

CHAPTER THREE

THE PLAN

Do you understand all an acting career entails: the time, money, training, dedication, energy, lifestyle adjustments, personal and business challenges? It is vital to know as much as possible before embarking on this journey. Too many people approach an acting career with no strategy or idea of what is necessary. Most try to get acting work way before they are ready, jump from teacher to teacher, make bad business decisions and/or are financially unprepared. Don't be one of them. This is a business. When preparing to be a doctor, dentist, lawyer, accountant, contractor, teacher or most any type of professional, there is a strategy: schools to attend, financing, entry-level work, business plans, etc. Professions have established paths to be traveled and one can usually determine what is required – the costs and courses of action. Yet most people approach becoming an actor as if it were an improvisation. From my years of being an actress, teacher, casting director, director and producer, I have seen thousands of actors come and then go because they didn't have a plan. I strongly believe that having a well-thought-out plan that actors commit to is crucial for a successful career.

Amen. I tell actors this all the time. **HUGH LEON, Commercial Agent @ Coast to Coast Agency**

The plan that I am about to outline is what I propose to new actors as well as those who were actors ten years ago (or more) and folks who have had bad training or have done the kinds of acting work that has created habits that are not conducive to film and TV work or professional theatre productions. This plan should help you avoid many pitfalls of the first few years. It is based on my career, the experience of thousands of actors I know or have trained and successful actors whom I have researched. It is not the only strategy, but it is the one I strongly believe makes the most sense and have seen work for the great majority of those who have followed it.

This PLAN suggests an often-followed routine in which to proceed when making long-term acting goals for one's self or when stuck at a career roadblock. I cannot begin to count the number of working actors I have met who lament about how much easier their careers would have started had there been a plan given to them to follow.
BERNARD TELSEY, New York Theatre and Film Casting Director

TO START:

If you do not live in New York, Los Angeles or Chicago, seriously think about moving to one of these cities. These are the major entertainment markets in the United States. Many consider San Francisco, Seattle, Detroit, Dallas/Houston, Miami/Orlando and Las Vegas strong secondary entertainment markets. In Canada, the major markets would be Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal. These entertainment centers offer the best overall training and the most career opportunities and work. Bottom line: If you want to be a professional working actor in film and TV and/or high-end theatre productions, you will need to move to a major or secondary market area either at the beginning or no later than by the end of the first year of this three-year plan.

THE FIRST SIX MONTHS

- Take acting and improvisation classes
- Audit classes and read as much as possible
- Rehearse a lot
- Develop skills and sports abilities
- Make as much money as possible

Acting Classes: First and most importantly, start with an acting teacher whom you want to train with for at least a year. How to research and select the right teacher is covered in Chapter Four. Your acting/scene-study training is the foundation of your craft. The sooner you find the right teacher and commit to the process, the sooner you can start learning the techniques and tools needed to be a well-trained actor.

Acting classes are essential and extremely important. They teach actors to react to other actors, which in my humble opinion is what real acting is about. I recently worked with an actor who has won every award imaginable and is supposed to be at the top of his craft. His performance was so planned he never even looked at me or reacted to what I gave him. I realized that this man's entire career must have been made in the editing bay. No matter what line reading I gave him, he responded with the line reading he had planned. It was disconcerting and in my opinion selfish. In scene-study classes actors learn to react and that is what creates exciting performances.

LESLIE JORDAN, Emmy-Award-Winning Actor

Improvisation Classes: At the same time you start an acting class, enroll with an improvisation teacher whom you plan to train with for at least six months. I believe improv in conjunction with an acting class helps to speed up the training process, stimulates creativity, lays the foundation for auditioning and promotes commitment, spontaneity and freedom. I am a major advocate of the benefits of improvisation training.

Audit: When permitted, audit other workshops that your acting instructor teaches as often as your schedule allows. When objectively watching actors perform their work and listening to the instruction, it is often easier to see how the teacher's process works, which helps you better understand and trust his/her technique and commit to it. This can speed up your progress.

Additional Rehearsals: A great way to get more from your acting class is to rehearse as much as you can with your partner. The more you rehearse, the more you can investigate the scene and experiment with ways to tap into your emotions as well as find richer interpretations thus, the more you can grow as an actor. I also recommend that you always work on monologues and possibly an additional scene with a second partner (other than the one who was assigned to you). In most acting classes, you are only allowed to put up one piece of work at a time. If prepared, you can let the teacher know that you have a monologue or a second scene that you would like to put up if there is time, or if your assigned partner is absent. As a teacher, when I see that an actor is hungry to learn, I give him more time and attention.

With improv classes, normally there are no required rehearsals, but you can get together with people from the class and practice the games and techniques. Also go to improv shows with fellow students then afterward discuss what worked and what didn't.

An actor must approach his or her career like an Olympic athlete. The more

you practice the necessary skills, the more you will book. With a high level of discipline and concentration on the work, you will see results.

AMY LYNDON, TV & Film Audition/Booking Coach

If you can invest more in your training, ask your acting teacher if there are books, articles, DVDs, or CDs they would suggest. Get what is recommended and read, listen to and watch it. If you have questions about the information you obtain from these products, ask your instructor for clarification at an appropriate time. This type of exchange (if not done too often) lets him/her know the level of your commitment and could create a better teacher/student relationship.

Skills and Sports Abilities: If you have special skills or talents or excel at any sport, continue to do, play and/or develop them. The more activities you do well and talents you possess, the more job opportunities are available. Many commercials and lots of theatrical roles require specific abilities. Dancing, horseback riding, tennis, skiing, landscaping, cooking, skydiving, rock climbing, languages, dialects, stamp or coin collecting, yoga, mosaics, Pilates, weight training, running, painting – whatever it is you enjoy, pursue it in your free time. Although I place this instruction in this period of The Plan, I encourage you to continue with it. Besides potentially having value in your career, these activities help you to have a fuller life, which enhances your well-being and helps you to be a healthier actor.

Money: Get a survival job or jobs where you can earn enough money for your living and acting expenses as well as enough to put into savings. Business and marketing expenses, especially during the second and third years, will get pricey, and it is important to start saving sooner than later. I will detail these expenses in Chapter Six.

After the initial training period when actors start looking for acting jobs, many are not prepared for the costs involved with the business aspects: union membership, shooting and reproducing photos, subscribing to casting websites, joining networking groups, participating in activities and showcases, or being able to support themselves when taking time off from their survival jobs to do a film for which they earn very little or nothing. If you have not saved for these expenses, your momentum will be interrupted. Actors caught in a financial bind oftentimes stop training so they can pay the business and marketing costs. This action can prevent them from taking their craft to the next level. Some continue to study and forego their marketing, which prevents them from taking advantage of work opportunities. With either scenario, careers can take a downward spiral or never get started. So it is vital to your training and career to be financially prepared.

Time Required and Scheduling: The time needed to undertake what I have outlined in this first period can range from twelve to twenty-five hours a week. Depending on your commitment, availability and finances, you could be working on your training for the minimum or maximum amount of time. The more time you can put in during this stage as well as the rest of the phases I am about to outline, the stronger your acting foundation will be. It is not a guarantee that you will become a better actor than someone who isn't as committed, but if I were a betting person, I would put my money on you progressing faster unless you have major issues.

During the first year, most who follow my plan won't be going out on many acting auditions so there is no need to keep your days free. I recommend getting a 9-to-5 job or weekend work (depending on the job) because that is where you can usually earn the optimal income. Keep most weeknights free for classes, auditing and rehearsing – becoming a well-trained actor. If you join a daytime acting workshop then you can do nighttime work. There are many well-paying night jobs. (I suggest a large number of actor-friendly jobs in Chapter Six.) Create a schedule that serves both your talent development and your ability to earn a good

To have the rest of the valuable Three Year Plan, check into getting Carlyne Barry's book *HIT THE GROUND RUNNING*. This 300-page book is a comprehensive roadmap that will intelligently and efficiently guide you through all the steps leading into your acting career. It is full of up to date information, insights, pitfalls and tips from Carlyne as well as fifteen top industry pros. For more information or to order the book, go to: www.hitthegroundrunningbook.com