

Acting Tips

Accept you are nuts, unconfident, insecure, whatever – if you're not now you will be soon in this profession. We all do self-judgment. We're all perfectionists. Don't worry about all that. That's all okay. Don't get caught up in your head. Instead ask: what is the story? It's all about the story.

Alexandrea Schepisis, Actress and director, on story: success comes with a sound understanding of 'story;' maintain the focus on story and what you are trying to offer an audience.' Australian actor Lewis Fitz-Gerald ('Crownies') – it is a character's 'duty' to 'serve the story' in a drama.

Writers work from the inside out – words last - actors from the outside in – words first. So the work we are doing is to find what life lies beneath the words. We have to dig into a scene to discover our real obligations to the material. Uta Hagen said 'dig deeper.' It's not necessarily more work, it's knowing what you're looking for. In a sense a lot of the hard work has been done for you in the writing of the scenes. Your role is to understand the writer's intent, but when you interpret, you make your own contribution, surprising the writer with your own invention. To do this, over time, with practice, you will develop your powers of script interpretation. Of course it's another thing to be relaxed enough to give over and play in the moment. But that comes with practice too. Or at least faking confidence does, and that's the same thing really.

Keep it simple. The confidence of the simple action, played decisively through the fear of doubt, or the one risky idea or interpretation, will cut through where complication and indecisiveness just muddies the water. Remember we are after recognizable human behavior that needs to be clear: the audience only see it once, though the actor will live in it for far longer than that. And for the audience to recognize truth it has to be precise. So we always have to keep coming back to simplicity.

You don't have to be amazing. You just have to be present. The best actors get nervous. Why wouldn't you? Until it's done there is always uncertainty of how good it will be. Barkworth: there will always be dread AND longing. Some doubt and fear is normal. Too much is paralyzing. When you are too anxious, remember to enjoy yourself. Have fun. The business, the life, can be hell: if you don't enjoy the actual acting, what's the point of it all? If you fluff your lines, forgive yourself. All the best actors do. If you're really stuck, in acting hell, if you're worried about fucking it up, loosen it up by focusing for a time on getting it wrong: make mistakes! Remember that the more flaws you can find in the character the more flaws you can forgive in yourself. So go for the dark/ ugly side – there's a lot of power in there. Let go, jump in, trust your prep, trust your instinct.

To learn lines: record the whole lot, yours and their lines, in any accent required, then listen to it ALL THE TIME, repeating as you go. You have to have your lines absolutely down in order for you to truly be in the moment.

The difference between an amateur and a professional is: an amateur practices/ rehearses 'til he gets it right; a professional practices 'til he can't get it wrong.

More prep doesn't always mean a better result though. You can overbake it, get too rigid, stuck in your choices. When you arrive at the audition/ on set you want to have a bunch of possibilities ready to go. You don't have a set idea of how to do it – that could lead to trying to do it RIGHT. ALWAYS be open to direction/ new ideas – if you resist them you'll regret it later. It's a sure sign you are closed off. Forget about being good OR getting it right; that'll get in the way of being in the moment. Don't worry about the result. It's about jumping in, not giving a fuck, just doing it, and trusting that it will be much better that way than anything you could plan. Then it's about the ability to change. To be different every night/ take. Attitude on the day is almost everything. Everything you do in prep

should only be about outcome. Natasha Kinski: 'I don't understand acting except when I'm doing it. And sometimes not even then.' The best acting feels like you are making your best discoveries now, in the moment of playing.

There is no excuse for not knowing your lines.

You need to have a technique. To know the tools, to be able to look at a scene and get to the heart of it. Often you only understand it really when you do it. What you discover in the moment will always be more interesting than what you have invented in advance. It's not about going through a checklist; it's about mastering a few basic tools then applying them as need be to each given script - and throwing it all away on the take. TV and Film is different from theatre in that it is better not to have it all nailed down. Being a bit insecure about your choices sometimes makes you work a bit harder on the day to make connections and discover things. Accidents are gifts. Part of you should want things to go wrong. Always bring it back to working on the instinctual (rather than intellectual) level.

What is the purpose of all the work we are doing? Finding the intentions, beats, questions about 'who, where,' back story, obstacles, emotions, change/ travel, the scene's value/ described in a word? Well, the written word is not what interests us. These are just our clues as to what is really going on - the thoughts and feelings under the surface. These thoughts and feelings are both known and unknown, hidden by behavior. Nothing is what it seems. A good scene is rarely about what it seems to be about. It is usually about something else. There's usually a subtext, an inner life that contrasts with or contradicts the text.

The outer size of the performance depends on the style of the show. Theatre can be tiny - a big toe wiggling can bring the house down. Film can be HUGE. It all depends on what show you're in. But don't push. You are enough. Clint Eastwood: 'my acting coach used to say: Don't just do something, stand there. It takes guts to do nothing.' Once you show them more you might be just showing them bad acting.

People lie. What they say is not always what they are really thinking. This is how people function every day. This doesn't mean that people are insincere. It's just that we all wear a public mask. It's virtually impossible for any of us to properly express what's going on inside, especially when we are under pressure. No matter how much we try to express them, our deepest feelings often elude us. The most passionate moments must conceal an even deeper level. Marlon Brando: 'the subtlest acting I've ever seen is by ordinary people trying to show they feel something they don't or trying to hide something.'

Be professional! People work again with people they like, not necessarily who are the best. Be yourself, your considerate self: gracious, courteous, light, non-judgmental - of yourself as well as others - and humble. Be someone who is easy to work with. But in the end, try to be professional, but don't change who you are. Say what you think, not what you think other people want you to be thinking. Be yourself, even though, as we all are, you are a work in progress. Robert Redford said: 'as an actor, I wouldn't want to direct me. As a director, I wouldn't want to work with me.' And that's okay. A bit of tension is part of the creative process.

Courage courage guts guts guts. Don't be safe. It's okay to be scared. The greater the fear the more the need to be brave and the more intrigued the audience will be.

NO ONE sleeps the night before the first shoot day.

Peter Feeney