

# **How To Book Acting Jobs In TV And Film**

Conversations With A Veteran Casting  
Director On Mastering The Audition Room  
And Much More

By

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## What Is Good Acting?

This is not a book on acting technique, it's a book on how to audition well, but let's chat briefly about acting. What is good, compelling acting? What are we drawn to in great actors?

Some great actors have had substantial training and some have not. I am always biased toward the well-trained theatre actor because I am passionate about theatre, but some casting directors are not. Oddly, there doesn't seem to be a correlation between success and training. As long as you are a good actor in *The Room* and can bring your full arsenal, you will book jobs. Actors who graduate from Julliard book jobs and actors who have never had an acting class in their life book jobs. I'm not suggesting here that an actor shouldn't care about the craft of acting or that you shouldn't ponder every day of your life what *is* good acting. I certainly do. Every time I see a movie or a play and am moved emotionally by a performance I always stop and wonder what is it about this actor that I'm so drawn to? As an actor, how can you translate what you know intellectually into your physical and emotional self? For most actors, this will mean taking acting classes on a continuous basis so you can learn technique and practice scene work. For others, it will mean being in plays. But taking classes and working on the stage will not guarantee you will book jobs in TV and film. Being a good, compelling actor in *The Room* will.

So what is good acting in *The Room*?

*Good acting is non-acting acting.* We, the audience and especially the casting director and the director/producer, don't want to see the work. We don't want to see you "Act." The transition from you as a person to you as the character should be seamless.

*Good acting is from your gut and your heart, not from your head.* Good acting is your ability to reveal *many* emotions simultaneously in a made-up situation - the "Magic If" in

Stanislavski terms. *If* I were a teenaged girl who sought escape in drugs (the film *Thirteen*), how would I *feel* in this situation? What emotional qualities would I bring to this role? True and deep emotions play well in *The Room*.

A good actor is *relatable, likable, natural, and fully connected to the other person*. A good actor listens and reacts *in the moment* to what is going on in the scene. A good audition should seem like a private conversation. If you're too self-conscious to go to that intimate place, where you really and truly connect with another human being, you will not audition well. If you're uncomfortable with intimacy in *The Room* – if you continually “check out” of the scene when it starts getting good and connected – you will not book work.

Finally, *good acting draws us in* as if there were a magnetic force field surrounding the actor. It's imperative you find your force field. A good actor is a *charismatic* person.

How can you enhance your charisma in *The Room*? Read on.

## **Third Meeting**

### **How Can I Stand Out?**

**H**ow do you stand out from the hordes of other actors vying for the same role? The answer is not what you would think. It's not that you have to come in and be "different" or "make a bold choice" to wake the casting directors up from our stupor. "Standing out from the crowd" does not mean using an accent when none is called for or wearing a silly hat. Standing out does not come from the outside but from within. That's one reason it makes me nervous when some acting teachers tell actors to "make bold choices." If you are thinking about how you can be different or how bored we are, your focus is in the wrong place. You cannot obsess over the other actors coming in for the same role or how you can "win us over." It is just you and the casting director and you must *wow* us by simply *being yourself*. This is true in all auditioning, but especially for TV roles. All we want is *you*, and to see your *natural charisma* coming through the character. As you read through the script with the casting director you must be yourself in each moment. This is particularly hard because the casting director is not an actor.

Casting directors are like matchmakers between the director, producer, creator, and the actors. Metaphorically, I ask

myself, would I want to date this person? Or just have coffee and look for an excuse to leave? Would I consider a long-term relationship? *Marriage*? The auditioner who would get the “marriage proposal” is the one who usually gets the job.

What do we look for? What makes us want to watch a particular actor over another? *Charisma*. Charisma is the bedrock of how we connect with each other as human beings. It’s the foundation of how we communicate with each other. Without charisma, without sex appeal, without attraction, without the force and chemistry between people, our lives would be dull, lifeless, and void of hope. Without charisma, your audition will put us to sleep.

It might seem a little strange to the layman, but I’ve thought a lot about charisma. In fact, I would say I’ve become an expert on the Art of Charisma, and there are two aspects to my own personal theory of charisma. The first entails *self-knowledge* and *balance*. In order to tap into your charisma fully when it comes to auditioning, you have to know *who you are* and then have the ability to reveal that true self in The Room. Ideally, your true self is also your balanced self. If you are all dark qualities, you will scare us, and if you are all light qualities, we won’t be emotionally moved by you. A charismatic person is the perfect balance of light and dark qualities. Shakespeare’s plays are all about self-knowledge and balance. If you’re too much of one thing, you either end up dead or your family is destroyed (Macbeth, King Lear). If you’re the perfect balance of man and woman, dark and light, you end up happily married (Rosalind in *As You Like It*). Same in The Room. If you’re able to reveal your perfectly balanced self, you end up working on a film or TV set.

So you must ask yourself, “Who am I?” What *emotional qualities* do you possess? As an actor, the only thing you can play is emotions. It’s the only thing the audience responds to. So make a list of who you are emotionally, and make the qualities one-word descriptions - sad, angry, optimistic, caring, fierce, funny, smart, passionate. Your list should be at least ten qualities, but fifteen to twenty is best. You should be brutally honest. Who

are you *really*? Are you depressed, melancholy, joyous? Are you skeptical, laid back, romantic? You can have contradictory traits and, in fact, it's best that you do. You can be loving and difficult, angry and peaceful. A complex person is an interesting person is an interesting actor in *The Room*.

Your list of qualities might look like this:

Angry  
Passionate  
Frustrated  
Joyous  
Sad  
Smart  
Funny  
Sexy  
Insecure  
Fearful  
Brave  
Bitter  
Optimistic

Most people only show one or two of their qualities to folks they are meeting for the first time. If the above were my qualities, I probably only show smart and funny to strangers. I might show four or five qualities (smart, funny, optimistic, brave) to my close friends and six or seven (add in angry and sad) to my mate. When I'm alone in my private space I reveal all of my qualities, especially those I want to hide (bitter, insecure, fearful). Sadly, most people are not expressing to others the full gamut of their emotional life. My darker qualities are not easy to take but they do make up whom I am. They are part of my emotional arsenal. If I'm not expressing my authentic self to the world, I'm gypping my colleagues, friends, and family of connecting with me on a deep and meaningful level. Most people are definitely in this group with me.

Actors are not most people. It is your *job* to connect with other human beings. It's your obligation to know yourself and have the courage to reveal at least five of your qualities in every

audition, every scene, every Room. If you are too nervous to reveal yourself the second you walk in the The Room, you won't get the role. If you are uncomfortable in your own skin, you won't let us in. You need to let us in. We need to see you. You can't be protective of your emotions, especially the darker ones. And we need to see you right away. You can't warm up in The Room.

A great audition contains at least five emotional qualities –from the list above, funny, angry, passionate, brave, sad for instance. You can grab what you can from your own personal arsenal and choose what is appropriate for the particular role. If your audition is one note, one emotion, such as sadness, it will be boring. If it's just bitter, it will be indulgent. Human nature is multifaceted, so should your auditions be.

The list you've made of your own emotional qualities is a beautiful tool. You can go to your darker qualities for the dramatic scenes and the lighter ones for the comedic. You can combine your dark and light qualities for the leading roles in either genre. You can go to your lightest of the light qualities for commercial auditions.

You're not bringing in anything to the audition that is foreign to you. You don't need to conjure up emotions that you've never experienced. It's all you and it will work for any scene, any role, in all mediums.

So self-knowledge and balance is the first aspect to my discussion of charisma. The second entails my Top Ten Secrets of Charisma that I want to share with you now. These tips were formulated after watching way too many actors blow their chances in The Room. They also came from observing brilliance. They are lessons learned from the inner sanctum of booking jobs in TV and film.

## **Sixth Meeting**

### **I'm A Trained And Talented Artist Ready To Make My Living As An Actor; What Are The Practical Aspects To The Job?**

**I** have lectured and held audition workshops at university theatre programs around the country and shared my knowledge with so many fine young actors. Most feel overwhelmed at the prospect of making the transition from theatre to on-camera work. This section is dedicated to them and my declaration is "Do Not Fear."

I'm a purist at heart when it comes to theatre. I would rather work in theatre than any other medium. The facts about being a working actor, however, are that a good, financially healthy career is a balanced one among theatre, film, television, and commercials.

## What City Will I Live In?

As it stands now, New York and L.A. are pretty much the only cities in which one can make a living as a full-time actor. Other states that now have a lot of film and TV production are Louisiana, New Mexico, and Michigan. The problem with living in these states is the lack of theatre and commercial work. Most of the time, these shows cast their leads out of L.A. or New York anyway.

If you are going to eventually move to L.A. or New York, do it sooner rather than later, and if you can, do it before you turn twenty-five years of age for the following reasons.

- It's easier to get an agent. If you are over twenty-five years old and don't have decent credits, as in Primetime Network and Cable TV shows and studio films, then it's difficult to get an agent and get seen by casting directors.
- You need to start your networking as early as you can during your career because it might take you years to get your bearings and get yourself together financially, so you might as well start on your Networking in the city you want to live in as soon as possible.
- You are at the peak of your marketability, agility, and probably do not have a family of your own yet.

I know a lot of actors who went to Chicago right out of school to be a part of that great theatre scene. They stayed until they reached a plateau and then went out to L.A. Now they are in their 30s, have only theatre credits and basically have to start from scratch in a new city.

## **How Will I Support Myself?**

It costs a lot of money to be an actor. Heck, it costs a lot of money to be anything in the arts. I had to take out a loan for my first year in casting, as I was a single mom. The pay I received while paying my dues sucked.

Actors have a lot of expenses right from the get-go. Headshots, wardrobe, classes, casting director workshops, seminars, socializing, going to see movies and plays, therapy, working out, haircuts and grooming. You honestly have to do it all and cannot scrimp on any of it. You absolutely have to go into your auditions feeling and looking your very best.

Have a really good support system – a mate, wife, husband, partner, parent, pal – someone who can fully support you emotionally and financially. Find someone who is deeply committed to you in this endeavor and is solid as a person in their own right. If he or she is not fully committed to your success or is jealous, there is no way that person will stay with you during the inevitable times when you will be hanging out with very successful, attractive people.

Get a day job that is brainless and has flexible hours.

Try to have at least \$15,000 with you when you go to L.A. or New York. That way, you can take care of everything you need to set up (getting an apartment, headshots, on-camera classes, etc.) and not have to worry, on top of all your living and actor issues, about finding a day job for at least three months.

If you are a young, talented, and well-trained actor, and do not have the \$15,000, go anyway. Find a way. Borrow money and do not feel guilty about it. I do workshops for young actors all around the country and meet a lot of incredibly talented, charismatic actors who are at the peak of their marketability. By “marketability” I mean that, assuming they audition well, they will find work because they “fit” what television and film are after. I tell them point blank, “You have what it takes so be on the next bus out to L.A. or New York.” Some of them come up with excuses not to go. Despite receiving a wholehearted endorsement

from a casting director, they say, “But I have too many student loans to pay off first.” Or, “But I have to help out my family first financially because they sacrificed to put me through school.” Or, “But I need my SAG card first.”

The hard truth is you have to put yourself first. You must be selfish to succeed. You must find a way to make this be okay. You have a gift and you must share it with the world. The older you get, the harder it will be for you to get in the door, and the more competition with actors with name recognition you will be faced with.

### **(Other Topics in the Section)**

**What Is The Average Monthly Cost To Rent An Apartment In L.A.?**

**Should I Move To L.A. Or New York If I’m Not In An Actors’ Union?**

**What I Should Do During My First Month(S) In L.A. Or New York**