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S T U D I O

A MANUAL ON HOW TO REHEARSE

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FORWARD

This manual on How to Rehearse puts emphasis on how to take care of yourself, because the reality of both film and television acting is that most of the time you are on your own, either with little or no direction or with direction given to you entirely in result terms. An actor in television or film must learn to achieve those results. Immediately. When the camera is ready, the actor has to be ready. The aim of our work is to teach you how to be ready.

This means you have to learn how to work on your own, without the director, without the other actor, even without rehearsal time. You have to learn how to make specific choices quickly and economically, which means you must be able to draw on your own life and emotions readily.

Since the art of acting is the art of creating relationships, use your workshop rehearsal time fully to learn how to work with real people in a real rehearsal process - so that you will know what to do when there is no rehearsal process and you meet the other actor for the first time in front of the camera.

There is one essential difference between stage and screen acting: the camera picks up what you think. A good screen actor is one who is always thinking (which is the communication of feelings through silent dialogue) and whose thoughts are always specific.

Don't believe that screen acting is "taking it down" or "making it subtle." You need the same life-force important impulses that you need for stage acting. So the adjustment you make is because of the physical proximity of the camera: the person you are relating to is right next to you, lying in bed with you or sitting so close to you on the sofa you can actually feel the warmth of his or her body.

1. Reading the script

Don't start to read from the point of innocence. Instead start to read, FOR THE FIRST TIME, from having this foreknowledge:

- This is going to be about me involved in a love relationship.
- What do I want: what am I fighting FOR in this love relationship? And what gets in my way: what interferes with me getting what I need? This is FINDING THE CONFLICT.

At the same time, find THE OPPOSITE of what you are fighting FOR. As an example: If you are fighting to create a love relationship with the other person in the script, then the opposite is wanting to be independent, to be strong enough not to need a relationship so you can stand on your own two feet.

So do not come to the first rehearsal with your partner with an open mind, ready to read through the play with a "Lets see what this is about" attitude. Come to it with prejudices - with your mind made up about:

- what you are fighting for in this relationship
- what creates the conflict
- what the opposite is

Remember: the opposite of having your mind made up is having an open mind to change based on new information you may find out. This might lead you to make a more BASIC, therefore deeper, choice and will also allow you to add many different ways of expressing what you are fighting for.

Figure out in advance what your partner in the scene is fighting for. Then find out in the first rehearsal what your fellow actor has decided he or she is fighting for. REMEMBER: you do not have to agree on what you are fighting for. In life, people don't agree - and they manage to have scenes together all the time!

2. Don't talk - DO

There's far too much talking and analyzing in the usual rehearsal process. One improvisation is worth ten discussions.

When I ask where a missing element is in the scene, actors tell me, "We talked about that," which proves that talking about it doesn't get it into the performance.

Do it. Put what you're talking about into the scene. If it doesn't happen in the rehearsal, then improvise to make sure it is there.

IMPROVISING is one of the most important elements in the rehearsal process. Improvise about the past: about what happened in earlier incidents between the two of you. Improvise about the future: about what you wish would happen and about what you fear may happen.

Rules for improvising:

1. Seek confrontations, rather than avoid them.
2. Operate on needing something NOW and refuse to postpone your need. Once you face a confrontation, then seek to explore its consequences, which will then lead to another confrontation.
3. Insist on making events happen. An event is where there is new knowledge that creates a change in the relationship.
4. DO NOT ASK QUESTIONS. Make statements.
5. ACCEPT FACTS GIVEN. i.e.: "father died."

3. At your second rehearsal

Read the scene together a different way: read the line as written, then, before your partner responds with his or her line as written, say aloud what you are really thinking and feeling.

Proceed through the entire scene this way.

If you get stuck later on in the rehearsal process, use this method of reading the play again.

This method, like improvising, is better than discussing and analyzing the script: it is another way of doing rather than talking.

4. Play PING PONG

Most scenes are too slow. They are much slower than the pace of life.

Therefore, every third run-through you do with your partner should be an effort to add the game of ping pong to what you are doing in the scene.

Think of what the game of ping pong means:

- It means immediate response: return the serve or you lose.
- It means there's no time to stop to think: you have to respond immediately.
- It means expressing joy when you win and dismay when you lose. It also means willingness to express admiration when your partner does well. The SCORE KEEPING is an important element in anyone who plays the game well. No one likes to play with someone who won't revel in the wins and losses.

Ping pong doesn't mean just going faster (although picking up cues always helps): it means making the stakes higher and more important.

5. At each rehearsal

Explore and add two more of the Guideposts (which you will find explained in the AUDITION book under the Section called The Twelve Guideposts)*:

- 1 Relationship
- 2 Conflict/What Are You Fighting For?
- 3 The Moment Before
- 4 Humor
- 5 Opposites
- 6 Discoveries
- 7 Communication & Competition
- 8 Life and Death Importance
- 9 Find the Events
- 10 Use the Place
- 11 Game Playing and Role Playing
- 12 Mystery & Secret
- 13 Mischief
- 14 Vulnerability
- 15 Architecture

*Shurtleff created Guidepost #13 after writing Audition.

*Shurtleff sanctioned Guideposts #14 and #15, which were created by Tom Todoroff.

6. Humor

Humor is the most essential ingredient to any relationship and it is the one most often left out by actors. The more serious the stakes, the more necessary it is to find humor.

Find humor in every scene, in every event, in every relationship.

7. The Moment Before

The moment before is what you start with. Therefore, it is important that it be SPECIFIC and emotionally charged so it will throw you into the scene to accomplish what you are fighting for.

Don't ever start any rehearsal or performance without recreating your Moment Before. What you do in the Moment Before will affect every moment you do in the scene.

8. Conflicts

Conflicts and problems will normally occur between actors working on a scene. Expect them; they are not unusual.

The only solution to Conflicts and Problems is the determination to keep communicating.

There is a tendency to pile up injustices, to become a collector of injustices. This is easy to do. The hard thing to do is to keep communicating even when you'd like to kill your partner or the director. Even when you feel you're not being dealt with fairly, even when you feel your partner isn't communicating at all, you must keep the channels open. Listen, be willing to hear what the opposite side's view really is, be willing to consider it even when you disagree.

Communication is hard. It takes determination and skill. Develop both. You're going to need them for every scene you ever rehearse or perform.

9. Do the majority of your work OUTSIDE of the rehearsal process

So that you are ready to perform when it comes time to rehearse with your partner.

Most actors fool themselves: they don't really work outside of the rehearsals. Don't just vaguely "think" about the scene: do actual, concrete work on it.

Ask Guideposts questions and write down your answers.

Force yourself to:

- Be Specific
- Make Concrete Choices
- Relate everything you do to your own life
- Don't limit your choices and feelings to your concrete every-day realistic life: always tap your fantasy life as well.

10. If you only rehearse the words of the script,

then you haven't explored the relationship between your life and the life of the script.

Don't go to the first rehearsal like an empty blackboard, ready to be written on. Go to the first rehearsal with half your rehearsal work already done: start out way ahead of the game.

There's a highly prevalent but mistaken concept: that an actor should come to the first rehearsal with an "open mind." An open mind in this case just means you haven't done your preliminary work. Instead, come to the first rehearsal filled with decisions and prejudices, with your mind made up. Only then can you be open to changes that will be worthwhile.

11. Think of the difference between stage and screen acting this way:

On stage, your partner is always on the other side of the stage. In screen acting, your partner is right next to you.

12. TAKE RISKS

Safe acting is dull acting. Learn to take risks. Learn to make every situation one that has Life and Death Stakes.

Taking risks is not a separate operation. Take risks in EVERY guidepost you apply to your scene.

Do MORE than you would in ordinary life: do MORE than you think you should.

13. Learn to physicalize all your choices

Even if you end up in a small office doing your audition or even if you end up in a tiny set squeezed up close to your partner or the camera, the fact that you have conceived of the scene in PHYSICALIZED terms will make your acting stronger, more specific, and more emotional. Find out always what the physical actions are that extend the emotions you are feeling. Put them into the scene.

14. Learn your lines early

The sooner you are off the book, the sooner you will (a) physicalize (b) take risks and (c) create relationship needs.

Have your lines learned by the second or third rehearsal. Otherwise you'll never make it in television or film.