

## CHAPTER 1: GETTING STARTED

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## Approaching Acting

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One of my most influential professors, Elizabeth Kemp, who unfortunately passed away in 2017, called her students “warriors”. I’ve adopted using this word when I’m teaching because actors are perseverant, continually opening themselves up to others, revealing their vulnerabilities, exposing their souls, and enduring the countless waves of rejection throughout their career. These traits are indicative of a warrior.

Every actor is different. Some never get training. They may have a natural ability and grow every time they perform. Other actors take acting classes in their community to improve themselves, using the learning environment to push them in the right direction. And then there is the actor who goes the way of higher education. Training under various teachers in their profession to hone their skills and ability.

There is no right or wrong path when it comes to approaching the art of acting. My belief is that an actor should take a class even if they do have a natural ability. They should understand the principles behind acting. The choices they make when creating a character and performing are exactly that...choices. It should not be through sheer “chance” from their natural ability.

Another aspect you should be aware of is that an actor’s training can be a very frustrating one. It’s one thing to understand the principles behind acting but it’s another thing to put it into action. When we act, we are creating a real emotion through fabrication. That’s not something that people normally do, yet actors create these emotions and make use believe that they are experiencing them for the first time.

When you begin the process of learning to act, you may feel frustrated. You may cry or scream because you aren’t grasping the technique and feel like you aren’t getting anywhere. This is perfectly

normal. Don't compare your progress to others. Everyone has ups and downs in their craft. We learn at our own pace and you will get there when you get there.

One more point I want to make about acting: every actor has a technique and a set of tools they use. No technique is better than another. There is no "one way" to do it. We try, we fail, we succeed, we learn. It's what makes each actor's style so unique. The techniques and styles you use will shape you as an actor and hopefully make you do what you do best: act truthfully. The tools that you find in this book are to help you along your way. Pick the techniques you like and discard the ones you don't.

The tools and techniques that you find in this book are to help you get to where you need to be emotionally, mentally, and physically when you are unable to achieve this organically. They are tools, nothing more. Just as a carpenter uses various tools to shape his woodwork, so are you, using various acting tools to shape your craft.

Allow yourself time to grasp the ideas contained in this book. Try them out. Experiment. Actors succeed because of their perseverance and tenacity. Don't be too hard on yourself when you find yourself up against a block or you are trying something that makes you emotionally uncomfortable. It's a natural occurrence. In class, Ron Leibman told us, "If it makes you feel uncomfortable, that's where you need to head."

Playing it safe is not the way of a warrior. You need to push through your blocks and achieve those breakthroughs that will strengthen you and help you become the warrior that is inside you.

In acting class, one of my students asked me to define a character actor, in the process, I expounded on Ron's words adding, there is a difference between something that doesn't feel comfortable and something that doesn't feel right. Usually something that doesn't feel comfortable involves emotions or feelings that we haven't felt or

acknowledged and trying to gain access to these emotions puts us in a vulnerable state, making us feel uncomfortable. If something doesn't feel right, it usually involves something that affects us either morally, ethically, or just who we are as people, which doesn't allow us to feel "right" doing that part. The trick is to know the difference and being able to act on it accordingly.

#### FOUR RULES TO REMEMBER

Because acting is subjective and sometimes it's easy to fall into the trap of feeling unworthy as an actor. As you read and work through this book, remember these four important rules to live by as an actor:

1. Never apologize for your work – Your work is yours, good or bad. We learn from our mistakes. If you apologize for your work it is showing that you are not worthy to be watched and people will start to expect less from you. Be proud of what you do, maybe you didn't succeed but you put yourself out there and that in itself is an achievement.

2. Don't compare yourself to others – Everyone learns and grows at their own rate. As actors it's easy to fall into the trap of comparing ourselves to other actors, i.e. This person is making it, I'm not, they always get cast and I don't, everyone understand this concept, why can't I? Comparing yourself will subconsciously keep you back and deter you from growing as an actor.

3. Give yourself permission to fail – No matter what we do in life, we have to learn. We can't succeed at everything the first time. By giving yourself permission to fail, you are allowing yourself to make mistakes or fall flat on your face. When that happens, pick yourself up, brush yourself off, and do it again. Only by failing can we grow as an actor.

4. Keep your secrets – **Never** disclose to another actor or director the personal choices you use for substitution, emotional

recall, sense memory, or anything that gets you in the mindset that you are aiming to achieve. It weakens that choice for you and makes it unusable. It gives them power over you as an actor. Instead of them thinking about what you are giving them, they will be thinking subconsciously, “He told me he’s using this tactic on me”, or “He’s thinking of this person”, etc. Your personal choices should remain secret during the entire rehearsal and run of the show. If, after the show, you choose to reveal what you used, you may, but I wouldn’t. You want to keep your secrets exactly that: secret.

Above all, be patient and open. Always be observant. Always be aware of your surroundings: the people, the objects, the smells, what you hear, see, touch, and taste. You will never know when something that you encountered in your life will be used and re-created on the stage.

## Keeping A Journal

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Before you begin your journey into acting you need to have a journal to keep track of your progress. You can use a standard notebook or a blank diary. I don't recommend using a binder filled with paper. It is too bulky and not conducive to the role of a journal.

Your journal should be with you whenever you are in class, at a coaching, or working at home on your acting skills. You should carry your journal with you at all times. Inspiration and breakthroughs can happen at any moment. It is a great way to keep track of the character traits of other individuals, sensory perceptions, and observations you may notice throughout the day.

You will also use your journal to keep track of your work and progress. I can't tell you how many times I've gone back to look through my notes and remembered an exercise or experience. Re-reading it reminded me where I've been or even techniques I may have forgotten.

I recommend spending at least 15 minutes writing in your journal after attending an acting class, private coaching, rehearsal, or performance. Let your thoughts flow. It can be stream-of-consciousness writing or carefully thought out. Whichever way you choose to use your acting journal, don't stop using it.

As you become more experienced on stage, you may find journal work isn't as important or vital to your needs as an actor but as a beginning actor it is crucial to have one. Be as specific as you can be when writing in your journal. Notate everything you remember, experienced, and retained. Don't wait too long to write in your journal after your class, doing an exercise, meeting with your acting coach, etc. You want the journal entry to be as fresh in your mind as possible. Too much time elapsed could result in forgetting a vital piece of information you may find helpful later.

Your journal and your journey as an actor are unique, remember you are joining that elite and special breed of person: the performer, the actor, and the warrior. Be brave, be true to yourself and let your journal tell your story of challenges and successes.