 seconds!”)

On the contrary, what he means is that he’s more interested in “the water you’re swimming in”, then in some perfect idea of the result of the scene.

He is interested in actors who are able to joyfully be themselves and approach each scene as if it’s really happening to them.

For goodness sake, you could accidentally drop your sides, lose your place, fumble to find the right page and then continue and STILL book the job. The casting people don’t need it to be perfect.

If you are swimming in playful, spontaneous waters it doesn’t matter how many “mistakes” you make.

You should approach your auditions this way from the outset, but certainly, if you audition and are given a chance to do the scene *again*, make sure to allow the scene to be different, by reacting spontaneously not only to what the other character is doing but to your own thoughts and feelings. This is the “jumping out into darkness, and trusting the net will catch you”, that makes great acting.

A lot of actors are able to risk and take chances while rehearsing, but come to the audition they freeze the scene up, play it safe and control it.

One way to combat this impulse is to say to yourself right before the audition, “This is not how I’m *really* going to do it.” Or, as the well known actor/teacher, Jeffrey Tambour, suggests, “Give yourself permission to do it badly.”

These suggestions can really help you to let go of your need to control.

But my favorite is to remind myself to *approach it like the ninth take*.

THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS FAILURE

Much of what I share asks the actor to be willing to be spontaneous, and allow things to surprise them in their performance.

This is a very difficult thing to do if you have a reality wherein you could “fail”.

I describe acting as “jumping out into darkness and trusting a net will catch you”.

Some people might say-

“I’m not going to jump out into darkness! That’s SCARY! ...There could be spikes down there. I could die!”

How about I give you a new word to use instead of “scary”?

How about **“EXCITING”!**

You’ll notice I said “jumping out into darkness and *trusting a net will catch you*”.

And what IS that net?

It’s the reality that, in acting, there is no such thing a failure.

The only way you’ll be willing to be spontaneous in your performance and just “see what happens”, is if you create a reality where there is no such thing as failure.

I have that reality with my art. So it can be yours as well.

Your thoughts create your reality. So if you would like to have that reality you need only understand the following five concepts. And most of them I have described earlier in the book-

NUMBER ONE

You should have some understanding of a “higher power”. And that it can guide you in your work.

(read “HIGHER POWER” on page 13, and “LET THE UNIVERSE CONTROL” on page 35)

NUMBER TWO

You should understand that you have the power to forgive yourself *unconditionally*.

...And do you know why that is?

Because you are a good person.

Good people make mistakes and it doesn’t mean they are not a good person.

When you make a mistake, no one is mad at you. Only you. And if that’s so, then you have the power to forgive yourself *unconditionally*. Meaning there is no condition whereby you are not forgiven.

It’s as if we are all archers, with a bow and arrow. And we are aiming at a bullseye on a target. And we shoot! ...And sometimes we miss.

That’s all a “mistake” is. You missed the bullseye.

But you were aiming at it! So you can forgive your self unconditionally. Guilt is just anger turned inwards, and anger never helped anyone do their art. When you make a “perceived” mistake in your performance, let it go and forgive yourself unconditionally.

NUMBER THREE

There is a higher plan unfolding for you, for your greatest good. And along with that, you must understand that you don't know what's best for you.

(read “A HIGHER PLAN” on page 15)

NUMBER FOUR

You can't get everyone to like you.

(read “WHEN SOMEONE DOESN'T LIKE YOU” on page 21)

NUMBER FIVE

There's no “right” way to do a scene. It's supposed to be different every time you do it, and different on every actor who does it.

(read “PREPARING FOR AN AUDITION” on page 124, and many other chapters.)

As long as you keep these five concepts in your head, you have a new reality! A reality wherein you can do your art joyfully and spontaneously with no concern as to what the result will be.

...You have now come to the end of this book.

While reading it you may have had the thought at times-

“Wow. That’s a terrific new thought. It makes me feel lighter and more free to play. It makes acting seem easy and fun.”

Please do not then make the mistake of walking away and thinking-

“But it’s gonna be really hard to have it affect my life!”

That is your vulture talking!

Your vulture doesn’t want you to change!

So he says-

“It’s going to take a long time for you to learn how to apply what you read!”

In hopes that you’ll take the new thoughts I’ve given you and throw them away, defeated.

Do not listen to him!

Everything you’ve read in this book works immediately, with no practice or time to “absorb”. If you think these thoughts, the results are instantaneous.

I may have put a new thought in your head that made you feel that acting is fun and easy and took the pressure off you and got your vulture to shut up...

Well, you can say those things to yourself!

And every time that you do, you will reap the benefits.

Your thoughts create your reality. When you have new thoughts, you are a new person, as long as you keep those thoughts in your head.

Enjoy!