

CHAPTER FOUR

TRAINING

To excel in the craft of acting normally requires substantial training. I subscribe to a deliberate plan of committed professional training for the actor who wants to do exceptional work as well as have a real chance at a career. There are many new actors who refer to themselves as “naturals” and think that they don’t need training and that classes would damage their talent. Yet you would train and educate yourself to be a doctor, lawyer, architect, accountant, yoga teacher, cartoonist, editor or any other type of professional. The better the training, the better you will be. Many don’t truly understand that being an actor is a profession. Don't be one of them. Those with abilities and talent with little or no instruction might get some acting jobs but those with training have a much better chance of having a career.

Training doesn't necessarily mean professional acting classes, though I believe they are the best settings to learn the craft. Many get professional instruction from the major universities known for their acting programs or highly respected regional theatre companies. Then there are actors fortunate enough to get their training on film sets either because they started young, were physically specific for a role, had heavyweight contacts or were incredibly lucky. Bottom line, for the great majority, the craft of acting requires instruction and time to develop. Respect your profession and train.

PROFESSIONAL WORKSHOPS FOR ACTORS

Comprehensive professional training is your acting education. You won’t get a degree, but then again a degree has never gotten anyone an acting job.

FORMS OF TRAINING

I strongly advocate the traditional approach for developing your craft – an extended, sustained and comprehensive training period in professional workshops. These are the main training workshops for actors:

- **Acting/Scene-Study**
- **Improvisation**
- **Commercial Audition Technique**
- **Cold-reading/ Theatrical Audition Technique**
- **Speech, Accent, Diction and Dialect**
- **Specialty Workshops**
 - Soaps**
 - Sitcom**
 - Comedy**
 - Theatre**
 - Shakespeare**
 - Stand-up Comedy**
 - Voice-over**
 - Character-voices**
 - Hosting**

- **Private Coaching**
Training
Audition
Career

Each has its time, place and value, which I will cover in THE PLAN.

Acting / Scene-Study: I strongly encourage you to start your training with acting/scene-study.

It is imperative to have acting training. Acting is a craft. I am sure that there are some people who with a lot of dumb luck have risen up through the ranks with little or no training, but the majority of really good actors that I have worked with all have trained and continue to train. **LESLIE JORDAN, Emmy-Award-Winning Actor**

In professional scene-study workshops, actors will do monologues and scenes from plays and movies and exercise. The instructors focus primarily on character development, script analysis, emotional connection, commitment to instinct and often voice and body work. There are numerous acting techniques and methods, The more popular ones were created by Sanford Meisner, Lee Strasberg, Uta Hagen and Konstantin Stanislavski. Most teachers have their own version of the established approaches. Some combine styles and others create their own technique. Investigate to see which one feels like a fit for you – the way you process and create. Then audit the teachers who specialize in that approach until you find the one with whom you connect. Finding, auditing and selecting teachers will be covered later in this chapter.

Improvisation: In my opinion, there is no better workshop than improvisation (with a good teacher) to help actors learn to trust their instincts as well as assist in developing creativity, freedom and confidence. These workshops utilize games and exercises initially created by Viola Spolin. It might be helpful to read her book, *Improvisation for the Theatre*. Most instructors teach their own approach to “Spolin” or have created games and exercises to add to the established repertoire. Actors should do this work for at least six to nine months. Scene study and improvisation, especially when taken concurrently (in two separate workshops) and for an extended period of time, will create a strong foundation for the new actor. Check “The Plan” for my suggestions on how long to stay with your teachers.

Commercial Audition Technique: Many new actors think that taking a commercial-audition workshop is where they should begin their training. They have heard that doing commercials is the best way to get started. That is ridiculous. I personally would like to track down the people who are giving out this advice and make them stop. Obviously, I can’t stop those misinformed people but I do fervently try to dispel that propaganda. After an actor has done acting and improvisation training for a minimum of six to nine months and then takes a commercial-audition workshop, it is reasonable for him or her to start auditioning for TV commercials. In most cases, the well-trained actor (with a good commercial look) has a better chance of booking work than the total novice. Commercial types and looks are covered in Chapter Seven, “Packaging Your Product.”

Commercial-audition-technique workshops primarily focus on preparing actors to audition well and book TV commercials. They are on-camera and utilize commercial scripts and scenarios.

The methods and techniques vary with every teacher. Commercial casting directors and successful commercial actors teach most of these workshops. In major markets, there are a lot to choose from.

Being a commercial-audition-technique teacher as well as a casting director and actress, I have rather strong opinions on what makes a good teacher and a valuable workshop. I fervently believe that good commercial-acting technique is good acting and that this specialty workshop should do the following: teach commercial acting techniques and specific on-camera auditioning tips; encourage creativity; clean up habits that disempower performances; give constructive feedback on the personal “issues” that could hinder actors from doing their best auditions; help distinguish each actor as a unique personality; work on activating authentic connections to audition material; get the actor on-camera enough times so he/she is comfortable being recorded at auditions; build confidence; and give feedback on wardrobe, hair and make-up to help actors to create or define their “look.” (Detailed information regarding creating your “look” is covered in Chapter Seven.) If the timing is right in your development and you choose an acting-oriented teacher, the commercial-technique class can be an asset to your acting training and theatrical auditioning.

Theatrical Audition Workshops/Cold-Reading:

After training for eighteen months or so, it is time to take a theatrical audition technique class, also referred to as a cold-reading workshop. (I don’t really know why they call it cold-reading. Most times you have hours, if not days, to prepare.) These workshops provide actors with audition training for TV dramas, comedies, sitcoms and soaps as well as films and sometimes theatre. The instructors impart techniques that assist actors to quickly investigate audition material, make strong personal and creative choices, facilitate emotional character connection, commit to instincts and sustain effective readings for the full length of the material (which can be one line or many pages), plus understand and learn how to navigate the audition process. After completing this workshop, you should be able to start auditioning for acting work.

A great teacher should give you the necessary skills to become self-sufficient. You should never need coaching on an audition if you know what you are doing. If you’re taking a class and still don’t know how to approach a script, then you’re in the wrong class. AMY LYNDON, TV & Film Audition/Booking Coach

For many, being a formidable, well-trained actor and taking one cold-reading workshop does not guarantee that you will be a consistently strong “auditioner.” Auditioning skills (like a muscle) need to be worked regularly to stay in shape and get even stronger – as well as keep actors competitive.



CHOOSING TEACHERS

AUDIT

Okay, you have done your research and have the list of potential teachers you are considering. Next, call and arrange to audit their classes. If they do interviews, meet with the teachers or

their coordinators for an evaluation. That one-on-one time will give you a chance to see if you will be compatible. Even if you are sold on a teacher in your meeting, still audit his or her class before signing up. Meet with and audit several teachers. Most, except for improvisation teachers, allow potential students to check out their classes without a fee. It is my belief that you should not study with an acting or technique teacher whom you have not been able to observe.

I always suggest that actors audit 5-10 different instructors. Finding the right teacher may take time but will save you hundreds of dollars. Why find out a week or two into the class that you don't like the instructor or agree with his or her style of teaching? If there is an instructor you've heard is really great, but he or she won't let you audit a class, MOVE ON. Would you buy clothing without trying it on to make sure it fits? TODD JUSTICE, Talent Representative @ Marshak/Zachary

Many acting teachers don't allow auditors. The auditor, the unfamiliar person, changes the energy and disturbs the trust and flow built through weeks of people working together. I myself would not appreciate someone who is not a member of the class copiously taking notes. TERRY BERLAND, Commercial CD & Author Picking an acting teacher is like dating. Check around until you find the one you connect with. Then STICK WITH THAT ONE. Committing is the only way to make progress. That's why it is important to AUDIT. Any acting teacher worth their salt would want you to sit in on a class or two to see if their approach works for you. LESLIE JORDAN, Emmy-Award-Winning Actor

FACTORS TO CONSIDER

When you audit, do you know what to look for and the factors to evaluate? Most actors want only to like the teacher and feel comfortable with him/her. Yes, that is important but there is much more to consider. I suggest you ask about and contemplate the following factors:

- teacher's approach and style
- the teacher for your class
- compatibility
- number of students in the class
- how often you will work in class
- class policies
- cost
- class level(s)
- video and playback

Teacher's Approach and Style: Ask yourself these questions in order to determine if the teacher(s) you are considering is a fit for you:

- Does their style or approach make sense and appeal to you?
- Is there a technique that the students understand and can apply or is he/she just teaching tricks or giving direction that produces flashy, instant performances?

- After he/she works with actors doing exercises, monologues and/or scenes, do you see an improvement in their work?
- Does the teacher utilize the class time well: starting punctually, allotting time and giving attention equally to all the students, dealing directly with what is needed and not going off on ego trips or telling too many stories of their accomplishments or bad experiences?
- Is the teacher constructive and supportive as he/she critiques and directs students?

For more helpful tips on guiding you through the value of training, finding the right classes and teachers for you, consider getting your own copy of HIT THE GROUND RUNNING - <http://www.hitthegroundrunningbook.com>